

***The Rhythm-Image:
Aesthetic experience in the work
of Theo Angelopoulos and Bill
Viola***

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is the candidate's own.

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Abstract

Following the secularization of the world in modernity, art's concomitant fate was the separation of form and content, which has founded art on a split that has entailed the inheritance of an abyss of incommunicability. Secularization, however, has not liberated art from the model of representation, which has now assumed the form of the identification of a self-referential beauty. Moreover, the modernist doctrine of autonomy has deprived art of the possibility of infusing the vital powers of being and society, subsuming it to the demands of the institution and the art market. Nevertheless, twentieth-century art is driven by the will to overcome the schism (form/content, art/society), to touch the viewer, and to become an experience rather than merely an object of vision.

Responding to this problem, this thesis explores the notion of rhythm, drawn from Bergson's concept of *la durée* and Deleuze's rethinking of immanence as difference and repetition. Rhythm, which grants the communicability of the work of art, emphasizes that art can only live in the experience; to conceive it solely in-itself as modernism has done unavoidably leads to its reification. Rhythm considers art in terms of intensity of the work and of the encounter, rather than in identifying art's spatial qualities. It tests the work of art and the encounter, but immanently in the life generated for the body. For this latter is also a rhythm, that is an affective surface which creates itself and reflects the world. Art then lives in the body but it also infuses life to the body.

Aspects of the work of a film-maker (Theo Angelopoulos) and a video-artist (Bill Viola) are also elaborated, in order to show how their singular implementation of time in images takes them beyond their representational content and opens them to rhythm as an affective, embodied experience.

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The realization of this thesis has been the course of an experience rather than the accomplishment of a research project. To consider it as an experience means that it has equally been an adventure, initiated by a question that was more intuitive than cognitive, and which, during all this time, I have been trying to answer as much as to understand. Nevertheless, as it is the case with experience and not with knowledge, it appears that it effectuated something *in* me that cannot be lost.

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Abbreviations

MWC	Giorgio Agamben, <i>The Man without Content</i>
SW1	Walter Benjamin, <i>Selected Writings, Vol. 1</i>
O	Walter Benjamin, <i>Origin of the German Tragic Drama</i>
CE	Henri Bergson, <i>Creative Evolution</i>
IM	Henri Bergson, <i>An Introduction to Metaphysics</i>
MM	Henri Bergson, <i>Matter and Memory</i>
TFW	Henri Bergson, <i>Time and Free Will</i>
B	Gilles Deleuze, <i>Bergsonism</i>
C1	Gilles Deleuze, <i>Cinema 1</i>
C2	Gilles Deleuze, <i>Cinema 2</i>
DR	Gilles Deleuze, <i>Difference and Repetition</i>
TP	Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, <i>A Thousand Plateaus</i>
WP	Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, <i>What Is Philosophy?</i>

Introduction

I. The context: experience and modernity

The modern era has been founded on the recognition of an absolute separation between immanence and transcendence, which has subsequently structured the world and experience on a split. Although it is not entirely correct to say that the Enlightenment introduced the schism to a previous wholeness of life, we can nevertheless validly claim that the Enlightenment firmly established this division in consciousness by institutionalizing it. Accordingly, as Simmel notes, earlier intimations of the rift were significantly found in at least two historical instances: first, during the Classical era, when Plato's doctrine of Ideas conceived the world of truth and eternal Ideas as a 'beyond' the empirical world of things, which is only the imitation or copy of the original world. Such an intimation of the rift was expressed again with the rise of Christianity, which condemned the flesh as the origin of sinful desires and exalted instead the aspiration for the attainment of a state of purity for the soul. However, "being a religion, it offered reconciliation with the same hand that had created the rift. It was only after

having lost its unconditional power over the soul, only after its solution to the problem had become questionable at the beginning of the modern period, that the issue could emerge in its full extent".¹ It was only after the Renaissance that the recognition of the fundamental dualism became dominant and reorganized the world and experience according to a polar structure.

The complete separation of the metaphysical from the physical was expressed in modern philosophy and science, and this had a most significant consequence: not so much the 'disenchantment' of the world but the recognition that the world had no end, finality or redemption; there was no transcendent point from which the world would be illuminated and existence ascribed a meaning. As we will see in the course of this thesis, the Baroque expresses vividly how, emptied from (transcendent) meaning, the world collapses into an image of inert matter.

To be sure, it is not that before the schism the world had a self-evident meaning, but by being a whole, and participating in both the physical and the metaphysical simultaneously, nature – the animate and the inanimate – communicated in the single life of creation. Before the split the world had no meaning simply because it did not need one; it *was*, and existence did not need justification because it was the expression of God's creative will. However, the need for meaning emerges once it is recognized as lost.

The shift that has taken place in the modern view of the world was practically expressed in the structure of experience. As Benjamin has pointed out for us, nothing renders more

¹ Georg Simmel, "Kant and Goethe: On the History of the Modern *Weltanschauung*", in *Theory, Culture and Society*, forthcoming.

evident the different status of experience in pre-modern communities and modern societies, than the story and the novel as their respective modes of communicating experience. The story is *embedded* in the life of the storyteller so that it can be passed on as experience, continuously molded in the flow; “the experience that is passed and the experience that the storyteller has, i.e. the way in which he experiences, are inseparable”.² This fusion does not testify to the actuality of what is narrated but rather to its plenitude. As opposed to information - which ties itself to the surfacing instant only to be discarded at the following one - the story is anchored in the long past of the community. Its origins become lost in space and time, but such dispersion adds to its authority, not simply because of an abstract, long past but rather because of the repeated deaths it has survived and carries all along. Benjamin wrote that “not only a man’s knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life [...] first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death”.³ Death *punctuates* the story,⁴ embedding it more firmly into what Benjamin calls a ‘natural history’, and endowing it with an aura, as if it had momentarily glimpsed another world and come back. Death opens up the story to its continuation in life and disperses the dead within the living. Finally, the story is not narrated merely for pleasure *or* for the pleasure of telling it; the thread of the past that it carries does not have a historical interest but a practical interest: embedded as it is in the life of the community it always contains a kernel of wisdom.

As opposed to the story, which is *grounded* in the community, the novel is the “form of the transcendent

² Scott Lash, *Another Modernity, A Different Rationality* (London: Blackwell, 1999) p. 314.

³ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992) p. 93.

⁴ Scott Lash, *supra*, p. 316.

homelessness of the idea" and that is why "it includes real time - Bergson's *durée* - among its constitutive principles".⁵ Once the idea has fallen from its transcendent home, time also falls from eternity and assumes the form of "a sluggish, yet constant progress". The man whose life has been deprived of an afterlife, is deprived of continuity both temporal (*I continue something from the past and I'll be continued by something in the future*) and spatial (communal) ties. As opposed to continuity as wholeness of experience (*Erfahrung*), which is true of the story, the continuity that Lukacs describes is that of fragmentation, the succession of instants (*Erlebnis*). When meaning ceases to be immanent in life, it gives rise to a concept of time as an abstract form, distinct from the events that materialize it. But the problem with such a conception is not merely that it 'spatializes' time in the Bergsonian expression, but mainly that events are no longer embedded in a whole, but individualized, contingent and only externally connected; they become meaningless and cannot be incorporated in present experience. The novel strives to come to terms with such a condition by creating meaning subjectively and reflexively. Death in the novel comes as a closure as it frames an individual life, but it also appears to give meaningful form to an otherwise scattered life, *retrospectively* in the epic form of a redemptive memory.⁶

Emptied from its immanent value, the living event becomes identified with mere *fact*. This identification is not natural and fact is not neutral or value-free. Rather it marks the imposition of a rational meaning (rather than spiritual or

⁵ Georg Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1978) p. 121. Although Lukacs' use of the Bergsonian term of *la durée* is rather unsuccessful here, this neither changes the meaning nor delimits the significance of his point.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

metaphysical) upon events. Although modernity turns instrumental rationality into its own mythology,⁷ the aim of this thesis is not to argue against this assumption in favor of the irrational and its disruptive force in experience. Instrumental rationality presupposes a Newtonian universe of an abstract space and time, but it also takes this conception further: having abstracted the event from the spatio-temporal whole and therefore stripping it of its immanent meaning in the whole of life, it is able to impose an external meaning according to the criteria of utility. Although utility is significantly implicated in life, life's *interest* is much broader than utility. But for instrumental rationality life bears no immanent reasons. It is an empty biological substratum upon which *we* structure and organize our activity. This is how *Erlebnis* gradually substitutes *Erfahrung*, thus marking the increasing rationalization of experience and its reduction to knowledge.

But it is also the structure of experience that follows this tendency. Practically, the status of experience in a given socio-historical context cannot be diagnosed in-itself but, as Benjamin has shown, it is reflected in the modes of communication: "[t]he replacement of the older narration by information, of information by sensation, reflects the increasing atrophy of experience".⁸ The modes and technologies of communication

⁷ This is one of the central arguments of Adorno's and Horkheimer's Enlightenment project. Thus they write: "Man imagines himself free from fear when there is no longer anything unknown. That determines the course of demythologization, of enlightenment, which compounds the animate with the inanimate just as myth compounds the inanimate with the animate. Enlightenment is mythic fear turned radical. The pure immanence of positivism, its ultimate product, is no more a so to speak universal taboo. Nothing at all may remain outside, because the mere idea of outsideness is the very source of fear" in Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London, New York: Verso, 1999) p. 16.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", in *Illuminations*, supra, p. 155.

are the virtual mirrors or reflexive surfaces of the mode and value experience assumes. Benjamin with his consideration of the story and the novel (but also of Baudelaire's lyric poetry, and photography) has opened the field for us to consider art as a mode of communication, which implicates aesthetic experience within experience.

II. The problem: aesthetic experience

The exclusion of the absolute from the immanence of experience also had a major impact on art; it redefined its function and its distinct field which gave rise to aesthetics. The secularization of art has inherited the split as the separation of form and content and has opened up an abyss of incommunicability. Moreover, the modernist conception of autonomous art that is free from material constraints (such as economic, moral or political concerns) did not emancipate art but on the contrary, disempowered it and rendered it all the more dependent on the art market.

The paradox of art in modernity consists in that although art has freed itself from external references and the need to refer to something other than itself, nevertheless, it has not emancipated itself from the model of representation. The idea of representation has haunted western art since the Classical era and has its origins in Plato's doctrine of mimesis: Plato considered art as the copy of reality, which was in turn the copy of the only original and external world of Ideas. Since then, the doctrine of mimesis has been recurring in various guises and

sophisticated accounts. Thus the modernist account of self-referentiality, according to which art refers to and questions itself, assumes the existence of a formal artistic essence which determines the particular work of art. The separation of form and content establishes their (impossible) relation in terms of activity/passivity and results to the reification of the work of art and the spatialization of beauty.

Art's identification with 'pure' beauty renders it pictorial; it makes art an object of vision and perception, but no longer a living experience. Art becomes disembodied, that is, it loses its amplitude, expansiveness and vitality in favor of the specialized perception or of a distinguished visual sensitivity, which can specify the point of perfection. In this evolution aesthetic experience loses its *body*, together with its struggle, its passion and its falsity, in order to become sight, more specialized, more perfect and more...object.⁹ Criticizing the isolation of art in the sphere of the aesthetic and the indifference of beauty in its bourgeois conception, Surrealism posed the idea of beauty as intensity, expressed in Breton's phrase "beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all",¹⁰ and evoked the necessity that it be an (immaterial) event of the body.

Art in the twentieth century is marked by the will to overcome its reification and to become something that matters. Art strives to become life, and even though that has always been

⁹ The question of vision, not merely as a 'natural' but as a culturally implicated sense perception, that structures a *relation* to the world and is also structured by it, has been extensively elaborated in cultural theory. Nevertheless, the critique to the scopic regime had permeated the whole twentieth century in both art and philosophy. See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993). For a discussion of the entanglement of vision and visuality, as the distinct historical manifestation of visual experience in its possible modes, see Hal Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988).

¹⁰ André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Penguin Books, 1999) p. 160.

its aspiration, maybe now it has more reasons and chooses more complex ways to attain this. Thus, very often art is driven by an inclination to touch the viewer - her body. There is a quite powerful tendency to physicality expressed in various ways: from expressionism to the incorporation of technology in art and the reproduction of time in the image, and from the installation to performance art, just to mention some few and obvious examples. Similarly, the reception of art has shifted from contemplation and distance to different models such as distraction, interaction, shock etc. In all these expressions art seeks to become life, to exceed the walls of the museum and regain its vital powers. However, is it enough for art to *actually* touch the body in order to fulfill its role as a promise of happiness?

The aim of this thesis is to grant art life, not in-itself but in the singularity of the experience and moreover to indexically weave this experience *in* the body. More specifically, although the work of art *is* in-itself, it can only *live* in the experience, and it lives in the body; it cannot live *within* the body as a container of the innermost substantial self but enveloped in the body as a whole, as ungraspable becoming. Art can only touch the viewer not simply through perception but rather through *affect*. Affect - which is neither sensation nor affection - forces us to rethink and reinvent the reality of the body. In our account, affect is the *rhythm* of the body. This means that the body is not given as capacities, properties and qualities, but it is a constant becoming, a singular mode of creating the pathways through which it feels, apprehends, and lives the world. Affect as rhythm is no more within the body than on the surface, or rather it is endlessly repeated at all modalities of being as an in-between, at the encounter.

With the notion of rhythm we distance ourselves from 'touch', the evocation of tactility and the haptic eye. A most famous and influential account of this is Merleau-Ponty's essay on Cezanne's painting.¹¹ However, such an account remains implicitly entrapped in the idea of art as mimesis, for it cannot avoid assuming that the image of the rotten apples in front of my eyes *reflects* itself in a transcendental consciousness, which redistributes it in the sensory modalities. This approach remains on one hand an empirical description, which in order to grant the communicability of the senses with each other and within a whole (or equally the communicability of the painting and my body) needs a prior ground of consciousness, even if consciousness becomes now the flesh. On the contrary, the notion of rhythm that we will try to elaborate, following Bergson and Deleuze, attempts to implicate the transcendental within the immanence of experience; to envelop consciousness within the body itself, in the same way that suspension is enveloped in the flow of rhythm.

Moreover, the consideration of art and aesthetic experience as rhythm also distinguishes itself from psychoanalytic accounts of art. These latter by referring the experience of art to a disruptive unconscious (i) cannot escape the model of representation but they only render it unconscious, and (ii) they fail to consider how aesthetic experience takes us beyond the subject, exemplified in the gaze, to the event. Such a theoretical model has been particularly dominant in film studies; and despite its relevance to the paradigm of narrative Hollywood films, it nevertheless fails to consider how the film is

¹¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt", in Galen A. Johnson (ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, translation editor Michael B. Smith (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993) pp. 59-75.

not only structured on the basis of a narrative content but much more on the level of images, of movement and time and how therefore, cinematic experience is irreducible to a model of perception/comprehension and becomes an enveloping affective experience.¹²

Consequently, in the unfolding of our theoretical argument we will interweave the consideration of the work of a film maker (Theo Angelopoulos) and a video-artist (Bill Viola). Their work will constitute for us surfaces that will reflect, illuminate and test our idea of rhythm. More specifically, although these artists work with different media (cinema, video) they both create moving images and attribute a primary role in the implication of time in the image. Our discussion aspires to show how this implication of time assumes an expressive role and opens up the experience of film and video beyond the image as representation to a rhythm-image of intensity.

Rhythm constantly repeats itself at all levels: on the level of the work of art, on that of our encounter with it, or on the level of the body. Art as rhythm is not so much the work of art, but the event of its experience – the body – in which alone it lives. Through the implication of time, cinematic and video technologies envelop the viewer and structure experience as event rather than as a subject and an object. Nevertheless, rhythm does not appear as such anywhere, since it cannot be

¹² Especially film studies have been dominated by a psychoanalytic model of interpretation, which fragments the experience in active gaze, passive object of desire. Probably the most influential account has been provided by Laura Mulvey's, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in R. Stam and T. Miller (eds.), *Film and Theory: An Anthology* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000). As the title already indicates, her analysis only envisages film in terms of its narrative content. Currently, she has revised the psychoanalytic model through a consideration of time in film. See Laura Mulvey, "Passing time: reflections on cinema from a new technological age", in *Screen*, Vol. 45, no 2, summer 2004, pp. 142-155.

objectified as a property or quality of the image or of technology; it always remains implicated as a mode of enveloping the caesura.

III. The exposition

In the first chapter we will present the problem in terms of the secularization of experience and aesthetic experience. More specifically, we will begin our discussion by presenting Benjamin's critique of the Kantian concept of experience. For Benjamin the new concept (i) would account for an immanent absolute manifesting itself indirectly, in distorted or even violent ways and therefore (ii) it would also enfold both the subject and object of experience. Such a concept of experience would also correspond to the creation of a higher form of knowledge. We will then elaborate these philosophical points in the concrete terms of experience. Following Benjamin's reading of the German tragic drama, we will look at how the recognition of immanence did not simply alter the metaphysical presuppositions, but actually led to the reorganization of experience, and redefined the field of art. The *Trauerspiel* comes to appear as the origin of art's secularization and then also opens to new possibilities for overcoming it. Finally, we will turn to Henri Bergson and we will try to present some of the main aspects of his philosophy of time. Bergson first distinguished between intensive and extensive states in order to establish an irreducible difference in kind between the two. Taking this difference in the field of experience he dissociated –

in principle - the role of the body from memory in order to re-associate them anew in the affirmation of a single reality of duration. In this conceptualization, Bergson opened for us an entirely new point of view for the concept of experience.

In the second chapter we will suspend our theoretical discussion in order to explore how the Bergsonian ideas about temporality, duration, movement reflect themselves in cinema's moving-images, and particularly in the work of Theo Angelopoulos. Although Bergson himself, witnessing the technological evolution of early cinema envisaged it as a paradigmatic instance of what he called 'the spatialization of time', we will attempt to show that it is again with the same technology that new possibilities for the singular experience of time become available. More specifically, we will focus our discussion on the ways in which time is implicated in the image, through the alternation of camera movement and stasis, different types of shot and editing, but also colours or music or silences. We aspire to show that far from being the representation of a narrative content and the perception of spatial qualities, the film becomes a dynamic organization of a whole, which is implicating the viewer in an enveloping rhythm.

In the subsequent chapter we will return to the theoretical elaboration of our argument and we will attempt to create a notion of rhythm as the interstices of time and matter. However, rhythm is not outside of time and matter, but rather it envelops both and grants communicability. We will begin our discussion by presenting Giorgio Agamben's account of the fate of art in modernity, according to which art's secularization founds art on a split and entraps it in circular structure where self-referentiality becomes self-annihilation. Agamben evokes

rhythm as the original structure of the work of art but, by distinguishing between an ordinary and an original order of time, he cannot avoid assuming an ontological difference between the two. Thus we will turn to Deleuze's account of *Difference and Repetition* in order to develop the notion of rhythm as immanent becoming, where difference is in-itself and becomes affirmed in repetition (for-itself). The implication of difference in repetition as *affirmation* gains its consistency not in the identity of the whole but in a crack; synthesis is a disjunctive synthesis. This is the caesura of time and the suspension of rhythm. By being an intensity rather than temporality it cannot be lived as such (as object) and at the same time it can only be lived (as rhythm) in the difference it produces; it is itself the condition of transformation. We will conclude the chapter by arguing that rhythm is the mode of existence of the work of art; that is, the work of art is in-itself but it is also bound to the viewer who repeats it. It is repetition, or the event of the encounter as an opening to the viewer, which wills the work of art and allows it to become.

The fourth chapter will mark a pause in our theoretical analysis and will unfold aspects of the work of Bill Viola. Further aspects of time in the image will be presented and discussed. Although video also reproduces moving images, its technology differs significantly from cinematic technology in the way time is incorporated. Video materializes time in the electronic signal and therefore creates a different temporal paradigm to film. Even though Viola's work also favours slowness as a temporal quality of the image, it achieves a quite different experiential effect. His video pieces invent various ways - ambiguous as well as ambivalent - in order to render

time 'touch' the body, and at the same time, they make the body the site of art's contestation.

Finally, in the last chapter we will attempt to create the body as a rhythm, prior to sensations, perceptions, capacities and actions. In our view, the body does not simply interact with the world but it is constantly becoming with the world, in implicating the world. It is an affect, a reflective and enveloping surface which by giving time, deepens its affection and renders more complex its response; it differentiates itself by inventing itself in a poly-rhythm. We will sustain our argument by presenting the neurobiological account of the body and the process of perception. According to Gerald Edelman and Jean-Pierre Changeux's evolutionary models, whether at the level of morphology or at the level of its actions (i.e. perception), the body is not given as something determined in advance. It is unveiled rather as a variability which becomes determined in experience (action) by selection of neural circuits, which then become retrospectively strengthened. In this account, perceptual recognition is achieved by the body alone by selection rather than by identification with a prior model provided by a transcendental consciousness. By creating the amplitude of perception, that is the process, the body opens itself to the world and is taken by it in order to recover and implicate the world in its own becoming.

Chapter 1

Secularization and art: reconfiguring aesthetic experience

I. Introduction

The Enlightenment's recognition of reason as the foundation of valid knowledge has brought about significant changes in the field of knowledge and experience. Not only has it opened the way for the advancement of science and rational thought but it has also restructured the concept of 'experience'. This is because such recognition reflects the radically different metaphysical presuppositions that found modernity compared with those of pre-modern societies. Furthermore this reorganization also came to be considered as a crisis in experience.

In this chapter, we shall explore how the new metaphysical framework has affected experience. More specifically, we will trace the problems that emerged for

aesthetic experience, through Walter Benjamin's reading of *Trauerspiel*, together with the possibility of a new reconfiguration of experience that Henri Bergson opened. As it will become apparent, the notion of time will become central to our account. We will begin our discussion by re-examining Benjamin's critique of the Kantian concept of experience. Benjamin's critique was twofold and addressed the exclusion of the absolute from experience and the separation of the subject and object of experience. Indeed Benjamin's position is that of an immanent absolute but which manifests itself only indirectly, and in tortuous forms.

In the following section III, we will examine Benjamin's study of German tragic drama. The book is divided in two parts: "Trauerspiel and Tragedy" and "Symbol and Allegory". Our discussion will focus on the first in which Benjamin argues that the German tragic play is not simply a decadent version of Greek tragedy but that it is founded on radically different metaphysical presuppositions, which convey a distinctly different expression. Our analysis of Benjamin will show how the new framework is not external to baroque theatre but informs it from within; baroque sensibility is formed by the recognition of an immanent world beyond redemption and its struggle to come to terms with it; it coincides with art's 'fall from truth' which became the founding condition for modern art. Our discussion will also aim to reveal how some of the principal problems that haunt art in modernity (i.e reification and aestheticization) originated in the baroque and are implicated in a much broader shift that had taken place in the modern era.

The exclusion of the absolute - the separation of the physical from the metaphysical - brought about the

secularization of the world and experience. Secularization subsumed the world to physical laws identified by science (as rational thought) but deprived it from being anything more than this mechanistic operation; similarly, it externalizes and reduces experience merely to the event lived. Bergson attempted to grant the immanence of the absolute in experience in the creative reality of time. Thus, he countered the 'spirit of rationalism' by insisting upon the difference in kind between states that are intensive (states of consciousness) and extensive (states of matter). But then, he significantly extended this idea; although it appears as if he repeated the mind/body dualism, in fact he had radically altered the terms. He acknowledged a single plane of images onto which he posed the distinction in terms of time and space, virtual and actual. In this reconceptualization, he opened up a view of the world as an immanent plane of virtual existence *and* of continuous self-creation.

II. Prolegomena to a coming concept of experience: Benjamin reassesses Kant

The question of '*experience*' and its disintegration in modern societies of both early and high capitalism forms the core of Walter Benjamin's theoretical reflections. This question inspired his various writings ranging from language, to art and literature, to cities and architecture. As early as 1918, and in the essay *On the Programme of the Coming Philosophy*, he programmatically traces the lines of his philosophical

preoccupations, concentrating upon the extension and transformation of the Kantian concept of experience. This was the only explicit formulation and delineation of the main terrain of his effort to argue both *with and against* Kant.

The concept of experience is intimately linked with knowledge, and the relation between the two concepts – that is, to what extent we recognize experience as valid knowledge – also measures the richness and limits of both notions. In his essay, rather than merely criticizing the Kantian system for an overwhelming rationalism, Benjamin acknowledged its distinct significance among contemporary philosophies, in that he discerned that what “mattered was not primarily the scope and depth of knowledge but first and foremost its justification” [SW1, 100]. Kant did not substitute philosophical depth for scientific certainty, but rather he conceived of the demand for depth as the demand for justification.¹³ However, Kantian epistemology, under the austerity of the *a priori*, managed to account for the certainty of an a-temporal knowledge, if only by sacrificing “the question of the integrity of an experience that is ephemeral” and therefore, “singularly temporal” [SW1, 101].

This quest for certainty becomes especially articulate in *The Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* in which Kant establishes the principle of experience as being borrowed from the natural sciences, though he recognized that experience in-itself could not coincide with the objecthood of the scientific realm. The result of, or rather the prerequisite for, such an

¹³ This is one of Kant’s most innovative moves in the history of philosophy and it can be found in the Kantian distinction between *quid facti?* and *quid iuris?* If contemplation, reflection etc. are more than just opinions about thought at a particular time, then the image of thought retains only what thought can claim by right, and not by mere fact. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner Pluhar, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, A83/B116; see also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s support of such a distinction in *WP*, 37-38.

identification was a *view* of experience or of 'a world' that was "of the lowest order", "an experience virtually reduced to a nadir, to a minimum of significance." As Benjamin argues: "[i]ndeed, one can say that the very greatness of his work, his unique radicalism, presupposed an experience which had almost no intrinsic value and which could have attained its (we may say) sad significance only through its certainty" [SW1, 101]. The reduction of experience's significance is expressed by two complementary movements: the first consists in its identification with *cognitive* experience, while the second, in the inevitable stripping from *internal* criteria of value and the subordination of experience to knowledge.

The first point stresses the increasing rationalization of experience. By founding itself on the belief that the standard of true knowledge is empirically measurable knowledge, the victory of rationalism has simultaneously resulted in the banishment from the scope of acceptable theoretical discourse of the ultimate questions of human existence – those concerning the true meaning of life, man's station *vis-à-vis* the absolute. Such questions were traditionally the province of the now discredited field of metaphysics.¹⁴

Accordingly, the spirit of rationalism dismissed as irrational magical practices, religious prejudices, rituals, hallucinations and all which cannot be empirically proven and verified. But much more than that, what could not be

¹⁴ Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin, An Aesthetic of Redemption* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) p. 32. However, it was only a certain strand of neo-Kantian rationalism – which Benjamin was well acquainted of as a student of Heinrich Rickert and a reader of Hermann Cohen – responsible for excluding from its horizon the whole field of metaphysics and establishing its dominance upon this act of repression. Benjamin's (and our) revision of the Kantian notion of experience is addressed more against a neo-Kantian rationalist reading than initially engaging with the potential of Kant's own philosophy.

scientifically (ap)proved was also deprived of existence or reality. At best, these came to be considered as psychological aspects of an empirical consciousness, systematized into types of madness. Moreover, in the rise of rationalism, psychological explanations gained significant ground in order to account for 'disruptions' of rational behavior and action. Even more than the natural sciences, it is psychology which stands at the antipodes of magic.

However, what clearly separates psychology from magic is not so much the principles of operation, but rather the worldviews they respectively express and presuppose. Magical practices are only possible in a world which is not yet divided into subject and object, where man is intimately connected to the world. This has very little to do with the supposedly primitive belief in an animate world and much more with the *coincidence* of action and signification in the ritual.¹⁵ Although magic and ritual are not possible in a state of absolute unity between man and the world, but only emerge in a created distance or gap between the two, nevertheless this was not yet an objectified world. On the contrary, not only does psychology presuppose a subject-consciousness and an object-world, but also establishes two realities, namely a subjective or inner, and an objective or outer. What was intensively fused in the ritual becomes now clearly separated and enclosed; the dissociated worlds have no means of communication, but external mediators.

¹⁵ Wittgenstein's critique of Frazer's anthropological study in magic was that Frazer, entrapped in the mythology of humanity's heroic scientific progress, failed to see how the ritual was not science at its naïve stage, and therefore not a *mistaken* conception, but something quite different altogether. For ritual practices do not stand like *causes* for the wished results but rather stand materially for the wish; see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, ed. by Rush Rhees, trans. A. C. Miles, (Harleston, Norfolk: Brynmill, 1979).

The Kantian organization of the parameters of all possible experience, as constituted by the faculties of intuition, understanding and reason established in the *Critique of Pure Reason* reflects this segmentation of experience. This fragmentation is not a result of Kant's analytic approach to experience through the doctrine of the faculties, for he acknowledged the *de jure* character of his distinctions. Nevertheless, Kant's most notorious problem lies in the complete dissociation of reason and the absolute from experience. Critical philosophy admits of the possibility of establishing a relationship between intuition and understanding following which the materials of sensibility intuited through space and time are subsumed under the categories of the understanding. It denies, however, legitimacy to any supposed *direct* relationship between intuition/understanding and the ideas of reason, to which alone the absolute manifests itself.

Benjamin's recasting of the Kantian concept of experience consists not only in questioning its structure but also its basic assumptions namely, that (a) there is a distinction between the subject and the object of experience, and (b) there can be no experience of the absolute.¹⁶ These assumptions point towards the thesis that the whole Benjaminian project is inspired by the idea of an *immanent absolute*, which "manifests itself in spatiotemporal experience, but indirectly in complex, tortuous and even violent forms".¹⁷ In this way, he attempts to enfold the absolute within experience but in an account capable of sustaining its *discontinuity*.¹⁸ Benjamin's anti-Hegelianism - his

¹⁶ Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ H. Caygill argues that Benjamin's philosophy is an "anti-Hegelian but nevertheless speculative philosophy of history" in the sense that his project explores "the possibilities of a *discontinuous* experience of the absolute"

refusal to succumb to a developmental history of the spirit - does not only reject a linear conception of progress but mainly emphasizes, following Kant, the impossibility to grasp the infinite through an extension of the finite, or in other words, the impossibility of making the absolute an object of knowledge. This thesis was most evidently reflected in the clear distinction he drew between knowledge and truth, in the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' in *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*.

The consequences of such a thesis complicated further his position in that he aspired to affirm both the immanence of the absolute as the possibility of its being experienced, while simultaneously granting its non-empirical character. As such, it could not be the object of a psychological consciousness, but only related to a "pure transcendental consciousness", one which is "stripped of everything subjective". Moreover, Benjamin accepted the philosophical presupposition that "the structure of experience lies within the structure of knowledge and is to be developed from it", which means that although he had criticized the reduction of experience into cognitive experience, he envisaged the development of a new, higher concept of knowledge as capable of intimating and establishing a new concept of experience:

The task of future epistemology is to find for knowledge the sphere of total neutrality in regard to the concepts of both subject and object; in other words, it is to discover the autonomous, innate sphere of knowledge in which this concept in no way continues to designate the relation between two metaphysical entities [SW1, 104].

which means that he "refuses the comprehension of the absolute through finite categories"; *ibid*, pp. 2-3.

The task does not really consist in extending our knowledge but in transforming it into a higher knowledge, which will not be established upon (and itself establishing) the subject/object division, but will envelop both in a field of differentiation.¹⁹ The problem he faces is not how we can arrive to know the absolute, but how our knowledge can *account for* the absolute. Ultimately, his argument concerns the possibility of creating a concept of knowledge, which will not envisage the world merely as a bundle of finite objects, but rather as an organization of the finite which implicates the infinite. This is defined by his following formulation:

Thus, the task of the coming philosophy can be conceived as the discovery or creation of that concept of knowledge which, by relating experience *exclusively* to the transcendental consciousness, makes not only mechanical but also religious experience *logically* possible. This should definitely be taken to mean not that knowledge makes God possible but that it

¹⁹ Kant sounds similar to Benjamin when he writes: “[...] it will be a concern of pure reason to guide its *use* when it wants to leave familiar objects (of experience) behind, extending itself beyond all the bounds of experience and finding no object of intuition at all, but *merely space for intuition*; for then it is no longer in a position to bring its judgments under a determinate maxim according to *objective grounds of cognition*, but solely to bring its judgments under a determinate maxim according to *a subjective ground of differentiation* in the determination of its own *faculty of judgment*. This subjective means still remaining is nothing other than reason’s *feeling* of its own *need* [Bedürfnisses].” Immanuel Kant, “What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” in Immanuel Kant: *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp. 9-10; my emphasis. Deleuze and Guattari point out that “to orientate oneself in thought implies neither objective reference point nor moving object that experiences itself as a subject”; in *WP*, 37. The passage quoted shows that Kant is not merely the thinker of scientific knowledge’s certainty, but is interested in a *critical* metaphysics that allows ‘space for intuition’ something that is unveiled in the ‘subjective ground of differentiation’, indeed termed *a feeling* [Gefühl]. Benjamin’s own reassessment of the Kantian philosophy began with his effort to provide us with a richer account of such a feeling, that is, a richer account of the ‘Transcendental Aesthetic’ in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, thus his preoccupation with *experience*.

definitely does make the experience and doctrine of him possible in the first place [SW1, 105; my emphasis].

Benjamin here retains a critical metaphysics. He is still maintaining the tension between understanding and sensibility or form and matter, rather than simply collapsing the former into the latter, even if what will emerge by the transformation into a higher knowledge will decisively affect both concepts.²⁰ This can be traced in the short essay *The Doctrine of the Similar* and its revised version *On the Mimetic Faculty*, where the dualism between a subject of experience and an object of it is greatly complicated through a notion of experience – going between the ‘mystical’ and the ‘material’ – which tries to incorporate and bring forth a notion of the transcendental that makes available immanent totality as something completely new: a contour, a rhythm or a warp in experience.²¹ Accordingly, the transcendental has to be conceived in terms of the complexity of *appearance*, and has to lie not in the depths or the heights, but on the surface under the novel

²⁰ Benjamin will entrust this form of knowledge not to science but to language. This is because science has to work with a limited concept of experience. His theory of language undergoes significant variations in the course of evolution of his philosophical and critical thought, ranging from a religious/theological to a materialist conception. Nevertheless, what remains constant is his opposition to semiotic linguistic theories as well as to the instrumental view which regards language as a means for the expression of a content. Instead, for Benjamin, language became a transcendental surface (field) enveloping and communicating an immanent absolute. Benjamin's theory of language is developed mainly in three essays: Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" (1916) in *One-Way Street and other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, (London, New York: Verso, 1979), pp. 107-123; "The Task of the Translator" (1923) in *Illuminations*, ed. and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn, (Fontana Press, 1992), pp. 70-82; in the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" in *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, trans. Osborne, (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 27-56; and in "On the Mimetic Faculty" in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, supra, pp. 160-163. Nevertheless, one should point out that Benjamin's concept of experience is richer, and thus incorporated into his theory of language, and his critique of Kant is not just a linguistic meta-critique; see Caygill, supra, pp. xiv-xv, 13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7

reconceptualization of it as paradoxically being *both* bounded and infinite. Both of the above essays develop genealogies of perception as reading; thus, the transcendental conditions would refer here to the possibility of legibility of a surface, in other words, to the addressing of the question 'in virtue of what can something qualify to be read?'

Benjamin transforms Kant's transcendentalism in the way he conceives of it as an infinite configuration of surfaces; the transcendental becomes a fold in the surface of absolute configuration. Perception and experience as reading is not just coming from an active reader – as the subject of experience – who imposes a reading on the 'read' – as the object of experience. Neither is perception the mere receptivity of impressions. What is 'read' is *always already* constituted and makes a contribution to its being read by the reader. The thrust of the argument is therefore that the transcendental, that is, the conditions of possibility of reading itself, are themselves part of an infinite set of possible surfaces.²² This infinite set of possible surfaces is not the mere consequence of an intended meaning imposed by the subject of experience, but is based on what Benjamin calls the discovery of a 'non-sensuous similarity' between different and infinite patterns of configuration. In both essays Benjamin uses the example of dance in order to highlight certain important features of such an experience [*Erfahrung*]: (a) in the experience of dance the most important point is that these patterns of configuration are temporal, and have metrical and rhythmical aspects, and (b) the dissolution of the distinction between subject and object (or the reader and the read) is itself a mode of configuration and not just a mediator. One does not

²² *Ibid.*, p. 4

just use dance as a means of perception and reading, but is dissolved into that experience.

Benjamin's aspiration was to develop a reflection on time and space in which totality is immanent to experience, but presented in oblique, distorted forms. Benjamin reassesses both Kant and neo-Kantianism in the way he makes an effort to show transcendentalism to be both concrete and *a priori*. Aesthetic experience is the *topology* of the Benjaminian project, and the *locus* of such an exploration would be retrospectively in his work on the German tragic drama.

III. *Trauerspiel*: art configures its immanence

Following our discussion, the problem of modernity is rooted in the (im)possibility of an immanent absolute in experience, and is represented in the subsumption of experience to the rules of knowledge or, what amounts to the same thing, the dissociation of a theory of knowledge from a theory of life. At the core of this reduction lies a significant distortion of the concept of time. Clearly, the problem is not merely a dispute among philosophers about the authentic meaning of a concept. On the contrary, it is rooted in the reality of modernity and in the ways it restructures experience primarily through a reorganization of lived temporalities. Henri Bergson, as we will see later on, was primarily preoccupied, from a philosophical perspective, with the elaboration of a new concept for the inventive reality of time, instantiated in the notion of *la durée*, Benjamin on the other hand, followed a different route which

led to the transformation of philosophy into cultural history, through the extension of his method of *immanent critique*.

The idea of the possibility of an immanent critique emerges from Benjamin's reflections on the task of literary and art criticism. In the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue", "he is trying to determine and to instance, at precisely the same moment, the modes of intellection and argument proper to aesthetic-historical discourse".²³ The possibility of criticism presupposes criteria and categories which become applied to and test their object. However, given the (by definition) singularity of the artistic-literary object how is it possible to apply pre-existent, generalizing criteria? Benjamin refuses the external application of given aesthetic categories, which would "measure" and objectify the work of art. Instead, criticism needs to invent the criteria which would be integral to each work. Benjamin acknowledged and embraced the circularity involved in such a stance as that characteristic bond of intimacy binding together interpretation and its object.

Moreover, he redefined the tendency of all philosophical conceptualization and criticism *vis-à-vis* the work as such: "to establish the becoming of phenomena in their being" [O, 47]. Knowledge proceeds to the universal directly and ignores the being of truth as embodied singularity; on the contrary, criticism of individual works of art aspires to allow for "the universal to unfold *from within the boundaries of the particular itself* - the work of art", while at the same time safeguarding its distance from its sensuous immediacy.²⁴ Benjamin's critical essays not only mediate between philosophy and art, but also extend art history into cultural history in order to embed the

²³ George Steiner, "Introduction" in O, 20.

²⁴ Richard Wolin, *supra*, p. 87.

work and illuminate its spatio-temporal context in order to transcend it. Thus, Howard Caygill argues that Benjamin dissolves the unity of the object 'art' by dispersing it spatially into the world which "contained and is contained in works of art", but also temporally in the past history which renders it possible and in the future interpretations which unceasingly renew it.²⁵ Benjamin's idea of transcendence of the work of art becomes significantly different from the classical notion. Instead of safeguarding the absolute value of the work of art for eternity, Benjamin distributes it in the world and he therefore measures transcendence in dispersion.

In this first part, a reading of Benjamin's work of literary criticism on the German tragic drama will be undertaken with a view to regarding it as a moment of immanent critique not of the individual artists and works but rather of experience and the aesthetic experience in particular, opening up to the question of their relation. Particular interest in this work lies not only in the imaginative conception and elaboration of its subject matter, but equally in that it is mostly here that Benjamin traces analytically the origins and problems of aesthetic experience in modernity. The intention here, however, is not to provide a complete analysis of *Trauerspiel*, but to illuminate those aspects that can be considered to be most expressive and relevant to the spatialization (or secularization) of aesthetic experience in modernity.

Benjamin's study *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* constitutes an original reading of the German baroque play, whose reception and treatment by the art historical discourses of the time had only considered it a minor, rather unpopular

²⁵ Howard Caygill, "Walter Benjamin's concept of cultural history", in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. David S. Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 91.

genre. His reading sets out to define the historic specificity of the *Trauerspiel* by showing the determinate differences from ancient Greek tragedy, of which it was commonly conceived as an unsuccessful imitator. Yet Benjamin does not merely base its specificity in its difference from tragedy, but also in revealing or creating its singular Idea, as 'the truth content' that the critic extracts from 'the material contents' of the work.

From early on, and in the course of his study, Benjamin draws the line of demarcation between tragedy and *Trauerspiel*. Although it appears to be merely a difference in the content, it is in fact the expression of that difference, which will give the German drama a distinctly different orientation:

[...] the incidents listed are not so much the subject-matter as the artistic core of the *Trauerspiel*. Historical life, as it was conceived at that time, is its content, its true object. In this it is different from tragedy. For the object of the latter is not history, but myth, and the tragic stature of the *dramatis personae* does not derive from rank - the absolute monarchy - but from the pre-historic epoch of their existence - the past age of heroes [O, 62].

The staging of historical life rather than myth indicates a society which is developing a secularized conception of the world. The *Trauerspiel* refers us to a world which is now realizing its Fall, that is, it is recognizing that *rift* between transcendence and immanence which divides the World, introducing a series of fundamental dualisms within human beings, within their world or between them and the world. Compared to the tragedy of Greek antiquity, the German tragic drama inscribes itself within a very different metaphysical framework. This difference does not merely concern the shift in the conception of the 'beyond' but much more significantly it

urges a complete reorganization of the conception of *this* world. And as Benjamin shows, the distinctive baroque *aesthetic* emanates from and reflects precisely this struggle with the consequences of the Fall.

The *Trauerspiel*²⁶ is culturally and historically embedded in the early stages of the recognition of a secular world, which having changed the metaphysical framework, has also completely transformed the physical order. Yet, this is a moment when the new world was only beginning and striving to rearrange its new structure. It is because the fields are not yet demarcated and art is not sufficiently separated from life, from ethics and politics, that the shock of the Fall initially results in a great, even naive, assimilation of the theatrical to the historical. This happened to such an extent that at times "the agent of historical execution himself would have been called upon before all others for the writing of literature" [O, 64].

The shock of the separation of the realm of immanence from that of transcendence in its vertiginous effects is mostly reflected on the idea of catastrophe, which haunts the baroque as opposed to the historical ideal of restoration. Benjamin will fuse the physical and metaphysical aspects of the Fall in a very precise and profound description:

The religious man of the baroque era clings so tightly to the world because of the feeling that he is being driven along to a cataract with it. The baroque knows no eschatology; and for that very reason it possesses no mechanism by which all earthly

²⁶ Baroque theatre as a genre, to which the *Trauerspiel* also belongs, is a rich and complex theme. It is customary to delimit the baroque chronologically in terms of reference to the history of architecture; in theatrical terms then, the baroque age runs from the building of the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza (1580-84) to that of the Teatro La Fenice in Venice (1790-92); see Margarete Baur-Heinhold, *Baroque Theatre* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967) p. 7.

things are gathered in together and exalted before being consigned to their end [O, 66].

A primary consequence of the exclusion of transcendence is a disoriented immanence.²⁷ It was eschatology, as the idea of redemption, that was sustaining the world and guaranteeing its coherence, and therefore when it was no longer possible it also removed the *ground* from the world. The first reaction of the *Baroque man* was to grasp onto a bare materiality. Because when things lose their meaning what remains is not just an empty world, but rather the world's overflowing materiality. One of the principal characteristics of the baroque is its extravagant theatricality. At the very beginning of baroque drama, Shakespeare in *As You Like It*, and Calderon in *El Gran Teatro del Mundo*, gave the clearest expression to a theme that others were to elaborate upon and that came to mark the baroque: 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players'; the fusion of life and theatre is achieved in multiple ways, adding to the meaning of this idea a variety of nuances.

Tension in the baroque is evidenced in a rather idiosyncratic way; although it recognized existence wholly in its worldliness, it had *not* abandoned the desire for transcendence. But since it was deprived of its fulfillment in an afterworld, it had to seek a secular solution. As Benjamin describes it:

²⁷ Margarete Baur-Heinhold makes a successful comparison between Renaissance and Baroque man in the following: "Renaissance man had stood firmly in the centre of his universe, confident of being the measure of all things in it. Baroque man stood at a frontier, with no such firm ground under his feet. He could include both the heavens and the underworld in his theatre and see his own figure in comparison with, and measured against, divine infinity." *Ibid.*, p. 7. However, if the baroque man can equally include in the same picture the earth, the heavens and the underworld this is because he has lost all measure for things; as opposed to the Renaissance, the image he is drawing is a *disproportionate* one.

[s]ince therefore neither rebellion nor submission was practicable in religious terms, all the energy of the age was concentrated on a complete revolution of the content of life, while orthodox ecclesiastical form were preserved. The only consequence could be that men were denied all real means of *direct* expression [O, 79; emphasis mine].

It was this tension between an assumed immanence and the desire for an impossible transcendence which became resolved in 'theatricality', releasing a multiplicity of signifying consequences. Theatricality becomes the route of perversion, the detour introduced in the place of a direct attainment of the goal. The theatrical fulfillment of transcendence found its expression mainly in two ways. The first consisted in what Benjamin calls "the secularization of history in the setting"; just as the world had suddenly become meaningless and the human condition revealed in all its hopelessness, so historical events were conceived, "less as a manifestation of morality than as the natural aspect of the course of history, essential in its permanence" [O, 88]. Having lost the grounding for meaning, which also rendered possible the dissociation of levels of the world, everything became inscribed into the same single and continuous surface.

Consequently, the historical order becomes flattened upon the natural order and the mourning play turns to "natural history", that is in the endorsement of a de-historicized conception of history.²⁸ The loss of eternity which would ultimately redeem and allow justice for the transience of this world was supplanted by a fateless eternal return. In this view,

²⁸ For an elaborate analysis of *Trauerspiel's* regression to a de-historicized "natural history", countered by a new theory of natural history, which attempts "to recover an ethico-theological potential", see Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of stones, animals, human beings, and angels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

history ceases to be constituted by actions of historical agents and becomes instead the repeated suffering of the hopeless, exemplified in the martyr-drama. It was in an image of suffering and lament or indeed in a peculiar escapism to nature that the inner life of the Baroque man found mystical fulfillment. But, as Benjamin points out, "[t]he nature of the creation which absorbs history back into itself, is quite different from the nature of Rousseau" [O, 91]. Thus, this is not a nature in a state of grace, but only its imitation; it is not eternity reflected in the *movement* of grace, but rather the timelessness of its frozen picture. For what the baroque image mostly lacks is movement, which instead becomes substituted for spatial simultaneity. Such a substitution is not to be understood in terms of an absent conception of the sequentiality of historical events, but rather as the sense of an emphatic and equally suffocating present, where everything is *now*.²⁹

The first route for an indirect fulfillment of transcendence, the one which followed the path of "natural history" was expiated either to lament or escapism. There was also a second route of resolution, one mostly exemplified in the Spanish drama of Calderon, where *Trauerspiel* - as the intersection of mourning and play - attains its perfect form. It is not that Calderon brought lightness to the heavy atmosphere of the German drama; rather his 'playful' style is novel and expresses something profoundly and imperceptibly distinct from the 'cheerful'. For Benjamin, works of art "may be 'cheerful' where life is 'serious', but they may take a playful form only when life too, *in the face of an intense preoccupation with the absolute*, has lost its absolute seriousness" [O, 82; emphasis

²⁹ Namely, there is only the one dimension of presence and simultaneity. This will become clearer below, especially in our engagement with Bergson's concept of time.

mine]. He will identify Calderon's genius with that gesture which, through the techniques of "the enclosure by a framework" and "the playful miniaturization of reality", will give rise to reflection. The 'playful' can only be inscribed in a world where things cease to be for the first time, and are only repeated. In place of mere repetitions, the game is invented in order to repeat the first time. Paradoxically then, it might have less to do with the cheerful and more to do with the tragic! For it neither ignores nor denies the latter, but rather it constitutes a mode in which the tragic is affirmed and enveloped "by miniaturization".

Furthermore it is from this tendency that the absolutely crucial figure of the 'intriguer' was invented by the *Trauerspiel*, and with him comedy was introduced in the 'mourning play'. Yet, the intriguer cannot be identified with a comic figure, for he precedes the latter and is most notably incarnated as the 'demonic fool'. By being "the courtier whose intimacy with the tyrant or royal victim makes of him the key witness and also the weaver of murderous plots,"³⁰ the intriguer, before comedy, is the figure of the 'ambiguous'. Ambiguity, however, does not merely refer to things which have lost their inherent meaning but rather to the demonic twist infused in an emptied matter. Benjamin writes about the intriguer that "[i]t is quite appropriate to the secularization of the passion-plays in the baroque drama that the official should take the place of the devil" [O, 126]. The intriguer not only does he incarnate the disbelief of the baroque man, but there is also a profounder necessity which finds its expression in his figure. The intriguer can only appear in the flattened world of immanence, for when the dualism of heaven and earth is no longer possible due to the

³⁰ George Steiner: "Introduction", in *supra*, p. 18.

collapse of their grounding distance, the only option possible is a groundless ambiguity, and the intriguer is always the 'rootless'.³¹

If the 'playful' and the intriguer exemplify the demonic tendency of the baroque, lament will avow for its melancholy – gravity, or the centripetal force of the earth. More precisely, melancholy is not identical to lament if only for the reason that the former describes a spiritual disposition, while the latter its material explication. Lament cannot be conceived without tears being shed, but melancholy is marked only by a certain pensiveness. Benjamin will give us a most imaginative account of melancholy, tracing it through cosmic saturnine forces of attraction and repulsion and the physiology of the humours. Far from being a psychological condition or pathology, melancholy is revealed as an ontological tendency. In its figuration as *acedia* – or that final boredom of the spirit – it permeates the baroque in its profoundest and most original instances.

Although the intimate relationship between *acedia* and creativity (that Benjamin clearly implies, but does not explain) is interesting but obscure, it would be too early to attempt an elaboration here. Instead, we will limit our analysis to the divergent path which explicates melancholy to the characteristic baroque lament. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, the *telos* of tragedy consisted in the *catharsis*, which would be accomplished through the experience and tension of grand emotions (Aristotle is very specific about the proper tragic emotions, which are only pity and fear).³² In this conception, catharsis was not identical to

³¹ See also H. Caygill, *Walter Benjamin*, supra, pp. 60-61 on the importance of the figure of the intriguer in *O*.

³²The Aristotelian definition of tragedy was stated as such: "A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious, and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a

the experienced emotions, although these latter served as its condition. Moreover, the emphasis was laid much more on the *tension* than on the emotions themselves. This agonal tension would culminate in the instance of tragic silence, which kept the struggle of the tragic hero unarticulated, inward and impossible to share. That is why tragedy is neither about the display of great emotions nor about the provocation of an emotional response, but something quite different altogether. Benjamin says:

[t]ragedy is a preliminary stage of prophecy. It is a content, which exists only in language: what is tragic is the word and the silence of the past, in which the prophetic voice is being tried out, or suffering and death, when they are redeemed by this voice; but a fate in the pragmatic substance of its entanglements is never tragic. The *Trauerspiel* is conceivable as pantomime; the tragedy is not. For the struggle against the demonic character of the law is dependent on the word of the genius. The evaporation of the tragic under the scrutiny of psychology goes hand in hand with the equation of tragedy and *Trauerspiel* [O, 118].

By characterizing the tragic as “a preliminary stage of prophecy” or by ascribing to its linguistic nature, Benjamin stresses that the tragic does not belong to the events themselves as one of their properties. What is tragic in the event only emerges when *viewed, in the light of* redemption. That is to say that the tragic is neither a fact nor its description. It emerges in retrospect and transforms the fact into an event, thus redeeming

narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions”; Aristotle, *Poetics* in Richard McKeon (ed.) *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001) 1449b 24-28. The term catharsis is probably the most controversial in the work and Aristotle never defined it. Clearly, we do not intend to attempt an analysis of the Aristotelian notion but only to trace certain connections which illuminate Benjamin’s position on tragedy and the *Trauerspiel*.

it. For Benjamin, the tragic only has a spiritual or, in a Bergsonian formulation, *virtual* existence. The mental character of the tragic was also testified by the role of the chorus within Greek tragedy. What characterizes the Greek chorus is its detachment from the emotional tension of the events preceding its appearance on the stage. This detachment is not a matter of indifference or lack of pity but as Benjamin succinctly describes it,

[c]horic diction, rather, has the effect of restoring the ruins of the tragic dialogue to a linguistic edifice firmly established – in ethical society and in religious community – both before and after the conflict. Far from dissolving the tragic action into lamentations, the constant presence of the members of the chorus, as Lessing already observed, actually sets a limit on the emotional outburst even in the dialogue [O, 121].

Although, the chorus sympathizes with the fate of the tragic hero it does *not* lament; instead its role is to envelop the act which preceded it and the coming horror, and thus to extract from the matter of the events their mental form in order to restore it to the consciousness of the community. In other words, the chorus intervenes, like an “interlude”, precisely in order to suspend tragic tension so that it does not get dispensed into lament, but that its energies are concentrated and, having been raised into their proper ethical form, are saved for the community [cf. O, 121].³³

³³ In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche equates the significance of Greek tragedy with the tragic chorus, which combines two forces, i.e. the Apollonian and the Dionysian; see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967) #1-2. Benjamin suggests that the Greek chorus is detached and reflective [O, 104, 121] building a bridge between the substance of tragedy and the spectators, thus performing a kind of detached philosophical contemplation. Nevertheless, Nietzsche makes the stronger claim that the chorus is not just a

However, for the baroque which has no place for redemption and in which everything becomes inscribed on the same surface of the present, there can be no prophetic voice "coming from the future and sinking into the past" and thus illuminating facts from within. The tragic loses its mental nuance and becomes equated with the suffering. This is exemplified in the martyr-drama where the focus is on the staging of the suffering and the representation of emotions at the expense of the action. The suffering itself becomes visual rather than agonal, it clothes the action rather than being clothed by it. Similarly, the chorus "frames" the act, enclosing it with lament, or rather emphasizing its 'lamentfulness'. As a result the energy of dramatic tension is not preserved into a higher form, but it is only physically explicated in mourning.

The emphatic visualization of suffering is the culmination of baroque theatricality. It expresses in the clearest way the baroque expansive tendency, which forces it to be driven by the desire to *touch the viewer*. At all levels - that of its form, of its content or of the mode of its scenic presentation - baroque theatre has only one aim: the *intensification* of emotions. This aspiration also conforms to the spirit of the Counter-Reformation, which demanded great emotional intensity in the arts as a way of inspiring religious faith. Nevertheless, what it achieves is not to create a greater tension but rather to externalize it and evaporate it. The baroque externalization of

bridge, but it forms the *only* reality, and marks not a philosophical detached reflection, but a capacity of self-forgetfulness through self-transformation. He defines choric aesthetic experience as 'something different from the rhapsodist who does not become fused with his images, but, like a painter, sees them outside himself as objects of contemplation'; *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 64. For an account of Benjamin's appropriation and critique of Nietzsche see Joseph Westfall, 'Nietzsche and the Approach of Tragedy: Contra Benjamin' in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 43, no. 3, September 2003, pp. 333-350.

passions and affections lacks the exhilaration of a Dionysian outburst of life but envelops instead a melancholic gravity: mortality.

The space of the Greek tragedy was essentially inwardness (i.e. empathy). This was not so much due to its cathartic *telos* and the rising of logos, but mainly because the solution of redemption was pierced by a *non liquet*, exemplified in the tragic silence. The stage itself becomes in the Greek eyes the cosmic *topos* of the event rather than the place of a theatrical performance:

the Greek trilogy is, in any case, not a repeatable act of ostentation, but a once-and-for-all resumption of the trial before a higher court. As is suggested by the open theatre and the fact that the performance is never repeated identically, what takes place is a decisive cosmic achievement. The community is assembled to witness and to judge this achievement. The spectator of the tragedy is summoned, and is justified by the tragedy itself [O, 119].

On the contrary, the *Trauerspiel* signifies mourning, the ceremonious lament. As such it cannot be conceived without an audience. The *Trauerspiel* is *addressed*, it needs to be performed and seen. Every gesture is ostensive; in the absence of a viewer it does not stand on its own. To the extent that things, gestures, and the world are empty of meaning, they are equally substitutable, interchangeable and dependent upon the spectator to confer their meaning. Every act is repeatable whether it is a life event or a theatrical performance; for, life itself has become the 'theatre of life'. The stage of the performance - a life performance or a theatrical one - has nothing *cosmic* about it apart from its repetition. It has now been

transformed into a traveling topos, as the exact correlative of a time which has no moment of revelation, but only unceasingly unfolds, without end, entrapping the vain human existence. Nowhere does the radical re-organization of the metaphysical framework become more intensely expressed in experience, than in the conception of time itself.

To clarify the significance of the contrast put forward here: for the Greeks, the *event* of judgment that was tragedy takes place once-and-for-all - even the repeated theatrical performance is never staged twice in the same way. On the contrary, for the baroque, any event would be only the unceasing *repetition* of the human martyrdom; this is the state and the peculiar fate of the creature for which there was no redemption (not even curse). Moreover, the vanity of such an endless course of life of mere repetition is intricately related to and reflected in the baroque conception of death. As opposed to the death of the tragic hero, the death of the baroque hero marks no "end of an epoch", which means not only that his death bears no significant consequences but rather that it bears no consequences - apart from the strictly individual - at all. Benjamin writes: "[w]hereas the tragic hero, in his 'immortality', does not save his life, but only his name, in death the characters of the *Trauerspiel* lose only the name-bearing individuality and not their role" [O, 136].

Consequently, to compare the baroque theatre with Greek tragedy and consider it as its declining form totally ignores the decisive difference in the socio-historical context and the metaphysical presuppositions. Yet the originality of Benjamin's argument lies in that he envisages these differences not from the point of view of historical correctness, but rather from that of expressivity. For the *Trauerspiel* does not merely

emerge in a different context, it *expresses* a different world-view. But what becomes tragic in the baroque is given in an illuminated way in the moment of Hamlet's death. The fact that his death, the death of the man who was "inwardly destroyed because he could find no other solution to the problem of existence than the negation of life" came as an external accident rather than as a necessity of fate, was devastating in the eyes of those who aspired to tragedy [O, 137]. It annihilated the possibilities for the creation of a tragic effect. However, for Benjamin it is the externality of his death that marks the re-invention of the tragic by the baroque:

[t]he death of Hamlet, which has no more in common with tragic death than the Prince himself has with Ajax, is in its drastic externality characteristic of the *Trauerspiel*; and for this reason alone it is worthy of its creator: Hamlet, as is clear from his conversation with Osric, wants to breathe in the suffocating air of fate in one deep breath [O, 137].

What is tragic about his death is not so much the striking antithesis between the fateful death he wants and the mere accident that 'fate' holds for him but rather something else. In the impossibility of fate, as the internal reason for existence, I make of mere accident *my* fate. Hamlet is not like the rational man who alone creates and is responsible for his 'fate'; rather, in a more tragic and powerful gesture, he affirms accident for the sake of fate.

The absolute exclusion of the metaphysical from the physical has deprived the world from its inner luminosity resulting in the degeneration of the world and nature to the state of mere things. Since existence is deprived of any meaning, earthly life also becomes an enduring process of decay. This is

what the baroque world mostly seeks: what could radiate things again? The new metaphysical framework of the baroque bears significant consequences in the field of art, and it becomes apparent in the role that art assumes in modernity.

Benjamin's reading of *Trauerspiel*, especially the first part of the book, illuminates the *ambiguity* on which resides the baroque and which will unfold as a double possibility for the future of art. We stated earlier the intense theatricality characteristic of the baroque aesthetic. It appears then, that the fusion of theatre and life did not aim to revolutionize art as an event of life, but rather only recognized life as a theatre of repetition and artificiality. The assumption of an emptiness of meaning leaves things barely material. Such a bare materiality translates in the baroque artwork as an *excessive formality*. If the baroque dissolves the distinction of form and content this is because it has flattened, rather than condensed, the content in the image. It has not embodied meaning in the image but it has only rendered it pictorial. That is why, as Benjamin also claims, the baroque, as opposed to tragedy, can be conceived as a pantomime.

The flattening of the mental and the material is articulately expressed in the recognition that "these are not so much plays which cause mourning, as plays through which mournfulness finds satisfaction: plays for the mournful" [O, 119]. Lament is a very characteristic instance for the consequences of this flattening: *the substitution of the tragic for lament liquidifies the tension between the mental and the material*. Lament becomes the 'expressive mark' of the tragic, and the gesture by which the mental becomes visual does not intensify its effects but opens up to their objectification. If the satisfaction of mournfulness has nothing to do with original pleasure, this is

not because it responds to pain, nor because it is less intense, but rather because it does not come from an outside, that is, an 'other', but by *turning upon its own image*, by rendering pain *beautiful*. It is probably mostly in this gesture that, following Benjamin's reading, the *Trauerspiel* becomes the *origin* of the adventure of art in modernity by redefining the very nature of origin [*Ursprung*].³⁴ It gives us the hint for modern art's tendency to aestheticization, which is inseparable from its reification.

But at the same moment there is also, in this very reification and externalization a will for life bound up with active destruction, in order to clear the way for redemption. This aspiration transforms reification into a sacrificial movement.

The hereafter is emptied of everything which contains the slightest breath of this world, and from it the baroque extracts a profusion of things which customarily escaped the grasp of artistic formulation and, at its high point, brings them violently into the light of day, in order to clear an ultimate heaven, enabling it, as a vacuum, one day to destroy the world with catastrophic violence [O, 66].

³⁴ Lack of outside meaning, mere repetition, and Benjamin's dialectical reversal in art's *excessive form* of aesthetic reflection, redefine both art's origin and art as origin itself; see below.

IV. Bergson and the temporalization of experience

Benjamin's penetrating insights into experience and art have alerted us to a crisis of experience in modernity and have allowed us to identify its symptoms in art and the concrete terms with which it is posited. The reconfiguration of the metaphysical presuppositions has significantly been reflected in the conception of time. The idea of eternity made possible the once-and-for-all of Greek tragedy. However, once redemption could no longer be offered, time also took the form of mere repetition. Thus, the conception and experience of time became central in modernity. To further this discussion, we will turn now to Henri Bergson, whose writings make an important contribution to the staging of the philosophical problems concerning the natures of time, perception, memory, life and evolution. However, we do not intend to address all novel aspects and themes raised in his work, but rather to illuminate the concept of experience from the perspective of time, memory and the body that he opens up for us. Our aim will be to show how Bergson first separated the two orders of time and space, as differing in kind. At first sight this appears to be the classical separation between intension and extension. However, Bergson's novelty was that he conceived of experience in terms of time rather than consciousness. Translating this distinction into memory and perception he gives us an original conceptualization of experience, which enfolds the one into the other.

a. Intensive and extensive states: the critique of spatialization

Bergson's philosophy is, in all its aspects, principally a philosophy of time, affirming its reality in the form of continuous change. It is founded upon the idea of duration as memory's enduring and becoming, which informs not only human life but the whole universe. Duration (*la durée*) is the concept through which Bergson temporalizes experience and Being, and shows how the independent consideration of time (that is, not merely a dimension of space) renders experience irreducible to the sum of the events lived; he demonstrated how the reality of experience differs in kind and exceeds the actuality of perceptions. However, in order to argue for the inventive reality of duration he had first to show how time differs *in kind* from space. As a result, even if he is a philosopher of the One (though *what* 'One' is the crucial question), he continually comes up with his famous dualisms: matter and memory, mind and body, quantities and qualities, intensity and extensity etc. All these distinctions are nothing more than the expressions of the irreducible difference in kind between the two orders, which constitute reality: the order of space and that of time.

Reality itself is a composite. In all its aspects it gives us mixtures of space and time and we are never confronted with pure states. How then is it possible to dissociate the composite from the pure *tendencies* which inform it? And moreover, if in experience we only encounter composites, what is the reason of an abstract decomposition? There are two forms of knowledge corresponding to the double order of reality, the intellect and intuition:

[t]he first implies that we move round the object; the second, that we enter into it. The first depends on the point of view at which we are placed and on the symbols by which we express ourselves. The second neither depends on a point of view nor relies on any symbol. The first kind of knowledge may be said to stop at the *relative*; the second, in those cases where it is possible, to attain the *absolute* [IM, 21].

These two ways of knowing differ in that one provides us with an external while the other with an internal knowledge of the object. But how are we to understand an internal knowledge? Does Bergson, in opposition to Kant, argue that knowledge of the thing in-itself is possible? Are we still in the realm of knowledge, or rather is he evoking knowledge's transformation into a higher form? However, these questions might anticipate our discussion. The difference between external and internal knowledge can be illuminated by what he will elsewhere distinguish as objective and subjective knowledge:³⁵

In fact, we apply the term *subjective* to what seems to be completely and adequately known, and the term *objective* to what is known in such a way that a constantly increasing number of new impressions could be substituted for the idea which we actually have of it [TFW, 83-84].

In a striking reversal of our common understanding of these terms, Bergson correlates subjective with absolute knowledge, but yet, through the prism of a specific and complicated thought. He explains that an object can be divided

³⁵ Our use of the aforementioned dualisms, which passed from intellect/intuition to internal/external and subjective/objective knowledge, does not imply that they are equivalent.

mentally in infinite ways without *altering its general appearance*; if these subdivisions are possible, it is because they were *already present*, even before their realization, in our image of the object. These subdivisions are actual rather than virtual, even without needing to be realized, because they were perceptible in advance. What we call an 'object' is a closed system not because it is bounded, but because it has already structured the relation between the perceptible and its perception, not as a becoming but as a transposition of being from the state of the possible to that of the real.³⁶ But in this conception time is subordinated to space - it has become a parameter - and the future only measures a distance from the present rather than a radical openness.

Moreover, although the internal subdivisions of the image we have of the thing do not essentially alter it, in a reverse analogy, everything that comes to be added externally in this image also produces a novel image of the thing. Consequently, the object can be divided infinitely by producing only differences in degree. In the Bergsonian account, a difference in degree does not so much distinguish the smaller from the larger but rather it is defined by the relation it establishes between the part and the whole. In the case of such differences, the part only offers a *partial view* of the object and the latter is identical to the sum of its parts. As such, objective knowledge is necessarily bound up to its relativity, which

³⁶ What is the relationship between the possible and the real? Bergson paradoxically explains that it is a fundamental illusion to believe that the possible precedes real existence. Thus, in asserting that the possible is only *the mirage of the present in the past*, he claims that the possible is something more: the combined effect of reality once it has appeared and of a condition which throws it back in time. Essentially, it is the real that makes itself possible, and not the possible which becomes real. See H. Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An introduction to metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Citadel Press, 2002) pp. 91-106 at 101, 104.

means that for its verification or modification, it is subject to the empirical facts. Verification in this case consists in measuring the *identity* of the image of knowledge with the fact.

To be sure, the experienced sensation of my feelings is subjective neither because it is internal nor because it belongs to a subject but rather because it is *itself* a 'subject' in a very particular way. Bergson uses the example of a complex feeling, which simultaneously entails a plurality of simple elements: 'but, as long as these elements do not stand out with perfect clearness, we cannot say that they were completely realized, and, as soon as consciousness has a distinct perception of them, the psychic state which results from their synthesis will have changed for that very reason' [TFW, 84]. This means that a feeling, or else duration, can be, and it is indeed, a multiplicity but a non-numerical one, which, as Deleuze has argued, "does not divide up without changing in kind, it changes in kind in the process of dividing up" [B, 42]. Thus, a feeling very concrete in its intensity may be experienced, permeated by the complex of love and hate. However, as soon as there is an attempt to divide the feeling in the distinct tendencies that inform it, it becomes clear that the attempt itself has already changed its nature. For neither love nor hate considered in-themselves have anything to do with feeling as a complex whole. Moreover, anyone who has experienced such a feeling knows that the two tendencies, although apparently contradictory, do not cancel each other out, but make the feeling all the more intense. We need therefore to admit that the two intensities differ without opposing each other, without standing in a relation of the

positive and the negative;³⁷ they are both positivities, two genuine intensities which *differ in kind*.

It can be seen that the discussion about the nature of a feeling, a conscious state or a duration, becomes more complex when explaining what it means to call a feeling 'intense', or 'more intense' as a feeling is always of an intensity. Is it then our expression a mere tautology? Or, does a feeling express a difference in degree between two intensities? Bergson fiercely criticized the idea of quantitative differences between conscious states, arguing that when a feeling endures by varying its intensity, what is experienced is not more or less of the same feeling, but a qualitative change. A feeling endures, what makes it continuously passing into something else, transforming the whole of a psychic state [TFW, 10].³⁸ As opposed to extensities, which increase or reduce in magnitude without altering the image of the whole, intensities do not add up forming a greater intensity of the same kind but *endure* in time, what coincides with the qualitative change of the whole.

³⁷ Both forms of the 'negative' as deterioration (i.e. disorder) and opposition (i.e. nonbeing) were rigorously criticized by Bergson. He argued that: "there is more, and not less, in the idea of an object conceived as 'not existing' than in the idea of this same object conceived as 'existing'; for the idea of the object 'not existing' is necessarily the idea of the object 'existing' with, in addition, the representation of an exclusion of this object by the actual reality taken in block" [CE, 286]. Moreover, 'negation' necessarily presupposes an affirmation to which it draws upon. Thus, the difference between the two is that an affirmation proposes a judgment on an object while "a negative proposition expresses a judgment on a judgment". It is therefore "an affirmation of the second degree" because "it affirms something of an affirmation which itself affirms something of an object" [CE, 288]. He will conclude that "the idea of Nothing, if we try to see in it that of an annihilation of all things, is self-destructive and reduced to a mere word; and that if, on the contrary, it is truly an idea, then we find in it as much matter as in the idea of All" [CE, 298]; see also *The Creative Mind*, supra, pp. 97-100.

³⁸ The discussion of psychic states as intensities, which cannot be considered from the prism of quantitative differences applicable only to magnitudes, takes place in the first chapter of TFW, 1-74. Bergson does not restrict his argument to deep-seated psychic states but also extends it to sensations and muscular effort.

Moreover, the consideration of numbers reveals that the difference between intensity and extensity cannot be drawn on the basis of the opposition of a unity and a multiplicity. Duration is a unity enfolding a multiplicity of conscious states, but the number is "a collection of units", or "the synthesis of the one and the many". Since in both the order of space and that of time we are encountered with the 'synthesis' of unity and multiplicity, what is at stake each time is the identity of the particular process of common formation, or the mode of their entwinement. Bergson explains how a numerical multiplicity is formed by the addition of *identical* units. However, these units also need to be in some way discrete in order to be added, for otherwise they would only be a single unit. Bergson concludes that this necessary difference is provided by thinking the units as juxtaposed in space rather than in temporal succession [TFW, 77]. In the latter case, we would only be faced with the repetition of single units rather than with a multiplicity. Consequently, numerical multiplicity can only be conceived in terms of temporal simultaneity and spatial juxtaposition.

As opposed to the order of space where every moment remains *external* to each other, the intensive states of consciousness, as they are lived rather than symbolically described, are constituted as a multiplicity of moments "succeeding each other" that is "melting into one another and forming an organic whole" [TFW, 128]. It is precisely for this reason that the living organism, a feeling, or a work of art, constitute "organic totalities", as Jankelevitch argues. Spiritual realities are internal to themselves twice-fold, because they perpetuate themselves and because they totalize themselves;

mechanisms remain external to themselves.³⁹ States of consciousness exist only in a flowing continuity where each moment contains everything that has preceded it and is pregnant with what follows it, while at the same time it does not simply add itself but *informs* the whole.

In *Time and Free Will* Bergson will grant a psychological reality to duration in the same way that unity is attributed to a simple act of the mind rather than to things. Thus, although external things change, “their moments do not succeed one another, [...] except for a consciousness which keeps them in mind” [TFW, 227]. However, the psychological account of duration in *Matter and Memory* will open itself up to a virtual ontology of time and a new conception of the genesis of space and extensity.

b. The doubling of reality and the body

In the ‘Introduction’ to the English translation of *Matter and Memory*, Bergson states the aims of his book as the affirmation of the reality of spirit and the reality of matter. As its title already indicates, it is a book haunted by the question of the mind/body dualism. This is the problem that Bergson will address in the form of the relation between perception and memory. The “decisive turn” of dualism emerges for Bergson at the particular moment of human experience. But the idea filling the entire book is that experience extends beyond its human

³⁹ Vladimir Jankelevitch, *Henri Bergson* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959) p. 13.

form from both directions; it goes “beyond the decisive turn” twice. For Deleuze, “dualism is therefore only a moment, which must lead to the reformation of a monism” [B, 29].

If we conceived the idea of *Matter and Memory* in the form of a diagram, it would be given to us in the form of the circle, although an idiosyncratic one, which in the process of following it would have doubled upon itself in such a way that its beginning and end would occupy the same point but they would not coincide. The two instances of monism cannot coincide because they are of a different nature since, as Deleuze rightly argues, the first is an actual point of departure while the second is the “virtual image” of this point, “which finally gives us the sufficient reason of the thing, the sufficient reason of the composite, the sufficient reason of the point of departure” [B, 28-29]. In our view, the relation between the two instances is particularly important; it illuminates why the simple assertion of Bergsonian monism remains insignificant unless one accounts for *what has happened in the process* so that the simple fact of monism is not enough by itself but has to be repeated and affirmed. However, this question will only receive a preliminary and incomplete answer here.⁴⁰ Yet, what we want to show in this part is how Bergson, through the discussion of images, perception and memory, proceeds from an uncertain monism, to its dissociation in a *double* order of reality in order to end up to a *doubling* reality.

When considering the problem of perception and representation, the two main currents in modern western philosophy (materialism and idealism) begin by dissociating matter (as the extended substance) and consciousness (as the

⁴⁰ This will recur in *Chapter 5* of this thesis not in relation to the Bergsonian method but in relation to the neuronal processes of the body.

unextended or inner). According to the Cartesian dualism, material bodies or things only partake of the extended physical world, and their properties and relations are subject to the study of geometry. On the contrary, ideas are formed in the mind and they are immaterial, since this latter has no other property apart from thinking or being conscious. Following this view, to perceive is to form an idea in consciousness, which means that perception is unextended, since it has no spatial properties or relations, and inner because it is only present in *my* consciousness. Consequently, if perception takes place somewhere other than the object then it is its *representation*, purporting to correspond to the thing.

However, how can we grant this correspondence? If the two orders (the mental and the physical) are separated, and equally the possibility of representation entails the possibility of misrepresentation, how can we assert that what we know of the world is indeed the world and that we are not the victims of systematic illusions? If perceptions as our terminals to the world have become interiorized in our consciousness, what access do we have to external reality and how can we test the correctness of our perceptions and the effectiveness of our actions? This is how Bergson describes the problem:

[f]or realism, in fact, the invariable order of the phenomena of nature lies in a cause distinct from our perceptions, whether this cause must remain unknowable, or whether we can reach it by an effort (always more or less arbitrary) of metaphysical construction. For the idealist, on the contrary, these perceptions are the whole of reality, and the invariable order of the phenomena of nature is but the symbol whereby we express, alongside of real perceptions, perceptions that are possible. But for realism as for idealism, perceptions are "veridical

hallucinations”, states of the subject, projected outside himself
[...] [MM, 68].

As opposed to both traditions, Bergson considers perception of matter and matter itself before the schism initiated by realism and idealism, between thing-in-itself and appearance for my consciousness. Instead, he views the world as “an aggregate of images” where my body is an image among others, acting and reacting upon one another in all their elementary parts according to the physical laws of nature. As such, the world for Bergson is granted an existence that is something more than what the idealist calls a representation, and yet something less than what the materialist calls a thing; existence is placed in-between the thing and its representation.

The account of matter and extensity as an image is not to be equated with the Platonic view of the world as mere appearance of an external true existence, nor more generally with the idealist conception, which subsumes the world to a mind that will entertain it. On the contrary, for Bergson, the brain as well is nothing more than an image among others and as such it “is part of the material world; the material world is not part of the brain” [MM, 19].

For Bergson, who assumes the common sense view of the world, “the object exists in itself, and on the other hand, the object is, in itself, pictorial as we perceive it: image it is, but a self-existing image” [MM, 10]. The world is *in-itself* without being dependent on my perception; *my* perception does not come prior to the world, it *anticipates* it. However, at the same time the world is indeed pictorial as we perceive it. What is the meaning of this double temporal relation of my perception to the world? As F.C.T. Moore suggests, things in the world “are

images because they exist in a space in which they are capable of being pictured ('our' world); they exist in themselves because their existence does not depend upon their *actually* being pictured."⁴¹ Bergson therefore begins by accounting for a *fundamental duplicity* in the mode of things' existence: everything that is, exists in-itself, but also, it is perceivable, it opens itself to the outside.

Moreover, although Bergson uses the term "images" and even "pictorial", we should not restrict our understanding to the pictorial qualities of things; rather, we should extend our interpretation to include all kinds of physical signals of the thing, perceivable by our senses. Bergson's images are real objects, rather than fictions, really possessing the qualities they possess and are perceived as possessing; his luminous universe really acts upon us. The view of matter as an assemblage of images bears then a double signification: on the one hand, it establishes as Bergson's starting point an *ontological monism*; and on the other, it initiates us to his theory of the *immediacy* of perception, which does not have to go through the intermediary of representation.

The universal plane of images, which act and react upon each other, is a plane of action, where the difference of forces is played out. It is the plane of heterogeneity and pure difference. In this universe of indiscriminate images however, there is one that can be distinguished: the image of my body. What makes it distinct from all other images that surround me, is that "I do not know it only from without by perceptions, but from within by affections" [MM, 17]. My body is part of the aggregate of the material world, receiving and restoring movements back in the

⁴¹ F.C.T. Moore, *Bergson: Thinking Backwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 24.

world, yet, with the only difference being that it appears to *choose*, relatively, the manner in which it will respond. Choice, however, does not come from conscious representation and decision but from action. For Bergson my body is 'an instrument of action' alone and 'cannot give birth to a representation' [MM, 20]. As an instrument of action the body is oriented to utility; it is *selectively* sensitive to the environment according to what may serve its vital needs and ends.

It is important to note, however, right from the start that these needs and ends are not essentially pre-existent. They are immanent to *life* itself, which for Bergson becomes a cosmological notion rather than being restricted to the individual life of the organism. As such, life consists in the tendency to action, understood beyond the merely human scope; it is the tendency to become actualized. Needs are not conceptions of lack, but conceptions of life and positivity for they aid and aim to action.⁴² Consequently, my body which is only actual (that is, my ability to act) generates perceptions as real actions. Perception then does not consist in forming a representation of the world but in a process of *selection* from the world of those movements that might be useful.

However, selection is not the only movement of perception but it is simultaneously bound up with reflection.

⁴² *Creative Evolution* is clearly the book where Bergson elaborates his philosophy of life and evolution. But equally this idea permeates *MM*. Thus he states: "Whatever the nature of matter, it may be said that life will at once establish in it a primary discontinuity, expressing the duality of the need and of that which must serve to satisfy it" [MM, 198]. However, for Bergson life is not installed as primary need but rather need emerges as expression of life. This is apparent when he writes: "Living matter, in its simplest form and in a homogeneous state, accomplishes this function [of receiving and utilizing movements] simultaneously with those of nourishment and repair. The progress of such matter consists in sharing this double labor between two categories of organs, the purpose of the first, called organs of nutrition, being to maintain the second: the second, in their turn, are made for *action* [MM, 64]."

The selection of a useful movement from the world is only possible because it coincides with the reflection of my possible action upon the world. Perception as selection does not only receive a movement from outside, it equally expresses, in exactly the same manner, my *possible action* to the outside; selection follows the criteria of utility. However, these criteria are neither conceptual nor externally given but emerge from the requirements of action and are immanent to it. Perception, therefore, is not merely reception but comprises simultaneously a double movement: a centripetal movement of selection of the movements received and a centrifugal movement of reflection of possible action.

Although Bergson ties reflection to perception he does not intellectualize it nor does he render it a representation of the mind in the idealist sense. There are two main reasons testifying to this position: first, because the representation born in reflection adds nothing new to the object, it only eliminates its part which cannot serve my action. That is why Bergson insists that "there is for images merely a difference of degree, and not of kind, between *being* and *being consciously perceived*" [MM, 37]. Consequently, it is not that Bergson denies any role to representation (as a centrifugal movement) in perception, rather his thesis consists in asserting that if perception is a photograph, it is *already* taken, already developed in the very heart of things [MM, 38]. The Bergsonian radicalism consists not only in the fact that he externalizes perception, for a materialist could account for that as well; instead, his position is more complex because he manages to render perception both external (in the objects rather than in us) and to account for its duplicity in the form of a centripetal and a centrifugal movement that it embodies. In this way, perception of matter is granted its

correspondence to matter (rather than merely to our mind and our hallucinations) but, by reflecting our possible action upon things, it has also become *our* perception.

It is in this way that my body as centre does not introduce a split between consciousness and the world but rather doubles its order. Both realism and idealism confess that the same images may simultaneously participate in two systems: one belonging to science where every image relates and varies to itself, and thus possessing an absolute value, and the other (the world of my consciousness) where every image varies in relation to this centre. But the crucial question is not if there is one or two systems, but how the two systems relate to each other. As opposed to subjective idealism (which derives the world from consciousness) and contrary to materialistic realism (which derives consciousness from the world), Bergson operates a very different method. He begins from the world as a plane of heterogeneity; but he also acknowledges that this is only an indifferent difference. My body, however, renders difference significant and this is expressed in its selection. But *my* body is not derived from the world, *it is implicated in the world as an image acting and reacting upon others; but also, it implicates the world because in its perception it reflects its possible action* [MM, 25]. The difference between the two systems is itself reflected in the difference between perception and conscious perception.

There is one more issue we need to address in relation to perception: what is the role of the brain and how is it able to transform perception into conscious perception? Bergson insists on the material identity of the brain to the body. As such, the brain is only oriented to action rather than to knowledge and does not give birth to representations. The only thing it adds to

perception is *analysis* of the movement received and selection of the movement executed. The evolution from the simpler to the more complex living organism consists in the latter's greater capacity to analyze its environment. In the simple living organism, the organs of action coincide with the organs of self-preservation, and perception with movement; in fact simple organisms do not have specific sensory and motor organs but this ability is blended and expanded on the surface of its body in a single property, i.e. contractility [MM, 55]. The undifferentiation of organs and abilities results in the organism's limited range of possible actions upon its environment. On the contrary, the complex organism having developed specific sensory and motor organs it has achieved two things: first, it has analyzed perception from movement and second it has also analyzed perception itself to various and specific sub-modalities (sight, hearing, smell etc.).

Bergson expresses a most original idea when he makes conscious perception correspondent to the measuring of the *distance* of possible action:

[t]o the degree that my horizon widens, the images which surround me seem to be painted upon a more uniform background and become to me more indifferent. The more I narrow this horizon, the more the objects which it circumscribes space themselves out distinctly according to the greater or lesser ease with which my body can touch and move them [MM, 21].

Conscious perception brings us closer to the world, or reflects our closeness. But what exactly is the meaning of this closeness? According to Bergson it is clear that the closeness of conscious perception equals nothing more than an increased possibility and capacity for action. There is nothing virtual in

pure perception, even if this latter only exists in principle and in reality it is virtualized because it is mixed with memory.⁴³ The reflection of *possible* action is not virtual, even if at times Bergson expresses himself without distinguishing between the two terms.⁴⁴ The reflection of the possible action is the reflection of the capacity for action, which may not be realized yet concretely, but it is nevertheless present, or inscribed. That is why perception lies no more to the sensory than to the motor centers; an injury to the nervous elements, whose role is to give *efficacy* to the disturbance received, "by diminishing our possible action, diminishes perception in the same degree [MM, 42]. That is why "perception is no more in the sensory than in the motor centers; it measures the complexity of their relations, and is in fact, where it appears to be" [MM, 46].

Following our earlier discussion, to the degree that the sensory and motor centers are not identical, perception does not coincide with action. But to the extent that they both emerged from the dissociation of a prior single property, i.e. *contractility*, they do not stand in opposition but the one is implicated in the other even after the dissociation. The centripetal movement of the sensory and the centrifugal movement of the motor organs

⁴³ Bergson accepts the fact that "there is no perception which is not full of memories". Perception is infiltrated by memory in a double way: first, because with the immediate data of our senses we constantly mingle thousand details of our past experience which may be useful in the present situation, and in fact, the greater our memory becomes the more it tends to invest our present perception. Furthermore, perception is itself memory because no matter how brief we consider it to be it always occupies a duration, contracts and prolongs a plurality of moments [MM, 33-34].

⁴⁴ This is because in *Matter and Memory* Bergson has not really emphasized terminologically the difference between the possible and the virtual. However, his discussion of the possible and the real in *Creative Evolution* will illuminate sufficiently the structuring principles of this pair and the difference between the virtual and the actual. It is mainly Deleuze who will take up and give a systematic use to the term "virtual". See also note 24 above and Brian Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect' in *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002) pp. 23-55

are the actualizations of the implicit tendencies of contraction and expansion. This kind of analysis has been rendered possible because of the brain. Its role is restricted to that of "a kind of central telephonic exchange: its office is to allow communication or to *delay* it. It adds nothing to what it receives" [MM, 30]. It is this delay introduced by the brain which gives rise to the *indetermination* of action. When the response of action comes temporally close to the movement received, when it comes immediately, it is a *reflex* action and it is almost extracted by its cause, to which it stands in direct proportion as its effect. On the contrary, the interval of the brain by allowing for indetermination in my response foretells of the spirit, in the form of the freedom of a will.⁴⁵ Quite clearly, Bergson does not locate spirit in the brain but rather the interval of the brain allows it to *appear*, like movement captured and rendered visible in the development of a photograph.

c. Duration and experience

On the antipodes of perception and the body, which is oriented to action, interested and therefore only actual or objective, stands memory or duration, which is, wholly virtual, inactive and spiritual. Duration for Bergson is essentially memory, consciousness and freedom. However, he went on to give a novel account of memory which he persistently opposed

⁴⁵ Thus, it is not an empirical indetermination, nor an indetermination due to our lack of knowledge. Perhaps it would be better to follow Deleuze here and talk about *determinability* instead; see Gilles Deleuze, (1996) 'Immanence: a Life...' Nick Millet (trans.) in Jean Khalifa (ed.), *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze* (London: Continuum) pp. 170-173.

to the common empirical, psychological and psycho-physiological conceptions. Bergson's thesis is that duration differs in kind from perception and he elaborates it against both currents of thought which fail to consider this difference: associationism and the psycho-physiological accounts.

He confronts associationism and its view that we reach memory gradually, associating our perceptions with ideas connected through the principles of similarity and contiguity. His critique consists in that associationism substitutes for the 'continuity of becoming, which is the living reality, a discontinuous multiplicity of elements, inert and juxtaposed' [MM, 134] and consequently comes to regard memory solely at its final stage of actualization in the memory-image. As such, it assumes that memories are stored images, which the present perception comes to associate with. Remembering consists in the sequential attachment of perception to ready-made images, rather than in the process of formation of such images. Associationism therefore results in the identification of the memory image with sensation and the latter with a weak perception. By reducing psychical life to sensation and perception as the difference between weak and strong states of intensity, it totally excludes memory from the horizon of experience. But the absurdity of this position becomes apparent if we consider a weak perception: we can easily realize that it cannot be confused with memory in the same way as adding a plurality of memories we will not create a perception.

Moreover, concerning the principles of similarity and contiguity, on the basis of which associationism explains how images attach to each other, Bergson argues that we can always detect similarity and contiguity between memory-images, but this is only a common *fact* insufficient in itself to explain why or

how the *particular* image was chosen and therefore they cannot serve as principles. The incapacity to explain the particular choice is due to the fact that it only attributes to memory a speculative interest, an existence for-itself, and fails to see how memory has an interest *for us* and is therefore related to the activity of the will; in other words, "its error is that it overly *intellectualizes* ideas" [MM, 164]. The critical point of Bergson's opposition to associationism is not merely the advancement of a different conception of memory, but rather that it has two crucial and concrete aims: first, it expresses the need to secure a place for heterogeneity within experience, which associationism lacks as it has substituted all difference with differences in degree. But also, in a subsequent move Bergson wants to grant for memory and spirit not only a purely speculative interest, but ultimately a vital interest, for us.⁴⁶

But associationism only corresponds to one aspect of the critique. Bergson also requires securing his position *vis-à-vis* the materialist assumption, which localizes memory in the brain. This view is most intensely expressed by science, especially the various psycho-physiological accounts which consider memory to be a cerebral function. The fundamental Bergsonian thesis concerning memory regards it as of a wholly spiritual (or virtual) nature; as such, it does not need and cannot be contained somewhere materially - namely, in the brain. Memory is indeed always preserved and never lost, but preserved in-itself, within time. However, in order to sustain his claim

⁴⁶ See below *Chapter 5* for the argument that we have a *practical*, rather than cognitive or speculative, relation with the environment. This might give us an idea about why Bergson is *not* a vitalist in the traditional sense. Bergson rejects the doctrine of internal finality inherent to each organism that haunted traditional vitalism; see John Mullarkey, *Bergson and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) pp. 62-63. 'If there is finality in the world of life,' Bergson writes, 'it includes the *whole of life* in a single indivisible embrace' [CE, 43].

Bergson has to respond to the pathological fact of the destruction of memory due to concrete lesions of the brain. Therefore, he discusses different cases resulting to disorders of memory and even aspects of aphasia and memory 'loss'. His hypothesis is that 'the disorders of imaginative memory, which correspond to local lesions of the cortex, are always diseases of recognition, either visual or auditory recognition [...] or of the recognition of words' [MM, 107]. By considering pathologies of memory as failures of recognition, Bergson locates the problem not to memory itself but to the activity of the body.

Moreover, he distinguishes between two causes of the lesions, corresponding to the double movement entailed in recognition: the first lies in the incapacity of the body to adopt, under the influence of the external stimulus, the precise attitude that will allow to choose among the memories; in this case, what is affected by the lesion are the mechanisms which continue, in an automatically executed movement, the stimulation received. The second cause involves the cortical centers which "*prepare* voluntary movements by lending them the required sensory antecedent, centers which, rightly or wrongly, are termed image-centers"; [MM, 108]. In the first case, the lesion has affected the movements of the body which *intend* the stimulation to the brain, while in the second, it has distorted the movements by which memories become *extended* in action, that is they become images. In both cases, the problem can indeed be located, but as a problem of fixing attention and therefore effectuating recognition rather than a loss of memory. Bergson does not deny that pure memory, in order to become actualized in a memory-image, is dependent upon the *action* of the body. On the contrary, he accepts that remembering is doubly bound to activity in a centripetal and a centrifugal movement which

render recognition possible. But memory cannot be reduced to conscious remembering; if with the concept of duration Bergson invents the being of an unconscious memory, this is clearly distinguishable from a Freudian unconscious.⁴⁷

Similarly to his theory of perception, according to which perception takes place at the object rather than in ourselves, we grasp the image of the past where it is in itself, and not in ourselves, in our present. This is how he describes the act of recollection:

[w]henver we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act *sui generis* by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first, in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past – a work of adjustment, something like the focusing of a camera. But our recollection still remains virtual; we simply prepare ourselves to receive it by adopting the appropriate attitude [MM, 134].

This act *sui generis* is the act of intuition, which in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* he had described as an act of intellectual sympathy which offers us an internal and intensive knowledge of things. In *Matter and Memory* he does not engage with a discussion of intuition, but he significantly indicates it in terms of a leap in order to emphasize its proper *discontinuity*. Intuition here becomes the simple (in the sense of indivisible) act which takes us *at once* in the ontological dimension of the past. The necessity of the leap in a pure past points to the difference in kind between the being of the past and that of the present, between pure memory and pure perception. In the

⁴⁷ Freud's unconscious denotes a psychological reality, which is outside consciousness, but Bergson's unconscious "is used to denote a nonpsychological reality – being as it is in itself" [B, 56].

same way that Bergson had defined the present as sensori-motor and therefore only actual, he also equates the past with the spirit and grants it, in principle, a wholly virtual existence.

As Deleuze describes it, this 'past in general' "is not the particular past of a particular present but that is like an ontological element, a past that is eternal and for all time, the condition of the 'passage' of every particular present. It is the past in general that makes possible all pasts" [B, 56-57]. This pure past transcends the idea of a psychological past, lived by the subject of experience, in order to evoke a kind of primordial or immemorial past, a past that has never been lived and has never been present, a past which has always pre-existed the present, placed as already there. Bergson's idea of a pure past in which we are placed by a leap, already indicates that his conception of memory leaves the field of psychology altogether, in order to address it not as a psychological function but rather as a *being of memory*. What is most idiosyncratic about the idea of a pure past is that its being is not posited as existent but rather as *already pre-existent*. As Keith Ansell Pearson points out,

the pure past or pure memory is, like pure perception, a theoretical hypothesis designed to enable a 'superior' empiricism to pursue various lines of inquiry and to overcome the limits of associationism. Pure memory shows us that there is a *movement* at work in the actualization of memory-images, we do not just pass from one isolated perception or memory to another.⁴⁸

Consequently, the idea of the pure past in Bergson has a double purpose: on one hand, it establishes the difference *in kind* between perception and memory and therefore clearly

⁴⁸ Keith Ansell Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life* (Routledge: London and New York, 2002) p. 174; emphasis mine.

opposes itself to the homogeneous order evoked by associationism. But also, by evoking the pure past as always pre-existent (rather than formerly existent) Bergson does not so much create an outside, transcendent reality, but rather accounts for the conditions of possibility of all empirical pasts and their recollection; he accounts for the *passage* of time and the ability to represent what has passed.

To clarify, let us ask the question *when* is a recollection formed? The common view holds that a recollection is formed *after* perception has ceased to be, and therefore that memory *succeeds* perception. However, such a conception necessarily assumes that "the course of our conscious existence must be composed of clear-cut states, each of which must begin objectively, and also objectively end" [ME, 158]. However, the division of our psychic life into states has nothing to do with the lived reality of time and everything to do with the retrospective accounts given by the intellect. Consequently, if we consider a recollection as simply following perception we can only hold a spatialized conception of time, which mistakenly substitutes for the continuity of our psychic *life* events, their discontinuous *descriptions*. However, if time is *other* than space, then recollections cannot follow this order. Instead, Bergson will account for the intensive being of memory by arguing that "*the formation of memory is never posterior to the formation of perception; it is contemporaneous with it*" [ME, 157].⁴⁹ Thus, a perception can become memory only because it has already doubled as a

⁴⁹ He will explain that if we do not realize, or have consciousness, of the parallel formation of memory with perception it is because the characteristic note of consciousness is action according to interest; but we do not *need* the memory at the moment we perceive the thing. Therefore "practical consciousness throwing this memory aside as useless, theoretical reflexion holds it to be non-existent"; see Henri Bergson, *Mind - Energy: Lectures and Essays*, trans. H. Wildon Carr (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1975) p. 160.

memory at the time it is taking place as perception. Similarly, how would a moment pass if it was not *passing* at the same time that it *is present*? Bergson establishes the duplicity of the present, a present that is only at the moment that is passing, *in passing*, the *fugitive present*.⁵⁰

This is then, as Deleuze argues, “a fundamental position of time and also the most profound paradox of memory: the past is ‘contemporaneous’ with the present that it *has been*” [B, 58]. We are led to assume that in the present that is, there is an implicated *has been* of the present, in order that the present might pass. Thus, the present is not only sensori-motor and therefore active, as Bergson had initially defined it, but it is now also revealed in its parallel constitution as memory. This is then how the present also becomes the “most contracted degree of the past”. It is this passing present, which becomes the condition of the temporalization of a present constituted in action. Otherwise, this latter would only expire itself in space, at the moment of the deed, without ever being possible to redeem itself in the life of memory.

The paradox of the *contemporaneity* of the past with the present that has been gives us then the passing present as an effect. This is also how Bergson in *Matter and Memory* goes beyond *Time and Free Will*; in the latter work he had argued for the reality of time and duration as succession; now, however, he gives us the *conditions* for succession, as *virtual co-existence*. Not only is the past the most contracted degree of the present but the whole of the past co-exists with itself. In the interval between the present, occupied by the sensori-motor mechanism of the body and a pure past of the totality of memories “there is

⁵⁰ See also Maria Lakka, ‘Duration, Rhythm, Present’ in *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 15, 2004, pp. 18-33.

room, [...] for a thousand repetitions of our psychical life, figured by as many sections A'B', A''B'', etc., of the same cone" [MM, 162]. In each of the planes, the *whole* past co-exists with itself but in different degrees of tension, contracted towards spirit or relaxed towards matter.

Each time an attempt to retrieve a recollection is made a leap is made on to a certain plane. Thus every act of conscious remembrance necessary involves a division of duration. The inverted cone gives us duration in a *dynamic schema* and reveals that:

[f]or Bergson, duration was not simply the indivisible, nor was it the nonmeasurable. Rather, it was that which divided only by changing in kind, that which was susceptible to measurement only by varying its metrical principle at each stage of the division [B, 40].

My leap into the past always gives me the whole of the past but in a different degree of contraction and relaxation. This difference in the tension does not alter the contents of the past but the *movement* of duration. As opposed to an empirical composite, which divides itself in pure tendencies duration is "simple, indivisible, pure"; and "the simple does not divide itself, it differentiates itself."⁵¹ If in duration the whole past co-exists with itself this is not a repetition of the same; on the contrary, what co-exists and is repeated is the constant movement of the past's differentiation. Duration coincides with this unceasing repetition of *its* difference.

⁵¹ Gilles Deleuze, "Bergson's Conception of Difference" in John Mullarkey (ed.), *The New Bergson* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999) p. 49.

Duration is for Bergson the *intensive form*, in which the past is preserved as a whole. Duration as pure memory is never lost and yet there is nowhere that it is contained; it is preserved in itself, in time. Deleuze, who re-invented Bergson in a radical way, recognized in the notion of duration the reconfiguration of the Kantian sense of time:

Bergsonism has often been reduced to the following idea: duration is subjective, and constitutes our internal life. And it is true that Bergson had to express himself in this way, at least at the outset. But, increasingly, he came to say something quite different: the only subjectivity is time, non-chronological time, grasped in its foundation, and it is we who are internal to time, not the other way round. That we are in time seems like a commonplace, yet it is the highest paradox. Time is not the interior in us, but just the opposite, the interiority in which we are, in which we move, live and change. Bergson is much closer to Kant than he himself thinks: Kant defined time as the form of interiority, in the sense that we are internal to time (but Bergson conceives this form quite differently from Kant). [...] Subjectivity is never ours, it is time, that is, the soul or the spirit, the virtual. The actual is always objective, but the virtual is subjective [C2, 82-83].

V. Conclusion

Benjamin criticized Kant's exclusion of the absolute from his concept of experience and his division of the event of experience into a subject and an object of experience. Instead, his aspiration was to create the concept of experience as an immanent totality which enfolds the absolute. Driven by a

similar concern against the spatialization and reduction of experience, Bergson founded the totality of experience (a heterogeneous totality or difference) in the intensive states of consciousness and the redemptive character of memory. Yet his thesis is that memory can never be lost but that it persists beyond cerebral lesions and conscious remembering, it is even when it cannot become actualized, created an account of memory beyond psychology, an ontology of memory as an in-itself. However, if memory endures in-itself, does it make any difference whether we remember or not? What happens in the passage from the virtual to the actual? Unless we consider this passage to action, we will not be able to see how the ontology of duration is a *virtual ontology* that needs to be created and in the third chapter of this thesis we will address the *becoming* (rather than the being) of duration through the notion of rhythm.

Similarly, is it experience that becomes reduced in modernity or is it only the concept of experience? Experience does not cease to form itself as a whole and to envelop all fragmentations. Nevertheless, Benjamin did not diagnose the atrophy in experience by comparing it to an original wholeness as if experience could be quantified and measured, but in its *communicability*;⁵² in modernity “it is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences”.⁵³

Trauerspiel laments the meaninglessness of the world, the gap of incommunicability that has separated being from the world. The lost intimacy now becomes the intensive cling to matter. In the annihilation of all distance which freely weaves

⁵² This condition is not acknowledged by Howard Caygill in *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, and therefore for him the atrophy of experience remains the atrophy of the concept of experience.

⁵³ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller”, in *Illuminations*, supra, p. 83.

the past and the future, in the creation of an overabundant and suffocating present, one may discern a double tendency beginning with an ecstatic rush to death. But there is also in this ecstatic instance of self-annihilation, and especially in its ostentatious character which extends the work to the viewer, a quest: 'look at me!' The baroque quest to be seen is not so much the instance of narcissism, but mainly the work's handing itself over to the viewer to redeem it. Since art can no longer be bathed in truth's light of redemption, it is now only the viewer, who can look, endow the work with a life and thus redeem it.

For Benjamin, baroque's affirmative instance is the moment of allegory, which is not just a literary trope but an embodiment of the baroque mode of expression. Greek tragedy finds its expression in the symbol which incarnates a whole meaning, the fulfilment of the wish, the instant of revelation. But in the case of *Trauerspiel* earthy life can find no fulfilment, and the instant can no longer be once-and-for-all, but another repetition and succession. The momentariness of the symbol is the immanence of meaning and being. But in allegory the two are separated and allegory draws upon the general; it is "a successively progressing, dramatically mobile, dynamic representation of ideas" [O, 165]. As such it introduces temporality, so that "from a long and patient process of deciphering, [...] we may begin to cross the dialectical chasm between the natural and particular (i.e the material) and the ideal or meaning. Allegory is just a different way of moving from the particular to the general".⁵⁴

With *Trauerspiel* we witness the instance where art's fall from truth opens the way to the immanence of experience. In the next chapter we will look at the work of Theo Angelopoulos

⁵⁴ Scott Lash, *Another Modernity A Different Rationality*, supra, p. 337.

and will try to show how cinema - by incorporating time in the image - unfolds images and creates the experience of the film as a visual rhythm.

Chapter 2

The Experience of Time in Theo Angelopoulos' Cinema

Slowness is the rhythm of
memory and pleasure

Milan Kundera, *Slowness*

I. Introduction

Witnessing the advent of early cinema, Bergson envisaged it as a paradigmatic instance of what he called 'the spatialization of time'. In the example of cinema (which reproduced movement by the addition of static points or frames), he saw the concretisation of the operation performed by the intellect in the

way it comprehends the world.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the history of cinema and its evolution as an art form makes us question and resist Bergson's characterization, and his critique, which is addressed to the intellect rather than cinema, holds true in relation to the technology. But to the extent that film is also an art form, it reveals that technology opens up possibilities and restrictions which do not determine the aesthetic outcome of the course of their actualization.

Although early cinema perceived the possibilities of the medium mainly as the visual reproduction of movement, later, with Italian neo-realism, it gradually became aware that movement could also open to time, and to the non-linear temporalities of percepts, affects and thought, beyond what was represented as a visual content, and as spatial movement to something that would nevertheless be experienced.

In this chapter, we will consider the work of Theo Angelopoulos in order to show how cinema arrives to be not merely the perception of images and represented movement, but to create the intensity of an experience. More specifically, we will discuss his work from the perspective of the experience of time in the images, and therefore we will attempt to think of film not so much as the construction of a narrative but as the organization of a temporal and variable whole. Angelopoulos' films are characterised by a distinctive temporality - "time is his poetic medium"⁵⁶ - and in them, time creates ruptures in the

⁵⁵ For Bergson, the cinematograph extracts "from all movements peculiar to all the figures an impersonal movement abstract and simple, *movement in general*: we put this into the apparatus, and we reconstitute the individuality of each particular movement by combining this nameless movement with the personal attitudes". And in general, so proceed perception, intellection and language [CE, 322-323].

⁵⁶ Wolfram Schutte, «Ένας Τοπογράφος Χρονοταξιδευτής» στο Συλλογικό Τόμο του 41^{ου} Φεστιβάλ Κινηματογράφου Θεσσαλονίκης, Θόδωρος

narrative sequence, giving rise to a unique temporality that renounces the conventions and taboos of filmic time but manifests a dedication to Reality.

Walter Benjamin argued that mechanical reproduction destroys the aura of a work of art and thus challenges the idea of authenticity on which art was founded for a long period of time. He posited that photography (and especially cinema) shifts the paradigm of art's reception from contemplation to shock.⁵⁷ However, the evolution of cinema has defied - or rendered more complex - Benjamin's insight. Angelopoulos' cinema has been characterised as a "cinema of contemplation" which reveals itself in striking images and singular duration.⁵⁸ Slowness - which is characteristic in his films - is a contemplative temporal mode, in the same way that Benjamin considered distance as a contemplative mode of spatial perception.⁵⁹ However, in our view, Angelopoulos' shots of extended duration bear also a subsistent materialist sense. What we will try to show is how the particular uses of various types of shots do not simply imply a non-linear structure of time, but rather they are successful in implicating in the physical perception of movement, of qualities and of content, an intensive experience of rhythm of a whole.

First, we will introduce some aspects of the relation between moving-image and perception in order to reveal how

Αγγελόπουλος (εκδ. Καστανιώτη, 2000) pp. 91-105 at 104. Also in Theo Angelopoulos, *Reihe Film 45, Carl Hanser Verlag, (München, 1992)*.

⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Fontana Press: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992) pp. 211-244.

⁵⁸ Andrew Horton, *The Films of Theo Angelopoulos: A Cinema of Contemplation*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997). About the general characteristics of Angelopoulos' cinema see especially the "Introduction: The Voyage beyond the Borders".

⁵⁹ Thus one of his definitions of aura described it as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" in Walter Benjamin, *supra*, p. 216.

film opens perception to intuition by incorporating movement. Then we will turn to Angelopoulos' work and will begin by arguing that his films abstain from the conventions of realism and psychology that structure narrative cinema, in order to create an intensive/temporal relation to reality. Following this, we will elaborate this point in terms of the singular expression – or rhythm – he creates for different types of shots, particularly the long shot and the long take, the sequence-shot and the out-of-field. Then we will address some motifs of *The Travelling Players*, aspiring to show how they structure the singular rhythm of the film at different levels or modalities. Finally, we will conclude this chapter by suggesting how Angelopoulos attempts to envelop in the physical movement of the images an ontology of time.

II. The moving-image and perception

In contrast to its early popularity and accessibility as a form of entertainment, cinema has generated a long dispute between theorists, historians and filmmakers, concerning its identification as an art form. Film is problematic in two ways: on one hand, cinema, like photography, fuses art with technology, and the mechanical character of its production and reproduction, challenges and apparently annuls the primacy of artistic skills. On the other hand, it incorporates a plurality of means of expression that it borrows from the 'pure' arts.

Its hybrid form makes it difficult to specify the nature of its artistic expression. Although the modernist doctrine of art

was founded on “the medium-specificity thesis” (the idea that “each art form, in virtue of its medium, has its own exclusive domain of development”) cinema resisted an essential classification and pointed to the redundancy of such an approach to art.⁶⁰ But at the same time, avant-garde practices mainly consisted in experimentation with the medium, and although they did not seek to define an essential nature for the art form, they played, tested and challenged the possibilities and restrictions the medium posited. In other words, there appears to be an intrinsic relation, rather than merely a ‘use’ relation, between the emergent art form and the material technology that renders it possible. Our analysis of Angelopoulos’ films will be based on this conception and will also try to illuminate the tangible ways of its unfolding.

The innovation of cinematic technology was that it did not only capture the image of reality, but also its movement. Cinema reproduces movement from stasis, by projecting twenty-four frames per second. The inscription of movement in the image increases the illusory effect, which not only relies upon the photographic resemblance of the static image, but also that it reproduces the flowing images of everyday experience; it therefore produces a different *perceptual effect*.

The film movement appears in many guises. Jean Mitry cites aspects of cinematic movement as such: the movement of represented objects within the camera frame, which is nothing more than recorded movement mechanically reproduced; the rhythmic movement determined by the type of shot, e.g. pan, track, etc., and more specifically, the dynamic relationships which each shot maintains with the preceding and succeeding

⁶⁰ Noel Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 25.

shot.⁶¹ The last point emphasises that what is 'in' the shots is less important than understanding how they are linked, grouped and interconnected. To understand the linkage of images (whether linear or non-linear) is not so much a matter of following the narrative structure, and of understanding the cognitive content of the film, but rather of viewing the tensions created in the interval between the images, and the intensities created in the gaps.

Let us however make a small detour. Bergson insists that movement is distinct from the space covered by it, but that we continually confuse the two. The reductionist error is based on the formula where movement equals immobile sections plus abstract time. According to this view, which originates as the result of modern scientific revolution, movement becomes spatialised, while time is recomposed from immanent material elements (sections), which replace the qualitative privileged instant with the quantitative any-instant-whatever [C1, 14]. However, the cause of the confusion is not only conceptual but also perceptual. It lies with the capacities of the eye itself and the primary role we often attribute to it in our experience; or better, the confusion originates when we isolate each of the senses and abstract from real experience.

Moussinac had observed quite early that, "though our eyes can appreciate the difference between colours and between shapes and between relative distances in perspective, they cannot appreciate rhythmic qualities in the movement they perceive - they cannot see movement in movement".⁶² Our visual perceptions refer to space, and the eye is only capable of perceiving spatial relationships. Since the essential characteristic

⁶¹ Jean Mitry, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, trans. Christopher King (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997) p. 91.

⁶² Cited in Jean Mitry, *supra*, p. 116

of movement is precisely non-spatial, then movement is not seen, but nor is its perception localisable in any other of the sense organs, although they may effectively get hints of it. Movement can only be wholly perceived, which does not require all the body as the sum of its parts, nor the sum of sense impressions, but rather the body (or a part of it) as a whole. And similarly, movement cannot be segmented and reconstituted by fixed points because it bears the duration of a whole. The perception of movement therefore is non-localisable but immersive. But then movement is no more perceptual than intuitive; it requires the intuition of the body.

We can now return to think about the meaning or effect of movement in cinema. In the first case, the movement of represented objects refers to the movement within the frame or set, which modifies the relationship between its parts. This movement is primarily *seen*, in that it is a representation (although it is not totally deprived from intensive qualities). In the second case, movement concerns the shot, the moving camera, and has a double effect: it both translates the modifications of the parts of the set, and expresses a change in the state of the whole. This kind of movement is both seen, in the former case, and also wholly perceived, or intuited, in the latter; the difference is now produced on the level of affection [C1, 19].

Moreover, from the moment that movement is not recorded as the traversing of space, but is inscribed in the image and its articulations as mobility, there is an emphatic transition from the spatial to its temporal dimension, where movement becomes less extensive and more intensive and it envelops rhythm. Rhythm becomes apparent only at the moment film becomes emancipated from the requirements of subject matter

to fulfil its aesthetic function; from the moment the image is not extended into action but suspended in the interval which opens it up to time.

III. Beyond realism and psychology

Angelopoulos' films belong to a cinematic tradition which challenges the established conventions of classical Hollywood films, and these latter are founded on a principle of reality, or 'reality convention', which does not simply mean that cinema needs to represent real or realistic events, as would be the case for realism; instead it is a profounder convention which may willingly incorporate also fictive events but on condition that they appear as real. Such appearance of reality is principally achieved in the structure of film as a narrative content. The narrative is constructed by events which are connected logically in terms of cause and effect and which unfold in a linear order. Consequently, the value of the images lies mostly in the *content* of the representation - it describes the image of reality and it can only reproduce perceptual 'clichés' but fails to create a Reality. In other words, the reality convention does not so much concern the faithfulness to reality, but rather its conception as a container of contents, its objectification.

However, Angelopoulos renounces this fundamental convention. He does not do this by introducing fantastic elements, or by reproducing an imaginary or purely subjective reality, but mainly by descending upon it, by stretching realism

to its limits. But how does film stretch realism and what happens at the limits?

According to Deleuze, the principle for the creation of time-images which go beyond the reproduction of perceptual clichés, is the 'breaking' of the sensori-motor image, which inserts an interval. He writes:

A cliché is a sensory-motor image of the thing. As Bergson says, we do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what it is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands. We therefore normally perceive only clichés. But, if our sensory-motor schemata jam or break, then a different type of image can appear: a pure optical-sound image, the whole image without metaphor, brings out the thing in itself, literally, in its excess of horror or beauty, in its radical or unjustifiable character, because it no longer has to be 'justified' for better or for worse... [C2, 20]

Let us then explore how Angelopoulos breaks the sensori-motor image, first by considering how his films go beyond a psychological realism. There is a narrative in the film and his images always begin from reality, which they strive to describe. In this description the characters of the film do not hold a primary position anymore than the harshness of the walls of old houses, the colour of the stones, the rain or the sound of steps on the tiled streets do. Everything makes part of the same plane.

His preference for the descriptive rather than the expressive or affective image becomes apparent primarily in his extensive use of the long shot and the depth-of-field, as opposed to the restrictive use of medium shots and the scarcity of close-

ups. One of the main values of the close-up lies in that it provides us with a tactile, sensuous impression of objects, or an expressive quality of characters, by which we become emotionally implicated to the spectacle. On the contrary, in the wide-angle shot, the camera, filming from a distance, comprises a wider range of things and persons within its frame, with the result of, on one hand, taking up the role of the observer rather than the participant in the action, and on the other, providing us with information rather than emotion.⁶³ At a first glance then, it appears that this type of image aspires to give us, a realistic reproduction or an objective view of reality. But this is not exactly the case in his films.

Moreover, his films also take us beyond psychology. The scarcity of close-ups is due to the absence of dramatic scenes of psychological significance. Dialogues do not play a central part as a vehicle for the revelation of his characters' thoughts, intentions, or feelings. In fact, they are rare, and they are either reduced to the basic or tend to the poetic. Most of the time we have very little information about the history, relationships, everydayness, fears, or demons or dreams of the characters; we may not even know their names. It has been argued that Angelopoulos' figures are not psychological entities but

⁶³ Jean Mitry defines and differentiates the two types of shot as following: "Because it has nothing in it other than logical information, the wide angle turns us into pure observers of the objects it puts in front of our eyes and distances us from the drama it presents, by interposing an actual distance between us and it. We participate on a purely intellectual level. We are moved by the action and by the resulting facts, ideas or feelings and hardly at all by the objects as 'objects', nor by the way they are presented (unless the plastic qualities of the image provoke an appropriate emotion) [...] In the long-shot, the individual component parts are eclipsed by the vast number of interrelationships between them. [...] In the wide-angle shot, since relationships of movement take precedence, perception is directed toward comprehension rather than consciousness released from intellection; with the effect that though in the close-up, comprehension must first of all pass through emotion, here emotion is the result of comprehension." Jean Mitry, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, trans. Christopher King (London: The Athlone Press, 1998) p. 134.

symbols.⁶⁴ His characters testify to the possibility of creating consistent entities, which are not based on significant psychological traits constitutive of subjects. However, to consider them as 'symbols', misses in our view the concreteness of their existence, a material harshness they embody. It intellectualizes their reality (as well as our relationship to them) and most significantly, it renders them absolute entities while, in our view, they are fragments, which attain their consistency by remaining riddled.

Let us take as an example the *Travelling Players*, probably Angelopoulos' most acclaimed film. This is an epic film, a meditation on Greek history - yet without being a 'historical' film - narrated through the journey of the travelling players. The story unfolds at three levels or circles which both disrupt and complement each other: the turbulent historical and political events in Greece of the years 1939-1952, the course of the travelling players during those years, and the resurgence of the ancient myth of Atreides. It is characteristic that the only character who has a name in the film is Orestis, alluding to the myth. Orestis is a partisan during the civil war, fighting in the mountains with ELAS (Greek National Liberation Party, formed by the communists). He is the only character who bears a symbolic existence; he is the symbol of the revolution. He appears at a few, critical instances, even though he permeates the film, especially through his sister and his comrades; Angelopoulos reserves for him a different kind of existence. The absence of a name for the rest of the members of the group reveals the absence of the individual, and the travelling players embody existence *in* collectivity. As Frederic Jameson precisely described it:

⁶⁴ Nikos Kolonos, *Θόδωρος Αγγελόπουλος* (Αθήνα: Αιγόκερως, 1990) σελ. 20.

[i]n fact, this ungainly procession up the street, uneven couples and groups moving at different rates of speed, and with unequal effort, yet the directors of the troupe mixing democratically with the rest, after the fashion of the circus – this seemingly random collection, whose personnel is renewed and transformed like an old photo album with the temporal discontinuities (Agamemnon dead and alive; Aegisthus inexplicably absent; Orestes and Electra together and then apart again), has as its ‘philosophical’ function to disqualify categories of reception that have been formed in an overestimation of the individual, or individualism. The hieratic stiffness of these inartistically garbed figures in ungainly movement has rather the mission of foregrounding that unrepresentable thing, the collective.⁶⁵

Collective existence is neither harmoniously pacified nor equalised by Angelopoulos, but it has been rendered differential and distributive. The film is not about heroes, nor about anti-heroes (although we are allowed to favour some, and to criticise or dislike others, and Angelopoulos also takes a stance); there are only figures of a concrete reality who endure and struggle with it, yet to different degrees: some capitulate more easily, others persist, and there are few who live tragically the consequences of their resistance. These characters are revealed to us through their actions. They are not presented to us as individuals but rather as roles they come to play within a more general, historical dynamic, and they individualize their role in concrete experience. That is also why they repeat the myth.

However, within this differential whole, the figure of Orestis’ sister (Electra) is differentiated as singular *or* as a singularity. Although most of the times she remains at the back

⁶⁵ Frederic Jameson, “The Past as History, the Future as Form”, in *The Last Modernist: The Films of Theo Angelopoulos*, ed. Andrew Horton (Westport, Conn: Greenwood; Trowbridge: Flicks, 1997) p. 86.

of the action - a silent witness - she is nevertheless active, and she recurs and appears at many instances throughout the film. She inhabits a borderline of existence where she both lives the events and witnesses them. Similarly, rather than initiating action, she is like an 'actor-medium', in the Deleuzian expression, "capable of seeing and showing rather than acting" [C2, 20], an affective surface which reflects the events.

Things are quite different in Angelopoulos' later film *The Beekeeper*, which as the title indicates, follows a main figure, a protagonist, as he leaves (or is left by, or both) his family, home, and town, travelling towards the south. However, this is a strange protagonist who is not really acting but is rather revealed to us while driving his truck in provincial roads, in taking care of the bees, in things he does not do, and in silences. Yet, his silences are filled not only by solitude but also by the tension of despair and of passion. In the young woman he meets on the road there is something 'magnetic', however, she has nothing 'special'; she is without past, without name, without plans, but only a (sad) appetite and a future.

Thus in Angelopoulos, even when the film follows the actors, such as is the case mostly in *The Beekeeper* and less in *The Travelling Players*, still the focus is not on the actors, nor on their lives. Rather they are vehicles, and through them something else is allowed to emerge. But this is mainly rendered possible by his particular implementation of time.

IV. The interweavement of space and time: the long shot, the depth-of-field and the sequence

a. The continuity of long shots and long takes

Angelopoulos' filmic style is largely characterised by the wide use of the long take, panning and tracking shots, the depth-of-field, and mainly the sequence-shot. Duration and temporal continuity, which are favoured over montage, become interrupted by the intersection of frontal or static shots, and still images. As we will attempt to show, such temporal organization and editing of the images (rather than narrative organization) also results in a different mode of perception and appropriation of the cinematic image.

A significant aspect of Angelopoulos' use of the long shot is the revelation of the landscape; there is a fascination with Greek and Balkan landscape and the landscape of the south in general. However, this is quite different from the Mediterranean cliché; it is mainly about a harshness of the south, about a desertness as it is mostly apparent in *the Reconstruction* but also in *The Travelling Players*. In these films the landscape reflects the characters' lives, and the characters reflect their landscape of stone. The one is not a metaphor for the other but the one is enveloped in the other, and the long shot achieves to enfold within a single plane the animate and the inanimate, man and nature, the rain and the stone. This is no longer a plane of objectivity and a descriptive image, but rather it is a plane of intimacy, where man is part of nature. Nevertheless, this is not the image of a 'harsh' nature but rather of a variable, 'poly-

rhythmic' nature that does not cease to unveil its power and beauty in different expressions. Thus in *The Beekeeper*, there are variations of landscape-images, from the cold and rainy images of the beginning of the film, to night scenes of petrol stations on the highway. However, the eye of the camera is also taken in a medium close-up shot of the beehives amongst wild flowers, which open to the sky, and the viewer can almost smell thyme. Angelopoulos' fascination with this image of nature will also become expressed at the end of the film: Spyros returns to the bees, lies on the soil and there is a close-up of his hand tapping, in a slight yet intense movement, to the earth. Becoming attuned. And from the close-up of the tapping hand and the earth, we are taken to a circular panoramic shot of the sky and the dance of the bees, and we create our lines of flight by becoming in tune with the earth.⁶⁶

Colour plays a significant part in his films, even if they are not colourful films. Colour is not only a means of representation or of a plastic synthesis of the image, but it carries and evokes a whole atmosphere, an era, or an inner landscape. Colour does not strike us, it is silent and powerful like mesmerism, which penetrates our memory-images and gives an evocative sense of the film. It does not attain a symbolic value but becomes the chromatic residue, a material quality of memory. Thus, it has been noticed that in his historic films, such as *Days of '36* and *The Travelling Players*, the dominant colour is ochre, a distinctive colour of the '30s neoclassical buildings in Greece. And we also recognise it through a series of paintings of that period, especially through those of Yiannis Tsarouhis,

⁶⁶ See also Gilles Deleuze: "It is in the earth that we die and atone for our birth. [...] The earth as primordial time of the autochthonous" [C2, 115].

where the chromatic nuance itself refers us equally to the urban landscape and the political climate of that era.⁶⁷

But the use of colour also goes beyond historical reference. In his later films there is a chromatic inclination to colder, lighter colours such as pale blue and grey fading towards white. Rather than evoking strong colourful contrasts, Angelopoulos' sense of colour is that of tonalities. Tonalities evoke colours as becomings, degrees of an intensity, which unfolds continuously passing into something else. They are enveloping atmospheres, fugitive colours, not anymore as qualities of the image but as variations of humidity. Similarly, in the long shots of the sea, the rain and the mist (in *Voyage to Cythera* or in *Ulysses' Gaze*) we have gradually passed from the landscape, to nostalgia, to the monochrome, to a line of flight.

This effect is not only produced by a very attentive implementation of photography but also by a particular implication of time. Angelopoulos' preference for continuity rather than juxtaposition is mostly apparent in the temporality, and the linkage of the shots. Thus as opposed to rapid editing he prefers the long takes, and rather than the montage-effect he structures the dialectical image in the continuity of the sequence-shot, to which he arrives to give a singular expressive significance. But what is the effect of maintaining a temporal continuity? Andre Bazin had defined cinema as "objectivity in time".⁶⁸ This is a striking formulation, for although we might

⁶⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the 'chromatic periods' of Angelopoulos' films see Ειρήνη Στάθη, *Χώρος και Χρόνος στον Κινηματογράφο του Θόδωρου Αγγελόπουλου* (εκδ. Αιγόκερως, 1999) pp. 77-91. Also Ειρήνη Στάθη, «Με το χρωστήρα του Θόδωρου Αγγελόπουλου: Οι εικαστικές αναζητήσεις του σκηνοθέτη και πως αποτυπώνονται στο έργο του», στο Συλλογικό Τόμο του 41^{ου} Φεστιβάλ Κινηματογράφου Θεσσαλονίκης, *Θόδωρος Αγγελόπουλος* (εκδ. Καστανιώτη, 2000) pp. 169-172.

⁶⁸ André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) p. 14.

assume that there is an objectivity in space (in terms of resemblance), how could we conceive of an objectivity in time? Is there an objective temporality of looking at a landscape, or a movement, or a face? Isn't temporality actually only subjective, as Bergson had argued with persistence?

Bazin explains this point through an analogy between the photographic and the cinematic image thus: while a photograph preserves the instantaneous image of the thing, film preserves "the image of duration, change mummified as it were"; film preserves time.⁶⁹ More precisely, this is already the function of photography, which "does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption".⁷⁰ For Bazin, the ontology of the photographic image (and therefore the filmic image as well) does not reside on some likeness to the image of reality. Through light, photography captures a material duration of the instant and preserves it in a mummified form on the film; photography is an index of reality rather than a representation. But at the same time, the selected instant extracted from the living duration in which it was initially born, becomes an instant in its own right and can be reinserted or unfold in different durations. It opens itself up to the repetition of experience and can become a new reality. However, film takes a significant step further and reproduces not only an instant but a duration; 'objectivity in time' means that we are *given* not only the image but also its duration, and therefore cinema structures our perception not only spatially but also temporally.

Thus, the long takes of empty landscapes, or of man and landscape, during which few things happen, challenge the

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

common paradigm of perception. Following Bergson and Deleuze, when movement becomes only subordinated to time, when it is not anymore translated into an empirical succession in space, it opens up to duration. Angelopoulos' extended temporalities of the non-significant removes the focus from the content of perception, and allows for time to pass, thus making of time an autonomous filmic event. Since the object of perception does not significantly change, perception of the image becomes suspended, turns back on itself, and becomes intuition of duration or self-affection. The image that we perceive is no longer there for what it represents, but it only exposes itself and unfolds. It is in these long shots, where the camera's eye lets itself rest on things and landscapes and waits, until something - something almost imperceptible - begins to happen. This may be the entry of a character in the frame as the initiator of an action, but mostly it is the emancipation of matter itself. As Jameson puts it:

[t]his is as in Bazin or Kracauer, *an ontology of stone and rain, depth, the tangible and the resistant*. [...]Image is too subjective a term for the weight and solidity of these constructs, or for the texture of the walls themselves, and the cobblestones (emphasis mine).⁷¹

It is because the camera - not the director nor the audience but the camera as an (in)distinct, third (un)consciousness - can waste time on nothing and lie in wait for nothing, that something emerges, that the stones or the walls, the depth, the mist and the rain (re)collect a past and a memory, which cannot be limited to our memories but tend beyond them to pure memory as the time of matter. Time is not

⁷¹ Frederic Jameson, *supra*, p. 84.

only the medium but also the end for Angelopoulos' representations; it becomes an indexical thread of the cinematic image which takes it beyond representation and which makes us, instead of being forced into a fictional reality, experience its virtuality in the camera-reflection.

In the question how can one - through art or cinema - represent reality, Angelopoulos understands the apparent betrayal and it seems that it is only time that can rescue it, only in time things are rescued. When he chooses to let his camera rest longingly on the steps of the protagonists, or on the empty landscapes, he seems to suggest that since we cannot know things in-themselves, since the real does not cease to exceed or evade and resist our representations, we can only give things time and let ourselves be subsumed in their unfolding rhythms. In that singular instant in the flow of time where the camera, between being a third consciousness and a no-consciousness, between observing things and being absorbed by them, between being a camera-eye and becoming pure matter, in that between or in that simultaneity where time cuts space, is born a difference, as a primal sperm of life, where things emerge.

b. Continuity and non-linearity: the sequence-shot and the depth-of-field

Angelopoulos' long takes, sequence-shots and depth-of-fields are all expressions of a dedication to spatio-temporal unity rather than the segmentation of montage. By reproducing extended, almost real temporalities of actions, his images favour

an ambiguous realism rather than the intense stylistics of action in montage. The principle of montage was most systematically developed by the Soviet school in the 1920s, which “has stipulated this as the nerve of the film”.⁷² Eisenstein considered it to be the essence of cinema, and it is true that montage is both a fundamental ‘technical’ principle (editing) but it is also a powerful and contested idea (effect-montage). Thus different conceptions or styles of montage have been developed, although the principle is based on the selection and juxtaposition of *two* shots. In Eisenstein’s dialectical conception, meaning (or the idea or the whole) is created as a sparkle or as an explosion of the tension created in-between the juxtaposed shots. His principle of montage constructs the event as a *dynamic* effect in the mind of the viewer, rather than as a mere addition of partial views which would only give its description.⁷³ However, montage is not the only way of connecting two shots.

Orson Welles had paradigmatically used the depth-of-field in order to organise the parallel action or focus on the foreground and the background in a single shot, where one comments or complements the other. Drawing upon Welles and Italian neo-realism, Bazin theorized and praised the function of the depth-of-field for producing an image of excessive realism. Part of his argument was that because the wide-angle shot comprises a larger picture of reality and gives us more information about it, it allows the viewer a greater freedom to organize his perception in the image himself. Moreover, he

⁷² Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.) *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (New York/ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) pp. 15-42 at 28.

⁷³ “But in my view montage is not an idea composed of successive shots stuck together but an idea that DERIVES from the collision between two shots that are independent of one another”. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

argued, montage presupposes of its very nature the unity of meaning of the dramatic event and rules out ambiguity of expression, while on the contrary, depth of focus reintroduces ambiguity into the structure of the image at least potentially.⁷⁴ Jean Mitry criticised Bazin for a 'naïve' conception of objectivity; the cinematic image is always mediated and the depth-of-field is no less restrictively organised in order to force the viewer to follow the diagonal or gap.⁷⁵ Bazin's argument, however, is more complicated and points to something different than a simple faith on the immediate relation and identification of the cinematic image to reality.

Moreover, for Bazin "montage as used by Kuleshov, Eisenstein, or Gance did not show us the event; it alluded to it".⁷⁶ It is true that in the case of effect-montage, the editing of a series of fixed shots also gives us an impression of continuity, but it is a continuity reconstructed intellectually rather than perceived and experienced as such. It is a continuity of action, of which we are given concrete aspects, fragmentary views whose counter-position makes *us* reconstruct the whole. Nevertheless, this is not simply an intellectual reconstruction; on the contrary, the juxtaposition of images in montage, which points to the gaps in-between rather than to the image's own content, produces tensions and 'hits' upon bodily impulses. Thus the montage-effect aims at effectuating a physical, direct impact, a shock effect that opens a way to the unconscious.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ André Bazin, *supra*, pp. 35-36.

⁷⁵ Jean Mitry, *supra*, pp. 169-172.

⁷⁶ André Bazin, *supra*, p. 23.

⁷⁷ The capacity of the technique of montage to disclose a third meaning beyond the two juxtaposed images, not through discourse nor thought, but through an almost physical impact and response, was very appealing and widely used by the Surrealists at the beginning of this century. Besides the fascination with movement, although explored in different ways, is characteristic in all avant-garde artistic movements of that era. See Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism" in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. by

Angelopoulos' case is relatively singular in this respect. Profoundly influenced by Welles, he also favours integration of action in a single shot rather than splitting it in two. Although the use of depth-of-field *per se* is not frequently, there are certain scenes of stark beauty and power. The wedding scene in *The Suspended Step of the Stork*, invents a paradigmatic use of deep focus: in a sombre yet surprising tableau the bride and her followers are on the riverbank in the foreground and her groom and his followers on the opposite distant shore. There is no music on the soundtrack, the only sound is that of the water flowing. The scene is captured in sharp, deep focus, which allows us to see everything simultaneously, it lasts over six minutes and its unique power lies in its use of cinematic space and time alone. It is an Orthodox wedding, and the ceremony is taking place in the Greek part while the groom across the river-border in the other country repeats (but without a priest) the actions performed in Greece. Andrew Horton has described the scene as "the most obvious case of 'touching' beyond the physical".⁷⁸

The static camera witnesses the instance; its stasis, the silence and the water flow do not simply invest with solemnity the actions performed. Rather this is a temporal stasis, a standstill of action itself. The movements recorded are not invested but rather disinvested, suspended from the

Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London and New York: Verso 2000) pp. 225-239. Experimental and avant-garde cinematographers, such as Eggeling, Hans Richter and Walter Ruttmann by creating abstract films, as well as Fernand Leger and Henri Chomette in a more concrete way, also explored montage in a very imaginative and original way in order to produce rhythm as the essence of pure cinema. Indeed they created very rhythmic images but "an art, which was the exact antithesis of cinema". On the early avant-garde and cinematic rhythm, see Jean Mitry, *supra*, pp. 109-120.

⁷⁸ Andrew Horton, *The Films of Theo Angelopoulos: A Cinema of Contemplation*, *supra*, p. 176.

temporality of action; they lose their object or their aim to something, and become movements in-themselves or rituals. These are already shadows of action which are simultaneously repeated on the other side of the riverbank. It is like a virtual image of reflections, which are not unfolding in time but rather they flash in time's interval. Although it appears like a static, spatial shot, the depth-of-field defies space and simultaneity and opens up to a polyrhythmic temporality; enveloped in a single time - the camera's point of view - it unfolds a double temporality of the foreground and the background which is also rendered discontinuous by the diagonal of the river.

Consequently, the ambiguity of reality entailed and preserved with the depth-of-field according to Bazin, has nothing to do with a faithfulness to the image of reality as Mitry wrongly criticised him for stating. Rather the ambiguity evoked is related to the discrepancy created within the image; the diagonal slices the image and organises it as an intensive-temporal whole which is enveloping different temporalities, rather than framing it as a spatial container of contents. It is not a matter of what are the contents (movements or things) but of how they are organised in the whole (shot). Angelopoulos envisages depth beyond space as an opening to time, to memory and repetition. The deep focus creates a dynamic, sharpened space and Angelopoulos moderates the contrasts created by implicating the image in light tonal colours ranging from white, to grey and blue, and mostly by rendering the whole scene enveloped in silence while letting it slip away with the sound of the water flow. He thus allows for space to be enveloped in duration and sound, or in suspension and pure time.

However, Angelopoulos does not make a wide use of the depth-of-field. Instead, he temporalizes Welles' idea and maintains his fundamental principle of spatiotemporal unity by inventing a singular implementation of the sequence-shot. Generally speaking a change of shot involves a change in the field of view and, inversely, a change in the field of view produces a change of shot. The sequence shot is a 'method' where editing does not take place by joining end to end different shots taken at different times and different places, but "takes place in the camera producing the same sequence of shots *in one single continuous movement*, in the course of one take".⁷⁹

In the sequence shot, the whole scene is rendered in one single shot, in one long take. Since it often replaces editing, it is also usually allied with the mobile frame. Thus, in the case of the sequence, the long take may involve panning and tracking camera movements, craning or zooming changing vantage points that substitute for the shifts of view supplied by editing. Thus the sequence shot is not merely another type of shot but rather it creates its own internal logic. It does not only develop a beginning, a middle and an end, but mainly it may have "its own internal pattern, its own development, its own trajectory and space".⁸⁰

But let us elaborate this point and the significance of such spatiotemporal unity by presenting a most characteristic and complex sequence shot from *The Travelling Players*. The sequence begins with a frontal shot of the group entering the courtyard and then follows them by changing position as they traverse the courtyard; when they walk up the stairs the camera

⁷⁹ Jean Mitry, *ibid.*, p. 64.

⁸⁰ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004) p. 287.

is no longer tracking but from the same point it revolves elliptically inscribing in its movement the wall, the stones and then catching again the travelling players at the balcony and following them as they leave the scene (to the rooms); then, in a low angle shot the camera traverses the whole empty balcony and stops at the other end, awaits while the members of the group reappear in the frame (initiated by the off-screen sound of the steps); the camera frames from a low angle the travelling players' look at something which remains outside the frame. Still frame. Then the camera leaves the group it begins again to revolve and inscribes in the passage the other part of the space; it stops after having completed half a rotation and remains still. Two actors appear and recite; the off-screen voice of the father, who subsequently enters the frame and the camera follows him for one last time.

This sequence does not merely perform a choreographic camera movement but it also implicates in it a unique temporal structure. The sequence begins as an actual description of the travelling players entering the space. However, when the camera starts moving and tracking, this space description becomes destabilized for we no longer just observe but we also become implicated in this movement and therefore in the described space. The mobile camera does not describe movement in space but it mobilizes space itself, and creates an unusual disoriented sense. The camera tracks the balcony and stops, waits and then frames a *look* at an off-screen space. This is a moment of suspension, a leap from the dimension of the physical to something else. Suspension is only initiated by the stillness of the camera and of the actors; it is however, completed by *reflecting* through the look an invisible space. Stillness becomes an oscillation over a void.

The camera recovers its movement not linearly but in rotation, which creates *retrospectively* the vertiginous sense. The vertigo of suspension cannot be actually experienced as such but only enfolded in active recovery. The camera stops at an empty space and the appearance of the actors – outside of the earlier context – completes our disorientation. The rotation has not only transferred us at a different space but also at another time. Where are we? The off-screen voice of the father is thrown as a fragile connecting thread between the balcony and the new site, between the past and the present, between life and theatrical performance. When he enters the scene we have come back to the plane of action.

As this analysis has aspired to show the mobile camera attaches the viewer to its movement. Moreover, by inscribing the movement of the shifting point of view, it embeds both change and point of view in the spatiotemporal whole. Therefore, rather than being a disembodied gaze which takes up different viewpoints in an abstract space – that is a space merely viewed but without the body's sense of space, the viewer is now made to assume a concrete bodily existence in the image, transmitted through the intuition of camera's movement. In the tracking shot, the camera no longer describes movement but, since it is itself *becoming* movement, it also transmits it as a flowing sensation. Moreover, the continuous shot does not reproduce the action as a readymade product and therefore as mere description, but by following its spatiotemporal unfolding and also by becoming this unfolding in movement. The passage from the static long take to the mobile frame renders not only the representation of the action visual, but a whole process of formation as well as a becoming. Similarly to the depth-of-field, the sequence-shot preserves the unity of space and time in the

action and that is why, as Bazin had argued, it delivers us a present taking place. Conversely, montage in its segmentation gives the impression of a ready-made reality, a kind of presentification. The sequence-shot goes a step further: by temporalizing such unity through camera mobility, it makes presentation also a becoming.

c. Beyond the visible: the out-of-field

Cinema creates tension not simply with the images themselves but also in their implication in movement and time; the temporality of the image also opens it to what remains outside of it. There is a powerful dialectic in Angelopoulos' films between what is contained in the frame and the out-of-field, between action and silence, the visible and the invisible. However, this is not so much a dialectic, as opposition of two terms, but rather a relation of parts or aspects of a whole. What remains out-of-field is enveloped in the film even if it remains invisible; it opens the film to contemporaneous different modalities of existence. The various uses of the out-of-field are once more related to the problem of representation and attempt to create a different sense for something that may be present without being actual. Moreover, if the frame also envelops an outside of it, this does not eliminate the tension of the passage from the visible to the invisible. The latter is not merely an extension of the former, and the role and function of the out-of-field assumes various significations and expressions.

In *Days of '36* Angelopoulos made wide use of the out-of-field, not only for artistic reasons but also pushed by the practical need to escape censorship.⁸¹ Things happen in rooms beside corridors, behind closed doors, in whispering, while the camera remains fixed on an empty space. The other space, where the action is taking place but which is kept out of our field of view, is only suggested to us by indicative elements. And even though we do manage to follow the narrative sequence, at the end, what is most significant in the film is not what has happened behind the door, but that dictatorships are always about closed doors, whispers, allusions, about the impossibility of talking freely. In this case therefore the interest does not anymore lie in the content of the unseen, of what was kept in secret, but the out-of-field becomes the *form of the secret* itself as an expressive form of dictatorships. Originating from a particular historical dictatorship as a material condition, Angelopoulos achieves a reflection upon its practices and he thus moves from a historical narrative of what happened to the political analysis of how it happens.

In another case, the out-of-field is used as an extension of the narrative, standing within it rather than outside of it and serving purposes of dramatic tension. An example of such a use could be found in *The Travelling Players* in which the camera is still and frames the theatrical stage. The father, coming out from the drawn curtains, announces the beginning of the play, which is to be interrupted a few instants later by the sound of aeroplanes' sirens and their bombarding. The lights go on and off, we listen to the audience's screams and their running away,

⁸¹ The film is about the coming to power of Metaxas' dictatorship in 1936. In fact, however, it is but a disguised allegory for the dictatorship of 1967-1974, and since the film was made during those years Angelopoulos could never have made it unless he adopted this allusive form.

while the camera remains fixed upon the stage even after all action is ended. Although it has taken place outside the camera frame, it is still in a space continuous with it, in its extension, a space perceptible and definable. The empty space is filled by the sounds that surround it and the static shot inscribes a movement, which remains within the bounds of our perception. Yet, the choice of keeping the representation out of vision, and presenting it only in its sound, presents the event as an echo, as the physical and psychological palpitations it creates. The still frame of emptiness freezes us, deprives us from participating in action and movement by actually seeing it, and only transmits the tension of the event. Letting time pass in silence releases the tension in order to give rise to contemplation.

In *The Beekeeper* Angelopoulos uses the voice-off more ambiguously. Spyros is sitting on the cinema stage where he and the young woman have spent the night, after a failed attempt of sexual intercourse. The sequence begins with a close-up and then the camera zooms out to a medium shot. There is no movement in the image but rather a fossilized sense; movement as a sign of life becomes initiated by her off-screen voice. The voice-off brings an interruption to the actual visual image; the interruption in space (where does her voice come from?) doubles itself as an interruption in time, as a memory. He raises his look to the off-screen space and then he replies, what tells us that she is actually in that space and time. Nevertheless, her absence from the frame makes them inhabit distinct spatio-temporal planes. It is not so much that their worlds do not communicate but rather that her voice reaches him as from somewhere other than the actual space, her voice opens to another world. She asks him to sing a song and he whistles a tune; whistling unfolds like a thread in-between the

on and the off-screen. The camera changes view in montage (reverse-shot) but we are faced with an empty dark space. Both voices are now off-screen and we become suspended by a dialogue that takes place nowhere. This is no longer a discrepancy between sound and image, or action and memory as modalities of existence, but a sudden leap to a pure time. She gradually appears from depth and from darkness, naked, coming straight to the camera, and we hesitate to decide whether she is real or imaginary, now or in the past, looking at the camera or looking at him. The next instant frames her from the back walking to him.

The beginning of the same film is a utopian voice-off. A high angle shot of a long table and roseleaves spread on the white tablecloth; a courtyard paved with mosaic tiles, it is raining. The sound we hear interweaves the sound of the rain, music and the narration of a story about the dance of the bees to a child. In terms of the narrative we understand due to the following shot that it is the scene of a wedding and the rain has made the guests move inside the house. The story of the bees is a memory of his father, a beekeeper, narrating. The bees, the rain, dance and the past recur in the film even if in different contexts and masks. But this is an image of the *origin* of the film, which only reveals by disclosing, memory and utopia, a weaving from which the real (the story of the film) will be unfolded.

The out-of-field is not simply a negation or a non-coincidence between the visual and the sound; some times it is the space that surrounds the camera frame which can be defined mainly by a previous or following action, and other times it is a space that remains indeterminate, a non-space. Much more, it refers to what is neither seen nor understood but

is nevertheless perfectly present [C1, 16]. Angelopoulos invents different expressions for the out-of-field. The out-of-field is the secret, but it leaves behind it the content to become itself the form. At other instances the out-of-field is inserted as a gap in order to maintain the tension of the event by preventing its explication in movement (the visual image). The secret becomes the intensity of the event which is transmitted rather than given. And then the out-of-field comes to create lines of flight, to invent different temporalities and planes, to redeem the encounters that failed this time, to grant that there is always repetition in the image.

V. *The Travelling Players*: repetition and suspension

Up to this point we have attempted to show how different types of shot and editing create different perceptual effects for the viewer and also how they envelop an intensity and rhythm which open the perception of the film to variable layers of experience. In this part we would like to consider certain aspects or motifs of *The Travelling Players* - not in-themselves but in how they relate and structure the whole, and how they create a sense or an idea of the film.

The narrative of *The Travelling Players* constitutes an account of Greek history during the years 1939-1952 presented through the journey of the troupe. History is not represented directly as the events themselves but rather indirectly as it is lived by the members of the group. And there is also the motif of the myth, the ancient myth of Atreides, which becomes

replayed in the life of certain members of the troupe. The three-level narrative structure indicates already a non-linear composition of the film which unfolds by creating lines of intersection.

Angelopoulos' non-linear conception of history is exemplified in the sequence shot. Thus the film begins with the camera slowly tracking backwards, and following the troupe through a small town as a megaphone in the background broadcasts political information; we are in 1952. The troupe continues walking past the town square, there is no cut but a continuous shooting but it is now 1939 and Metaxas' dictatorship (this information is given to us from the blaring speakers). The troupe is fifteen years younger, and there are clearly more members now. At first, this appears to be a dialectical conception of time and history, and it is true that Angelopoulos' considers his use of the sequence-shot as the embodiment of the Hegelian dialectic. Nevertheless, in our view his singular implementation of the sequence-shot defies the dialectical conception in favour of something else.

As we have already discussed the sequence inscribes the event in continuity rather than in the static juxtaposition of montage. The extension of 1952 to 1939 in a single shot - rather than in the montage of two shots - does not primarily aim to juxtapose and make apparent the opposition between the two historical instances.⁸² First, it envelops the two moments in a

⁸² On the two poles stand a free but decimated Greece (1952) and a dictatorship (1939), the latter having been the culmination of another series of political and military mistakes. In-between the two there are four years of war and German occupation, followed by western intervention for the establishment of democracy, which ended up in a three years civil war between the Right and the Left. The narration of a member of the troupe - in the form of a monologue facing the camera - of how he came to Greece from Asia Minor when the Greeks and the Turks exchanged populations makes another leap in the past from 1940 to 1922 to unfold another forking path of history.

single process of formation. History is not an intellectual synthesis created by the juxtaposition of events but rather it is an enveloping living process, which ascribes continuity to events, although there is neither linearity nor direct causality between them. Instead 1952 and 1939 relate by echoing each other and by repeating.

However, this is not a mythic repetition of the same, and Angelopoulos does not give us a mythological account of history. On the contrary, the motif of the circle and of repetition in time, the insertion in the narration of historical and political events of the ancient myth of Atreides, all these elements do not translate history into a mythical destiny, but on the contrary turn myth into history. *The Travelling Players* is very much about the forking paths of history, crisscrossing over time and space; it reveals a history, which is neither linear nor teleological but may move forward and backwards, and which bears gaps and repetitions. The present historical moment is always the most contracted degree of the past, of the whole past. 1952 does not echo 1939 by resemblance, as if they were two different points or stages of historical time, it echoes it because it bears it and because the one is enfolded in the other.

The crisscrossing in time does not constitute a flash-back. The conception of the flash-back presupposes that one has secured the present and that the past is only at our back while the future stands in front; it corresponds to a linear conception of time. However, in *The Travelling Players* there is not a single present point processing to the future and leaving behind the past. There is instead only constant mobility, temporal variability; time becomes a slippery surface rather than a pathway which constantly fuses past and future in its present. That is why in *The Travelling Players* (but also in all his films) we

are always in a present tense, even if the past is being unfolded.⁸³ Moreover, by participating in a present, the past is not determined in advance but it opens itself to new interpretations, considerations and becomings.

The flowing rhythm of the long shots and the sequence becomes interrupted by the insertion of static shots of narration or theatre. This dialectic between the flowing image and the frontal shot, aims at both implicating us in the flowing sensation of the image and distancing us from it. In the first case we are immersed in the image and experience its duration, while in the second the scene becomes like a theatrical stage, we are back in the place of the observer who looks at it. This is a technique of distancing, resounding the Brechtian techniques in the epic theatre; the aim is to break with the illusion and make the audience critical and thoughtful about the spectacle instead of letting themselves be mesmerised by it. The interchange of movement and stasis interweaves the flux of self-forgetfulness with the coming to a standstill where tension becomes released and constellates into critical thought.

A characteristic example of the technique of distancing is given at the scene of Orestis' sister rape. The representation of the rape is not given realistically; all actors remain dressed and they rather imitate a rape instead of enacting it: The purpose of the scene is to create the tension of the event, and therefore to stage it as real, but without the sentimental participation of the viewer, without the identification sought for by realism. The following shot frames Electra at a river bank after having been raped. She gets up, walks to the camera and starts narrating the bloody events of December 1944 that split the Right and the Left

⁸³ Barthelemy Amengual, «Μια Ποιητική της Ιστορίας» στο *Θόδωρος Αγγελόπουλος: Συλλογικός Τόμος* (Φεστιβάλ Κινηματογράφου Θεσσαλονίκης: εκδ. Καστανιώτης, 2000), pp. 23-36 at 25.

and led to the civil war. In this way, Angelopoulos de-dramatizes the scene of the rape, but also he attempts to reclaim the tension created then in order to connect it and release it as historical reflection.

But the most remembered (because most repeated) frontal shots are those of the stage where the troupe performs the pastoral play. It is always the same play they perform and it always remains unfinished. This repetition does not have a dramatic significance, it is rather like a recurring motif; it punctuates. As it is a theatrical play rather than an event in real life, it stresses a repetition of the same, a mechanical aspect of repetition. At the same time however, it is repetition which also grants continuity, which allows something from the past to recur in the future, it gives it a chance to live again. At the end of the film *Electra* remakes the troupe with old and new members, and the little boy, grown into a young man, comes to play the part of Orestis; he continues him.

The film begins and ends in almost exactly the same way but with a reversed chronology: the troupe stand with their suitcases at a train station and we hear one say in voice-over: "It was the autumn of '52 we arrived at Aigio. We were tired, we had two days to rest". The final shot appears identical, the same location and the same voice-over, but we are now in 1939 and with all of the travelling players as they once were. This is not memory or nostalgia for the past. Nor is it a mythical repetition that takes place in history. Repetition in *The Travelling Players* is the motif, which reveals something that resists, something that still persists and something that opens for us a future.

VI. Conclusion: towards an ontology of time

Angelopoulos conceives of the filmic unit that is the shot as a living cell with inhalation, expression and exhalation.⁸⁴ The shot is not merely an image but a rhythm; an unfolding in time. Temporality is not added to the image but it is the image, its singularity and expressiveness; for without time all images would be the same. In this conception empty temporalities are no less important than temporalities filled with action; they are “musical pauses” or necessary parts of the time of the living.

There is a strong but also ambiguous sense of realism in his films. Angelopoulos is not interested in giving us realistic representations of the events but nevertheless he is committed to this reality and to the present (or at least it is at these instances that his films become powerful). However, *this* reality is not determined and *this* present does not cease to be fugitive, already gone and utopian. Moreover, things do not *have* a duration but they *are* a duration, which unfolds in different ways at different contexts. One cannot measure that duration and reproduce it, in the same way that rhythm as a temporal periodicity cannot be identified to metrical spaces. For rhythm is itself the *internal* principle of temporal organization. The shot, or the film as a complex and variable shot, does not reproduce the image of things or of reality but it invents the rhythm that allows some new reality to emerge.

Angelopoulos' ontology of time is epitomized in a sequence-shot from *The Travelling Players*. It is the end of 1944. The Germans withdraw their occupation troops from Greece

⁸⁴ Interview of Theo Angelopoulos, «Οι εικόνες γεννιούνται στα ταξίδια», in *ibid.*, pp. 189-202 at 194.

and the people celebrate the liberation gathered at Syntagma square. The camera witnesses English, American and Russian flags from the back of the scene and songs are heard on the loudspeakers. Sudden gunfire interrupts the song and the crowd disperses to the surrounding streets. The camera begins to rotate capturing people as they run and disappear and it returns to the square after having inscribed a 360 degrees circle. The camera observes, still for quite a long time three, or four dead bodies remaining on the empty square. A Scottish man with a bagpipe crosses the square; one of the dead men (a member of the troupe) gets up and runs. The camera begins again a second rotation from the left; it now captures people coming over from the streets. The camera completes the circle and comes to frame the people and the red flags from behind.

In this sequence, comprising two full rotations and a long (for cinema) silence in an empty space, Angelopoulos gives us the national enthusiasm for the liberation and the faith to western allies, the betrayal by the western powers, and the communist reaction, which resulted to the bloody events of December 1944. The sequence not only gives us the continuity and reflection of the two events, but it arrives to translate historical time into the time of the camera: the time of belief and of betrayal, the time of persistence and the time of active recovery.

But then in these rotations and in that empty space, Angelopoulos condenses not just historical events but the historical course itself as ontological process of time's constitution. For most films the scene would have ended after the first rotation, for that would be enough to describe the events. However, for Angelopoulos historical time is not just the course of the events, and mainly the event has not ended when

it no longer takes place. It continues, it persists on the empty stage, in an empty time. It is this faith in the continuing life of the event that keeps the camera fixed to that space. It awaits, it rests its belief in the event that will return. The empty time is filled with the tension of what has just happened but also a tension coming from the future; awaiting redeems the past in the faith to the future. As Nagisha Oshima named it, this is “the filming of dedication”, which is a filming of hope.⁸⁵

And still, if hope is the dedication to this empty stage, then it does not belong to the future or to the imagination. In Angelopoulos it belongs to the present itself and the forces it may arrive to release. His profound materialism or ambiguous realism is necessarily connected to the long duration of his images. Slowness allows the relaxation of the gaze, which thus spreads itself to the matter of the images. But rather than staying true to the quality of slowness he also invents it as rhythm; in *The Travelling Players* slowness becomes the resistance of matter. Similarly, the sequence-shot as a type of shot achieves to envelop the event in spatiotemporal unity through the movement of the camera. However, Angelopoulos has not only implicated a suspension in the continuity of movement but he arrived to invent such a use for this technique, which would make the physical (the particular camera movement) implicate the metaphysical, in a sequence shot.

⁸⁵ Nagisha Oshima, “Η κινηματογράφηση της ελπίδας”, in Θόδωρος Αγγελόπουλος, Συλλογικός Τόμος, supra, pp. 242-244 at 244.

Chapter 3

Rhythm: the interstices of time and matter

I. Introduction

The secularization of art has redefined the field of art and urged the invention of different foundations. Art has fallen from truth but is now open to experience and the redemptive power of memory, and therefore now - more than ever - art requires a viewer. At the same time, secularization has also resulted in the split of a work of art into form and content. But how is it possible to reintegrate the two in the singularity of an artwork? What is the role of the viewer? Is he the one who gives consistency and determines the work or is it possible to invent some other kind of necessary participation which would open up space and time for art's 'becoming'? How is the experience of art an event that envelops both the viewer and the work in a whole, beyond a subject/object dichotomy?

In this chapter we will argue that a work of art is a rhythm that communicates itself as a whole. Rhythm is not an inherent property of the work of art and therefore it is not of the

order of the element, nor is it attached to the work's spatial or representational components as a quality. Furthermore, it cannot even be identified with the dynamic movements of the camera themselves. In all these cases we remain in the plane of action but rhythm happens elsewhere; whether at the level of form or content, rhythm is enveloped and enveloping as an expressive mode of being of the work of art. This means that it is *virtual* - not an essence to be recovered but a tension that needs to be activated and created anew in the concrete experience.

We will begin our discussion by presenting Giorgio Agamben's account of the fate of art in modernity. For Agamben the modern work of art is founded on a split - its own split that has consequently structured it in a circular movement of self-referentiality and self-annihilation. Agamben points to rhythm as the original structure of the work of art that would allow its communicability. However, Agamben's account of rhythm evokes an 'in-between' of two orders of time and it therefore appears to retain an *ontological* difference between an ordinary and an original temporality. We will then turn to Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* in order to develop a notion of rhythm as implicated in immanent becoming.

Thus we will begin by recounting the Deleuzian argument of intensive difference as the reason for empirical differences. Both qualities and extensities are the explications of this 'intensive quantity', as Deleuze calls it. However, the intensive (or difference) can neither be perceived of nor thought of as such. Yet, at the same time it can only be lived or sensed, by a transcendental exercise of sensibility (as Deleuze calls it) in its repetitions, that is, in the extensities that explicate it and the qualities that reflect (but only by explicating the reflection) on

the surface. But the intensive is not only explicated in extensities and enveloped in qualities but it is primarily enveloped in-itself, that is, repeated for-itself; thus it is not only difference but also repetition. It doubles itself and in this movement of envelopment it creates its own temporal space, in which difference is enveloping. This is the operation of a passive self as the condition of an active 'I'.

But how might a split self recover its unity, and the split artwork gain consistency? We will argue then that rhythm is a whole but only on condition that it is cracked. The crack of rhythm corresponds to a caesura of time - an imminent death and self-forgetfulness urged by a will - which is opening to the future. Such *power* of suspension is like a centrifugal force which expels extensities, qualities and everything that has become reactive, the common flow of time itself, and by selecting anew it recovers the active forces and comes back to repeat *again*. Suspension is a power rather than an instance, since it undoes temporality and cannot be lived as such but is enveloping in the transformation it has rendered possible.

Finally, we will conclude this chapter by suggesting how, after art's secularization, rhythm might be the immanent mode of being of the work of art, which wills to live and awaits the viewer to activate this life.

II. Self-referentiality as self-annihilation: Agamben on the modern work of art

a. The dialectic of the split

In *The Man Without Content*, Giorgio Agamben traces: the cultural, historical and ideological process of the separation between form and content in art; the emergence of aesthetics as the science of art; and the identification of art with the beautiful, conceived as “that which gives us pleasure without interest” (Kant) rather than “*une promesse de bonheur*” (Stendhal, Nietzsche), which would link it with an idea of happiness, as “an unlimited growth and strengthening of the vital values” [MWC, 2]. Clearly, the problem that activates Agamben’s thought and underlies his project is the ‘separation of the fields’ thesis, of aesthetics, ethics and politics, of art and life - the split that haunts modernity since the Enlightenment era.⁸⁶ His discussion is situated within a much wider philosophical and artistic tradition, engaging with the question of the reunification of *praxis* and *poiesis*. Although his argument unfolds at the level of art and aesthetic experience, his thought is incited by an ethical and vital concern.

Central to his account is the description of the cultural process which led to the recognition of autonomy of the work of art and the consequences it entailed. The birth of aesthetics as a distinct philosophical discipline did not itself establish the

⁸⁶ For the ‘separation of fields’ thesis see mainly Anthony Cascardi, *Consequences of Enlightenment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and J. M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

separation of art from other aspects of vital activity, but rather, it came much later, in order to institutionalize the split that had already taken place in the organization and conception of experience. In the case of the work of art, the split is expressed in the distinction between form and content, exemplified by Agamben in the literary figures of the 'Rhetorician' and the 'Terrorist'. The former "dissolve[s] all meaning into form and make[s] form into the sole law of literature" while the latter refusing to bend to this law, "pursue[s] the opposite dream of a language that would be nothing but meaning, of a thought in whose flame the sign would be fully consumed, putting the writer face to face with the absolute" [MWC, 8]. But if the quest for absolute form ends up with a rarefied image of beauty - one that has explicated all movement of grace - that for absolute meaning ends up by burning all meaning into the form of the flame. Both cases testify to what Agamben rightly declares:

[t]he couple signifier-signified is, in fact, so indissolubly part of our linguistic heritage - of our language conceived metaphysically as φωνή σηματική [*phoné semantiké*], as signifying sound - that any attempt to get over it without moving at the same time beyond the limits of metaphysics is destined to fall short of its aim [MWC, 10].

Both language and art are systems of representation communicating something other than the material that contains them, in that they are founded on a *distance* between signifier and signified, representation and reality. The whole problem (i.e. 'how to represent') and challenge (i.e. 'how to make present') art faces is related to how it negotiates itself with this distance. Artistic creation is driven by the desire to overcome the distance between art and life: the portrait wants to free itself

from the canvas, the bathers want to be heard laughing and the sun reflecting on the water wants to touch the eyes' skin. But, one cannot just ignore this distance without seeing the work of art liquefying itself and seeping through one's hands.

Moreover, the work of art is a duplicity: not itself and the reality it represents but rather two co-existent facets:

[t]he side that faces the artist is the living reality in which he reads his promise of happiness; but the other side, which faces the spectator, is an assemblage of lifeless elements that can only mirror itself in the aesthetic judgment's reflection of it [MWC, 11].

The recognition that the work of art bears an aesthetic value, rather than any other kind of moral or religious value, was decisive for the dissociation of the artist's and the spectator's role in relation to the work. While the reality of the artist is the living reality of production, the spectator is left with an image, an embodiment of beauty as a thing in-itself. The experience of the spectator in front of a work of art becomes more and more reduced and specialised to the identification of "the point of perfection"; the capacity for such identification characterizes the man of taste. As Agamben clearly shows, the split of the double reality of the work of art isolates the spectator and assumes for him an increasingly passive role. Excluded from production, the experience of the work of art is restricted to the act of reception, and far from being the participation in the event of truth, it becomes the mere perception of beauty. This isolation will entrap beauty in the vicious circle of self-referentiality, which

will reify it into taste and will pervert it into bad taste:⁸⁷ a pure movement of fetishization.

At the same time, the figure of the artist is dissociated from his experience in the eyes of his society, which exalts his work as the product of a genius, the pure formal principle of creativity, and freed from the contingent matter of experience. In the eyes of the artist his split subjectivity is expressed in the dissociation of his experience from the work. The artist loses the intimate unity with his material and becomes *tabula rasa* in respect to it; "every material being indifferent to him if only it does not contradict the formal law of being simply beautiful and capable of artistic treatment".⁸⁸ But having lost the intimacy of the material, the work is no longer the immediate expression of his faith or truth and becomes the instance of self-alienation. The modern artist is "the man without content", i.e. not the man who is all form, but the one doomed to inhabit himself only as a radical split.

So long as the artist lives in intimate unity with his material, the spectator sees in the work of art only his own faith and the highest truth of his being brought to art in the most necessary manner, and a problem of art as such cannot rise since art is precisely the shared space in which all men, artists and non-artists come together in living unity. But once the creative subjectivity of the artist begins to place itself above his material and his production [...] [e]verything that the spectator can still find in the work of art is, now, mediated by aesthetic representation, which is itself, independently of any content, the supreme value and the most intimate truth that unfolds its power in the artwork itself and starting from the artwork itself. The free creative principle of the artist rises up like a precious veil of Maya

⁸⁷ MWC, chapter 3.

⁸⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, cited in *ibid.*, p. 36.

between the spectator and such truth as he can attain in the work of art, a veil of which he will never be able to take possession concretely, but only through the reflection in the magic mirror of his taste [MWC, 36-37]

In this passage Agamben eloquently describes the determinate consequence for the fate of art - the separation between form and content. Art can be seen to lose its intimation with the material of experience and to cease to express the truth which creates the cosmic topos where artists and non-artists come together in unity. Losing the power of expressing something, it reduces and encloses itself in-itself, that is, to the creative act, which emptied from content and in order to sustain itself becomes fetishized in the birth of the genius. On the other side the spectator is left in front of the canvas, which no longer communicates anything other than itself. *The aesthetic response then is invented in order to fill the abyss of incommunicability opened up by the split.*

By renouncing its symbolic existence, as the embodiment of truth, the work of art loses its unity and becomes fractured. From that point on, art will move into recognising and striving to inhabit itself as split. Indeed, we would argue that modernist art (from Baudelaire to Proust, Joyce and the Impressionists) represents this movement in an exemplary way, summarized in Rimbaud's famous phrase 'I is an other', which critically culminated into the Surrealists' experimentations with subjectivity, the unconscious and art (although Surrealism stands on the verge of a new twist that art will take, especially after Duchamp). If the artist is still able to connect somehow his experience to the work, to inhabit his own production, this can now take place in a negative manner, through the work's embodying the split.

Yet, the vicious circle has no ending. On the contrary, it engages art in the vertiginous movement of negation and self-annihilation. Thus, compulsively emptying itself to lay bare its split, art will come to cease to inhabit a split self, but to be itself only the split. This is the moment of Minimalism and Conceptual art, which Agamben describes as the moment when:

becoming aware of its shadow, art immediately receives in itself its own negation, and in bridging the gap that used to separate it from criticism, itself becomes the *logos* of art and of its shadow, that is, critical reflection on art, *non art* [MWC, 50].

Conceptual art actualised one of the implicit tendencies in Duchamp's gesture, namely that 'art is the idea'. Duchamp became aware of the split founding the aesthetics of modern art. His 'readymade' strips art bare: not in order to show its supposed emptiness or superfluity, but rather in order to ask and risk what sustains the split of art; his gesture is an open question about art's justification. By exposing the split, Duchamp rendered visible the whole mechanism that had come to inhabit it: art museums, institutions, collectors. Duchamp's gesture of exposure, contracts with an amazing economy laughter and critique, simplicity and great risk. Later on, this tendency was taken up by conceptual art but, unfortunately, most of the times it was further developed only in the direction of laughter and institutional critique.⁸⁹

The artist's principle of creativity corresponds with the spectator's principle of aesthetic judgment: it marks the passage from the latitude of experience to a more specified and

⁸⁹ Simplicity and risk, however, seem to be more difficult to become incorporated in contemporary art. Although very often contemporary art strives to shock, it is difficult to produce a real effect since shock is also appropriated by the institution and art market and has become standardized.

intensified perceptive-conceptual attitude. From the revelation of truth, to the appreciation of beauty as the judgment on art or non-art and then to the question 'what makes something art', aesthetic experience unceasingly ascribes to itself a more enclosed, self-referential and intellectualised role. The enclosure of art in-itself does not augment its 'intrinsic' value, but on the contrary, it empties all value so that it can be freely subjected to the external imposition of value, such as is successfully attributed to it by museums, institutions, collectors and an ever-expanding art industry. Art then can only succumb to the general movement of fetishization and commodification. Agamben, borrowing from Hegel, will characterise the vicious circle of art's entrapment, from which it has no means to escape but only to negate with laughter:

[a]t the extreme limit of art's destiny, when all the gods fade in the twilight of art's laughter, art is only a negation that negates itself, a *self-annihilating nothing* [MWC, 56]

Consequently, the reality of art in modernity is not only that of a split between form and content, which consequently generates a series of polarities. Much more than that, the split becomes the foundation of modern art; it comes to be the formal principle of its existence. If the split opened up an abyss, which renders communication impossible and creates the vertigo of nihilism, is there any way to overcome it? Rather than ask whether art can transcend itself, which would be to anticipate an open future, we should rather address a different kind of question: what could grant the communicability of art?

b. The originality of rhythm

As opposed to the reified conception of the work of art, which divides it into the components of form and content, Agamben argues that rhythm is “the original structure of the work of art”. The question which immediately arises is, ‘what is rhythm’? The problem had already appeared in ancient Greek philosophy and Agamben begins his analysis by drawing upon Aristotle’s *Physics*. In Book II, Aristotle introduces rhythm negatively, by the privative expression τὸ ἀρρυθμιστόν [*to arrhythmiston*], meaning that which itself lacks rhythm. Nature is τὸ πρῶτον ἀρρυθμιστόν, [*to proton arrhythmiston*] that which is in itself shapeless and without structure, inarticulate matter subtended to any shape and mutation; that is the prime and irreducible element (στοιχείον [*stiheion*]), identified by some with fire, by others with earth, air or water. In contrast to τὸ πρῶτον ἀρρυθμιστόν [*to proton arrhythmiston*], ρυθμός [*rythmos*] “is what adds itself to this immutable substratum and, by adding itself to it composes and shapes it, giving it structure” [MWC, 95] (emphasis mine).

Agamben borrows from Lalande the philosophical definition of structure derived from the psychology of form and summarized as follows:

[i]n opposition to a simple combination of elements, a whole formed by phenomena in solidarity, such that each phenomenon depends on the others and can be what it is only in and through its relation with them [Lalande, cited in MWC, 95].

In Lalande's definition structure, as the whole, implies two things simultaneously: first, that the whole exceeds the sum of its parts, and second that every part exceeds itself by participating in the whole. But what causes this surplus and what is the nature of it? Aristotle notes that this 'something else' cannot be of the order of the element or of the ensemble constituted by elements, for in that case we would be entrapped in a problem of infinite regress. Anticipating Bergson, Aristotle conceives and initiates us to the co-existence of a parallel and maybe more essential dimension than that of space and the order of extensity, an order radically different from that of division. He does not arrive to call it time and intensity but identifies it instead with Form (*μορφή και είδος* [*morfé ke eidos*]). It is the order of Form that is both the cause of being (*αίτια του είναι* [*etia tou ine*]) and the *ουσία* [*ousia*], "the principle that gives origin and maintains every thing in presence" [MWC, 97]. Aristotle thus reverses the order and instead of conceiving nature as elementary matter, *τὸ ἀρρυθμιστόν* [*to arrythmiston*], he suggests its primal, Formal existence as *ρυθμός* [*rythmos*].

Aristotle's conception of structure as rhythm (*ρυθμός* [*rythmos*]) rather than element (*αριθμός* [*arithmos*]) differentiates him significantly from his predecessors, the Pythagoreans. In opposition to them, Aristotle conceives the difference between the two *formally*. Rhythm bears the quality of the essence, which is sufficient to make it something *other* than the element and not simply of another quality. In the end, elemental difference - even if it is not simply a material difference but rather a difference in the material - can only remain a quantitative difference, one which works through the more and the less, even if it produces qualitative differences. Rhythm on the other hand, pertains to a different order of being, which also means to

a different *logos*. Consequently, rhythm has a different principle of existence (*logos*), it precedes the order of extensity but by being itself *ousia* [*ousia*], it also informs this order by giving it its *principle of origin*. Rhythm not only gives the inarticulate a shape, but it also brings it into presence, marking the transition from non-being to being. But what does it mean that rhythm is the principle of origin of everything that is?

Origin should not be confused with a beginning or starting point, which would render it into the minimal quantum. Benjamin conceived it thus:

[o]rigin [*Ursprung*], although an entirely historical category, has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis [*Entstehung*]. The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis [O, 45].

Benjamin's concept of 'origin' attempts to overcome and bridge the dualism between historical contingency and the a-historical, transcendent Ideas, which grant the singularity of the absolute in its endless repetitions.⁹⁰

Agamben identifies origin with rhythm and argues that rhythm is not structure as minimal *quantum* and primordial element, but it "is instead *ousia*, the principle of presence that opens and maintains the work of art in its original space"

⁹⁰ For a very interesting discussion of Benjamin's theory of origin, which goes against historicism and Neo-Kantianism see, Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings and Angels* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998) pp. 24-48.

[MWC, 98]. Rhythm appears to introduce into the eternal flow of time a split and a stop:

[w]hen we are before a work of art or a landscape bathed in the light of its own presence, we perceive a stop in time, as though we were suddenly thrown into a more original time. There is a stop, an interruption in the incessant flow of instants that, coming from the future, sinks into the past, and this interruption, this stop is precisely what gives and reveals the particular status, the mode of presence proper to the work of art or the landscape we have before our eyes. We are as though held, arrested before something, but this being arrested is also a being-outside, an *ek-stasis* in a more original dimension [MWC, 99].

He identifies this ek-static suspension in a more original dimension with the double capacity of the work of art to give itself and withdraw itself at the same time, to be gift and reserve at once.⁹¹ For Agamben, the suspension implicated in rhythm, throws us into a more original time, where time ceases to be the flow of lived time and becomes the ecstatic instance, pure intensity before or beyond any time.

But how do we transcend our temporality for this original time? Probably it is less a question of transcending, of one becoming exterior to oneself and to one's duration (*durée*), than of 'being transcended' or overwhelmed by the multiplicity of durations that haunt us from within. As Merleau-Ponty remarks on the philosopher's intuition: "It is not necessary for

⁹¹ Ek-stasis in Greek means outside-of-stasis but also from-stasis that is, outside of the *order* of stasis: not movement – which is the appearance of time in space – but intensity. Agamben's reading of ek-stasis as the capacity of the work of art to give and withdraw itself at once, points precisely to its intensive mode of being.

him to go outside himself in order to reach the things themselves; he is solicited or haunted by them from within";⁹² art does not force us to go outside the flow of everyday time to a more original time, as if time bears two dimensions. Maybe the difference is not between a more original and a less original time; time is original, and the difference would only be between the order of time and that of extensity, between action and memory or else between *our* modes of inhabiting time. Time is a unity that holds itself and in-itself the multiplicity of durations, the different ways that beings participate in it. Art then instantiates and reveals *our* interiority in time.

Aristotle has insightfully conceived rhythm as marking a *transition* between non-being and being, the process and ground of what appears. Agamben, inspired by Benjamin, has argued that the mode of presence of the work of art is an in-between, ek-stasis, gift and reserve at once. The transition from non-being to being is not continuous passage but ecstatic rupture. Although Agamben recognises the intensive being of the work of art, he does not give us the transition from the intensive to the extensive, or how the former is implicated in the latter. It seems that for him the difference between rhythm (or Form) and matter remains external (ek-stasis) from a less original (flowing) to a more original (intensive) time. Ultimately, Agamben's account seems to grant an *ontological* difference between rhythm and its opposite; it is reserved for the original experience of the work of art. Our drawing upon Deleuze then, will aim at pointing to an internal, rather than ontological, difference of rhythm, one which is created rather than given or unveiled.

⁹² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. J. Wild et al. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1963) pp. 14-15.

III. Intensive difference

One of the principal aims of *Difference and Repetition* is to provide an ontological account of difference as the reality informing the actual world and all change. However, the creation of an ontology of difference – as opposed to ontological difference – is a move which significantly challenges the order of western philosophical thought. It requests from us to try to think of difference as primary and real rather than subsuming it to a primary order of identity. But at the same time, if it is difference alone which constitutes the reality of the world – the only reality which endlessly repeats itself, its ontology – isn't then the expression 'ontology of difference' a contradiction in terms? Indeed, either the expression becomes devoid of meaning or we need to re-invent the concept of ontology in a totally new way that would account only for an ontology of becoming, a virtual ontology where creation and destiny would necessarily and beyond contradiction co-exist.

Deleuze's philosophical argument engages critically with some of the most significant conceptions of difference in the history of philosophy and, which at the same time, structures itself by unfolding simultaneously at several levels of exposition (philosophical, scientific, artistic), though it is not our intention to reproduce his entire argument here. Instead, we will attempt to illuminate aspects of his ideas by creating a notion of rhythm, as the dramatization of the concepts of difference and repetition.

It appears there is a most profound Bergsonian influence (even if it is not the only one) informing *Difference and Repetition*, despite Deleuze's relatively limited discussion of Bergson. Thus,

Bergson appears principally at two instances in the book: first, in the elaboration of the passive synthesis of the past, where Deleuze evokes the Bergsonian idea of an ontological, *a priori* past, as the condition of passage, and second, in the description of the process of formation of actual reality (extensities and qualities) as an "assymetrical synthesis of the sensible".

It is true that Bergson distinguished between two orders of difference: differences in kind and those in degree. It is duration that grounds and bears all qualitative difference, whereas extensity only produces quantitative differences. But as he argued that real difference subsists only in qualitative difference while quantitative differences reduce it to the same, he transformed the two orders of difference in a single order, where all difference was taken up by duration. Although it was Bergson who performed the movement of enveloping the difference *between* the two orders as a difference *within* the single order of time, we are indebted to Deleuze for the recognition of the Bergsonian act as the invention of *internal difference*.⁹³

Deleuze takes a step further by stating that difference is not a difference in time but in intensity, in a move which appears to counter Bergson who had argued against the quantification of intensive states.⁹⁴ Deleuze will criticize Bergson on this point, stating that his critique of intensity,

⁹³ One of Deleuze's formulations of the meaning of internal difference is the following: "Duration, tendency is the difference of self from self; and what differs from itself is *immediately* the unity of substance and subject" in Gilles Deleuze, "Bergson's Conception of Difference", trans. Melissa McMahon, in John Mullarkey (ed.), *The New Bergson* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999) p. 48.

⁹⁴ See Bergson's critique of intensity in *TFW*, pp. 1-74, and also earlier in this discussion *Chapter 1*, part IVa.

[a]ssumes qualities ready-made and extensities already constituted. It distributes difference into differences in kind in the case of qualities and differences in degree in the case of extensity. From this point of view, intensity necessarily appears as no more than an impure mixture, no longer sensible or perceptible [DR, 239].

Deleuze's critique of Bergson is correct but provisional, since Bergson in *Matter and Memory* went beyond this point. Nevertheless, it serves as a starting point for the elaboration and illumination of the Deleuzian position on the creation of reality. Although the empirical world is constituted by qualities and extensities, in reality these are not given as such since the beginning, but rather they are products of a formative process. Therefore, there also comes a moment in Bergson when he himself raises the question of the double genesis of quality and extensity. But if we assume qualities and extensities as ready-made we can only arrive at a notion of difference as contradiction, contrariety or diversity, in all cases however a difference that is given but its reason remains external. Both extensities and qualities, considered simply as given in themselves, cannot ultimately escape the laws of identity - the former in the order of equivalences, and the latter in that of resemblance. However, the Deleuzian thesis considers that difference cannot be reduced to these phenomena but rather it is that which produces them, it "is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse" [DR, 222].

Prior to these empirical differences lies a primary difference, which *carries its reason within itself* and resides in the differences that belong to intensity, which inform both qualities and extensities and constitute the real nature of difference

(differences of level, temperature, pressure, potential etc.). Both differences of degree and of kind are the explications of this primary difference - the former in extensity and the latter in the qualities which fill extensity. What produces them however (and is neglected) is what Deleuze calls 'the intensive', the entire nature of difference. It is the intensive (the Unequal in itself) which makes the expression "difference of intensity" a tautology (intensity is difference) and which is the *reason of the sensible* [DR, 222]. Intensity is not an element, nor is it a difference between elements but rather it is differential in itself, doubled in-itself indivisibly, a resonant disparity.

The condition of that which appears is not space and time as Kant would have it, but this intensive difference, or *disparateness*, which precedes them and cannot be divided into elements that are disparate.⁹⁵ Prior to things, their properties and qualities, a multiplicity of vibrations, speeds and delays, shocks of difference, resonances and dissonances are in play as the reason of being. In our view, there are two points which are crucial for the Deleuzian conception of intensity, namely: (a) what does it mean that intensity is the reason of the sensible? Is it identical with its cause? And (b), how is intensity both

⁹⁵ Deleuze writes: "Every intensity is E-E', where E itself refers to an e-e', and e to ε-ε' etc.: each intensity is already a coupling (in which each element of the couple refers in turn to couples of elements of another order), thereby revealing the properly qualitative content of quantity." [DR, 222] In a footnote he cites Rosny and his two theses concerning intensive quantities: (1) "resemblance presupposes difference; it is differences that resemble one another; (2) difference alone allows us to conceive of being" [DR, 329]. Thus although Deleuze following Rosny speaks of elements such as E, E' etc. the emphasis is upon the differential power *between* them rather than *on* them. In fact the identity of the elements is fabricated retrospectively by the differential power and its spatialization. This is also why it should not be confused simply with an analogical relation, which creates difference secondarily based on comparing the identity of elements. That is why they are interchangeable and refer to other pairs (e-e', ε-ε'...) while only the power returns. The only Same is the differential.

indivisible and dispersed? Although both questions are important, they cannot be answered at this early stage.

Let us begin though with a simple example: the colour red only appears as such in experience but in reality it corresponds to a particular frequency of light energy. Red as quality is a translation of light frequency that is, the contraction of a multiplicity of durations operated by human perception. Moreover, science can measure and inform us about the particular frequencies corresponding to every colour. Is that all there is then and consequently the Deleuzian difference just a philosophical confirmation of the scientific principle of energy? Is the intensive an *actuality* of the same order with extensities and qualities only prior to them? Is duration measurable, outside the scope of the wave-length of our perceptions but within the wave-length of chronometers? Besides it is Deleuze himself, who as opposed to Bergson, calls it 'intensive quantity'.

Deleuze will insist that what he is arguing for is a *transcendental* principle of energy rather than the *empirical* scientific principle, which is only a local manifestation of the former. His critique against Carnot's and Curie's principles reflects Bergson's recognition that experience always gives mixtures and that we only know forms of energy which are already localised in extensity and extensities already qualified by forms of energy.

It turns out that, in experience, *intensio* (intension) is inseparable from an *extensio* (extension) which relates it to the *extensum* (extensity). In these conditions, intensity itself is subordinated to the qualities which fill extensity (primary physical qualities or *qualitas*, and secondary perceptible qualities or *quale*). In short, we know intensity only as already developed within an

extensity, and as covered over by qualities. Whence our tendency to consider intensive quantity as a badly grounded empirical concept, an impure mixture of a sensible quality and extensity, or even of a physical quality and an extensive quantity [DR, 223]

Deleuze's argument is twofold: (1) Energetics can only (and necessarily) identify energy by combining an *intensive* and an *extensive* factor. It cannot give purely 'the intensive' because it can only grasp it as it partly explicates itself in extensity. Thus, to return to the example of the colour red, science can identify it as a frequency only by spatialising differential vibrations, by relating the intensive to its extensive counterpart, in the same way that we measure movement by the distance covered and time by space. Red, however, is already an *implicated duration* in the quality that envelops it. But (2) the problem is not only due to the shortcomings of scientific thought or to the insufficiency of human perceptual apparatus. It is a real problem corresponding to the tendency that intensity itself has to deny itself by becoming explicated in extensities and underneath qualities. In both cases, however, the question is whether Deleuze is invoking a different *form* of energy, to which science has no access at all, or a different *concept* of energy from the existing scientific one.

Deleuze's disagreement with the scientific view becomes most articulate when discussing the problem of entropy, or the second law of thermodynamics, and in order to illuminate Deleuze's concept of energy we need to recuperate briefly the scientific position that he countered. Thermodynamics was born out of the interest in heat's possibilities for producing 'mechanical energy' through the transformation of matter and

the determination of changes of state. It was founded on the principle of the conservation of energy throughout the various transformations, known as 'conversions', undergone by physical, chemical, and biological systems:

[t]he idea of conversion, which postulates that 'something' is quantitatively conserved while it is qualitatively transformed, generalizes what occurs during mechanical motion. [...] Total energy is conserved while potential energy is converted into kinetic energy, or vice versa. Joule defined a general *equivalent* for physicochemical transformations, thus making it possible to measure the quantity conserved. This quantity was later to become known as 'energy'.⁹⁶

This idea, by viewing all natural phenomena as a continual conversion of living force (i.e. kinetic energy) and heat, into one another without anything being lost, provided the basis for the unification of the whole of nature. In this conception, energy was the underlying reality, which was the sufficient cause of natural phenomena and change, but which remained constant and invariable throughout the modifications it produced. But the principle of the conservation of energy, which also had far-reaching cultural implications, could only represent those aspects of nature that are peaceful and controllable, but could not account for any genuine natural power of creation or destruction. As Prigogine and Stengers point out: "[e]nergy conversion is merely the destruction of a

⁹⁶ Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature* (London: Heinemann, 1984) p. 108.

difference, together with the creation of another difference. The power of nature is thus concealed by the use of equivalences".⁹⁷

It was the concept of irreversibility that was the most original contribution of thermodynamics. Irreversibility concerned the recognition that the combustion of chemical energy producing the heat flow which was consequently converted into work, did not give an absolute equivalent quantity of energy at the final stage, but part of the energy consumed was not usefully exchanged but externally propagated as heat. This led to the formulation of a new principle: the existence in nature of a universal tendency toward the degradation of mechanical energy. This recognition in physics also entailed a different cosmology according to which,

[t]his world is described as an engine in which heat is converted into motion only at the price of some irreversible waste and useless dissipation. Effect-producing differences in nature progressively diminish. The world uses up its differences as it goes from one conversion to another and tends toward a final state of thermal equilibrium, 'heat death'. In accordance with Fourier's law, in the end there will no longer be any differences of temperature to produce a mechanical effect.⁹⁸

Fourier's law stated that heat flow is proportional to the gradient of temperature; it applies to all states of matter and to all kinds of constitution of bodies. It therefore considers *difference* in temperature as the condition for the production of heat flow and therefore work. Consequently, the problem of entropy is a problem of the cancellation of difference. This is the

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

most general and central content of Carnot's, and Curie's principles of energetics: "difference is the sufficient reason of change only to the extent that change tends to negate difference" [DR, 223]; energy pays the price of heat indifference for the change it produces.

Deleuze's conception of difference as the unceasingly organising principle of the world and his refusal to consider sameness as a reality of the world need not only account for the order of equivalences but also for the equalisation of difference. He considers intensive quantity to be the primary difference which informs the order of identity, and consequently he is also forced to accept that equality and resemblance are not our fictitious constructions or reductions, but that intensity appears to cancel itself in the qualities that envelop it and the extensities that explicate it.

In short, there would no more be qualitative differences or differences in kind than there would be quantitative differences or differences of degree, if intensity were not capable of constituting the former in qualities and the latter in extensity, even *at the risk of appearing to extinguish itself* in both [DR, 239] (emphasis mine)

In the movement of explication as the actualisation of the virtual, or else in the process during which energy is transformed into motion, intensity, (i.e. difference) measures the time of an equalisation. However Deleuze will not straightforwardly contradict it. Difference, which is violence as the principle of change, tends to be *tamed* when explicated.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Deleuze says that difference in-itself is unthinkable. "It seems that it can become thinkable only when tamed - in other words, when subject to the

Moreover, "the hard law of explication is that what is explicated is *explicated once and for all*" [DR, 244]. In other words, the movement of explication appears to *neutralise irreversibly*. Is then Deleuze adhering to the scientific principle of entropy despite all his attempts to escape it for the vitalist principle of a difference which affirms itself? Is the passage into action as a state of existence necessarily compensated by a partial death and an irretrievable loss?¹⁰⁰

The question of 'loss', 'lack', and 'difference' as signs of ontological difference that mark earthly existence as a fall, haunts Western thought whether scientific, philosophical or psychoanalytic. However, it also entraps Deleuzian thought (if simplistically interpreted) as a renunciation of the actual in favour of the virtual. Instead, as we will attempt to show, actualisation is a necessary prerequisite for the continuing life of the virtual. At this point however, it suffices to say that if explication takes place 'once and for all', this is not an argument against actualisation as being entropic. However it does force us to recognise that from a purely spatial order of extensities and qualities we cannot go back and reconstruct the energy that has created them and animates them. If the movement of explication is irreversible, this is because from the explicated we cannot recover the implicated.

four iron collars of representation: identity in the concept, opposition in the predicate, analogy in judgement and resemblance in perception" [DR, 262].

¹⁰⁰ In *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud had argued that the individual (ego) is born out of a separation: although "originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself". It gives rise to the reality principle and "serves the practical purpose of enabling one to defend oneself against sensations of unpleasure", with the price of losing the prior state of intimacy and unboundedness. Every expansive living attempt (love, religion, art, ideology etc.) are (failing) attempts to restore that stage. Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XXI, (1927-1931), (London: Vintage, The Hogarth Press, 2001) p. 68.

But for Deleuze the state in which intensities are enveloped by the qualities and extensities that explicate them, only concerns a secondary order of implication or degradation. It is in this order that difference in intensity is cancelled by an equalisation of the highest and the lowest. This order however, is only possible and grounded upon a primary implication designating the state in which intensity remains implicated in itself, at once both enveloping and enveloped - not enveloped in qualities but primarily in-itself. This time difference is *affirmed* - the highest as well as the lowest - and this order mediates between the intensive and its explications, revealing the tendency of intensities to become explicated (or externalised) and sustaining these intensities from being cancelled in their explication.

Consequently, extensities and qualities constitute the order of the actual - the former explicating the difference and therefore taking it outside itself, and the latter reflecting it on the surface; "a reflection which betrays it by explicating it in extensity". It is the scattered reflection of difference in qualities that constitutes contrariety. And for Deleuze, although contrariety in the quality may constitute the sensible being *par excellence*, by no means does it constitute the being 'of' the sensible:

[i]t is intensity or difference in intensity which constitutes the peculiar limit of sensibility. As such, it has the paradoxical character of that limit: it is the imperceptible, that which cannot be sensed because it is always covered by a quality which alienates it or contradicts it, always distributed within an extensity which inverts and cancels it. In another sense, it is that which can only be sensed or that which defines the

transcendent exercise of sensibility, because it gives to be sensed thereby awakening memory and forcing thought [DR, 237]

It is alone the transcendent exercise of sensibility that can sense the imperceptible, that is the being of the sensible rather than a sensible being. The imperceptible for Deleuze is not that which is beyond all perception and experience, but that which cannot be an *object* of perception. It is that which does not become external to itself without cancelling itself. But far from being incommunicable, it is the communicable as such which transmits itself only in 'clothing' itself. We can distinguish then three acts of envelopment of difference: first, difference is enveloped in the qualities that reflect its image by explicating it on a surface. Second, difference is always enveloped in-itself, clothed or masked; the intensive is and envelops itself at the same time. And third, difference is enveloping, it is that force which subsists and affirms itself in the movement of actualization.

Moreover, what remains very important in Deleuze's difference is that although he distinguishes the two orders of implication, we should not comprehend the higher or primary order as something totally different from the secondary order. The transcendental principle of energy is not a different kind of energy or of a different order than the empirical. For as soon as we conceive the transcendental principle of energy as belonging to a different order than the empirical, we have already fallen back to an ontological difference and evoked a new kind of Platonism. If on the other hand, we consider it to be a different form of energy, prior to the form which is accessible to science, we risk getting entrapped in the problem of infinite regress that already Aristotle had identified. But nowhere does Deleuze

seem to suggest a similar thing; he claims instead that "energy or intensive quantity is a transcendental principle, not a scientific concept" [DR, 241] (my emphasis). It is this fundamental conception of energy as transcendental principle that makes Deleuze literal, and not metaphorical, when talking about rhythms and vibrations. And yet, literal should not be confused with empirical. The higher order of difference is the reason of the empirical order - it creates the actual order of the sensible and it is enveloping in it. In the following part, we will show how an enveloping difference affirms itself in repetition rather than cancelling itself.

IV. The repeated difference of rhythm

We are accustomed to consider repetition as the reproduction of the same, but Deleuze will inexorably change this view for us. He distinguishes between two kinds of repetition: a bare or material repetition of the same and the disguised or spiritual repetition of difference. The former is the overall or abstract effect, the latter is the acting cause; the former is the given, the latter is that by which the given is given as such. Metric or cadence repetition as a regular division of time (an isochronic recurrence of identical elements) corresponds to that first instance of repetition. However, the second instance does not simply entail a different repetition, or variation from without; irregular periodicity belongs to pulsed time in just the same way as regular periodicity or repetition of the same does. Rhythm, however, is the inexorable clinch of difference and

repetition, non-pulsed time which lies at the heart of every cadence.

[A] period exists only in so far as it is determined by a tonic accent, commanded by intensities. Yet we would be mistaken about the function of accents if we said that they were reproduced at equal intervals. On the contrary, tonic and intensive values act by creating inequalities or incommensurabilities between metrically equivalent periods or spaces. They create distinctive points, privileged instants which always indicate a poly-rhythm. Here again, the unequal is the most positive element [DR, 21]

Moreover, Deleuze does not merely say that there are two kinds of repetition, cadence-repetition and rhythm repetition, but that in every case "the first [is] only the outward appearance or the abstract effect of the second" [DR, 21]. (Poly-)rhythm lies *always* in the heart of *every* cadence, and the formless in the heart of *every* form; it is the vital, positive, active process. Following the Bergsonian paradigm, this thesis renounces sameness as the reality of the world. Sameness would only belong to us, as the result of the reductions that our perception and thought operate upon the world in order to gain effectiveness. But is that what Deleuze tells us to do, namely, to open ourselves to the difference of the world? Certainly, openness forms an important aspect of his whole philosophy, but unless he gives the reasons why difference is better than sameness, the requirement for openness would remain a romantic statement.¹⁰¹ It seems, however, that Deleuze goes far beyond such a claim. If he is aiming to state, or even prove, that

¹⁰¹ 'Better', therefore, cannot have a moral connotation for this would entail sheer moralism.

difference is the reality of the world, intensive quantity being the reason of everything that is, why does he also employ the concept of repetition? Why is difference in-itself not enough but has also to be affirmed, repeated for-itself?

Deleuze begins the chapter on repetition by repeating Hume's thesis: "repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it" [DR, 70]. He takes us into the heart of the problem by explaining that, considering the rule of discontinuity or instantaneity of repetition, the fact that a new instant does not appear unless the old one has disappeared – hence the status of matter as *mens momentanea* – how can we say for every repetition it is 'the second', 'the third', or even 'the same'? In other words, the paradox of repetition is that it presupposes that, on one hand, the instances are distinct so that they can be repeated, and, on the other, that they are bound together, i.e. that they are somewhere retained. Hume's response then, which Deleuze supports, is that they are bound *in* the mind which contemplates. Repetition produces a difference in the mind of the *experiencer*, it is not an objective property of the repeated things since there is no causal relationship between the members of the series. Thus, when AB are repeated in a series they do not produce a causal relationship necessitating their repetition. If I expect B to appear after A this can only be because repetition has changed something in a contemplative mind, rather than in A or B themselves and the fact of their appearance.

Hume claims that the successive instants AB are *retained* in the imagination, which he identified as a contractile power. However, this contraction is neither memory nor reflection but a

synthesis of time. The succession of instants does not constitute time anymore than it causes it to disappear, instead time is constituted in an ordinary synthesis. Although this synthesis (which Deleuze calls a 'passive synthesis') is constitutive, it has to be distinguished from an active (conscious) synthesis, in that:

[i]t is not carried out by the mind, but occurs *in* the mind, which contemplates, prior to all memory and all reflection. Time is subjective, but in relation to the subjectivity of a passive subject [DR, 71]

It is the passive synthesis of the imagination that supports the active synthesis of memory and understanding. Thus,

[t]he constitution of repetition already implies three instances: the in-itself which causes it to disappear as it appears, leaving it unthinkable; the for-itself of the passive synthesis; and, grounded upon the latter, the reflected representation of a 'for-us' in the active syntheses [DR, 71]

The profounder significance of the passive synthesis does not merely lie in its contractive character but in that it creates a kind of retroactive movement; by contracting the distinct instances it also separates them again in the active synthesis. In this retroactive movement imagination has *enveloped* the external instances "*in its own temporal space*" upon which it will reconstitute them as distinct. The double movement of contraction and retrospection (or contemplation)

is not a composite movement, but rather contraction is identical with retrospection and envelopment.¹⁰²

In the repetition of the series of AB, my expectation for B to appear after A corresponds to the passive synthesis of the present as 'habit'. This contraction performed by the imagination is neither conscious or active nor exclusively human. "Rather, it is the property of passively acquiring an unconscious relation to the future"¹⁰³ and by constituting the lived present as the contraction of the past towards the future, it gives time its direction. The arrow of time, which coincides with the *sense* of a flowing time, is born out of this first passive synthesis.

What is important to note about repetition in the passive synthesis is that what is repeated are intensities and relations between intensities – contractions as signs – a constant variability that occurs with an individual and which defies representation, identity and concepts. As such, repetition in the passive synthesis does not determine the outcome of its motion – that is, it is not itself a determination – but rather it gives the *conditions* for the emergence of things, which get their determination in action. Consequently, the sign cannot be repeated by knowledge, which rather than capturing it makes it disappear, but only by *letting it work through us*. That is why for Deleuze, habits are not acquired by action but emerge out of contemplation. By invoking the passive synthesis of time, Deleuze reverses our common conception of its constitution: the

¹⁰² Deleuze will express this in various ways: "It is simultaneously through contraction that we are habits, but through contemplation that we contract." And further down: "We do not contemplate ourselves, but we exist only in contemplating – that is to say, in contracting that from which we come" [DR 74].

¹⁰³ James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction And Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003) p. 87.

past, the present and the future are not themselves dimensions of time:

[r]ather, synthesis constitutes time as a living present, and the past and the future as dimensions of this present. This synthesis is nonetheless intra-temporal, which means that this present passes [DR, 76]

Although the first passive synthesis determines the living present by giving it its direction from the past to the future, it cannot provide us with the full account of its constitution. The living present bears also a quality of passing, not when it has passed and is no longer present but at the very 'moment' that it is; a being in passing or the fugitive present. This is the passive synthesis of the past or memory, which *grounds* the active synthesis of memory as remembering, although this latter is *founded* upon the passive synthesis of habit.

The first synthesis, that of habit, is truly the foundation of time; but we must distinguish the foundation from the ground. The foundation concerns the soil: it shows how something is established upon this soil, how it occupies and possesses it; whereas the ground comes rather from the sky, it goes from the summit to the foundations, and measures the possessor and the soil against one another according to a title of ownership [DR, 79]

The foundation and the ground do not stand in opposition, nor is the one the empirical and the other the transcendental principle. Instead Deleuze, following Bergson, evokes a ground of the pure past, one that has never been

present but is always presupposed in every present, and which gives it its reason. Consequently, this mode of (pre-)existence of a pure past also defies the notion of a first time, or an absolute beginning. The first time is already a repetition and “the beginning always begins in-between, intermezzo” [TP, 329].

The passive synthesis of memory as the ground introduces depth as a dimension of repetition, which organises experience not only horizontally, but also vertically. For Deleuze, one does not really advance in experience but only by real leaps, which create for us a different level of the lived. The introduction of depth in a discussion about time appears to be a strange choice; is Deleuze spatializing time by evoking layers of experience? Moreover, how can one read his discussion of depth in *Difference and Repetition* considering the fact that just one year later, in *The Logic of Sense*, he renounced depth in favour of surfaces and series, and in *A Thousand Plateaus* he put forth the rhizomatic model of the plane of immanence? Although it is not our aim to analyze the Deleuzian shift of position, there is a way to interpret depth without considering it as a spatialization of time (anymore than one spatializes when one talks or describes or thinks about time), and we believe that there is also a reason for that.

Deleuze talks about depth in the last chapter of *DR* where the temporal synthesis explicates itself in space, as the “asymmetrical synthesis of the sensible”.

Depth itself, [...] is not an extension but a pure *implex*. No doubt every depth is also a possible length and size, but this possibility is realised only in so far as an observer changes place and gathers into an abstract concept that which is length for itself and that which is length for others: in fact, it is always on the

basis of a new depth that the old one becomes length or is explicated in length. [...] Extensity as a whole comes from the depths. Depth as the (ultimate and original) heterogeneous dimension is the matrix of all extensity, including its third dimension considered to be homogeneous with the other two [DR, 229]

One might validly argue that Deleuze's discussion of depth does not concern time, but the emergence of extensity and consequently; rather than spatializing the former it temporalizes the latter. This is true but there seems to be something more about this point. Depth is not extension and explication, but *intension* and implication. It does not merely explicate itself in extensity but rather by being the condition of extensity it also envelops and renders possible the latter's dimensions.

But what else is the intension of depth, upon which its vertiginous power lies - the attraction of depth by a lower depth - than the affirmation of repetition? Every repetition is an affirmation of the Unequal it repeats, not simply because it repeats it, but because it increases its power (i.e. the energy) in repeating. That is why every repetition is different - not because it repeats the different, but because it revitalises and empowers its difference. Repetition does not increase the energy by attaining depth but rather it is the other way around; depth is nothing more than the increased energy entailed in every repetition.

It now becomes apparent why it is not enough for Deleuze simply to state difference as the being of the world, but that he also needs repetition, the other pole of immanence, to affirm this difference. Repetition as contraction is the mode in

which external instances become enveloped in our temporal space and then reorganised in their distinctness; that is, events re-emerge *through* us. Repetition, however, is not merely reproduction of difference, nor fusion of external and internal difference but rather it is itself and every time the affirmation of its own difference.

Nevertheless, to invoke depth in relation to rhythm appears to be either incomprehensible or meaningless. However, when Deleuze says that every rhythm is a poly-rhythm, he does not merely evoke variation but also an increase of the intensive quantity, which is variability as such. The vertical relation of levels of experience as degrees of contraction and relaxation, translates into resonances and dissonances, harmonic relations and shocks. Deleuze cites Bachelard as following: "*the link between truly active moments (rhythm) is always effected on a different plane from the one upon which the action is carried out*".¹⁰⁴ He continues to add: "Action occurs in a milieu, whereas rhythm is located between two milieus, or between two intermilieus, on the fence, between night and day, at dusk, *twilight* or *Zwielicht*, Haecceity" [TP, 313-314]. Rhythm is never effected on the plane of action, because it is not an actual property or quality of the things; rhythm is not an object of perception. As an enveloped resonance and an enveloping force, it deterritorializes milieus and territories, unsettles properties and qualities from within; it is the purely expressed without ever becoming a content of expression.

¹⁰⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *La Dialectique de la durée*, (Paris: Bovin, 1936), pp. 128-129; emphasis mine.

V. Cracked consistency

Difference and repetition are the co-existent instances of rhythm. Although the two moments are not merely combined or added to one another, it is yet not clear exactly how they do hold together. The problem of *consistency* concerns the manner in which the components of an assemblage, whether it be a work of art or a living being, hold together. But it also concerns “the manner, in which different assemblages hold together, with components of passage and relay” [TP, 327]. Already this point alerts us to a common denominator: what holds an aggregate together is also what allows for its *communication* with others; what holds its unity also opens it up to the multiplicity.

Agamben described rhythm as appearing to introduce in the incessant flow of time a split or a stop, which “coming from the future sinks into the past” [MWC, 99]. Rhythm is a whole, but a fractured whole. This fracture, or suspension, does not divide the whole in parts but on the contrary, the instance of suspension is *necessarily* implicated in the whole as the condition of its rhythm. In fact suspension is an explosive or ecstatic instance, but on condition that it becomes enveloped in the whole. We cannot live the suspension as such transforming it into an empirical content; the outside of time cannot bring itself into temporality without transforming itself into its petrified image. And yet, it *is living* and can only *be lived* in the change that has made possible; it allows for the unfolding of a different rhythm of the whole.

However, the idea of the fracture initially appears to contradict the Deleuzian passive syntheses or Bergson’s

continuity of duration. Deleuze's passive syntheses correspond to Bergson's two forms of contraction memory; the passive synthesis of the present corresponds to the contraction of qualities, the contraction of a multiplicity of instances in a greater instance of perception, a contraction which necessarily renders every act of perception also a memory. But this contraction is possible only because of a prior contraction of levels of the past (the second passive synthesis), which allows for the whole of the past to be preserved in itself - pure memory.¹⁰⁵

However, pure memory is not a static or given being but also continuous becoming or duration. How can duration be not only a qualitative change produced by the succession of instants, not merely an aspect of the conservation and conversion of energy, but a true becoming? More precisely, how can it pass from its inactive, virtual status to become also actual and acting?¹⁰⁶ Memory would take us to greater and more fascinating depths, yet all the more unrealised, all the more removed from the demands of action and life. But if memory retains a practical and (not merely a speculative) interest for us, then we must grant the possibility of it recovering its depths in a sharpened edge which will cut through action.

A third order of time and repetition is needed for that: the time of the future as the eternal return. The eternal return signifies the *caesura* of time, and constitutes a fractured 'I' rather

¹⁰⁵ As Mullarkey rightly points out Bergson's theory of memory is "a tripartite theory with a concept of 'pure memory' alongside those of habit- and representational-memory". J. Mullarkey, *Bergson and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) p. 51. Representational-memory corresponds to Deleuze's active synthesis of memory.

¹⁰⁶ Thus in *Creative Evolution*: "Like the universe as a whole, like each conscious being taken separately, the organism which lives is a thing that endures. Its past, in its entirety, is prolonged into its present and abides there, actual and acting" [CE, 15].

than guaranteeing a coherent Cartesian Cogito. Following Deleuze's critique, Descartes' logical formula 'I think therefore I am' attempts to draw directly the undetermined ('I am') from a determination ('I think'). Descartes was able to arrive at this conclusion only by expelling time, "by reducing the Cogito to an instant and entrusting time to the operation of continuous creation carried out by God" [DR, 86]. Once Descartes had split 'I', he could only grant its unity in the unity of God. The Kantian critique addressed this insufficiency or gap¹⁰⁷ and he introduced a third logical value: the determinable, or rather the form in which the undetermined is determinable (by the determination). It is the form of self-reflectivity or the affection of a passive self. For Deleuze,

it amounts to the discovery of Difference - no longer in the form of an empirical difference between two determinations, but in the form of a *transcendental* Difference between the Determination as such and what it determines; no longer in the form of an external difference which separates, but in the form of an internal Difference which establishes an a priori relation between thought and being [DR, 86]; (emphasis mine)

The crucial difference between Kant and Deleuze, however, is that the former entrusted synthetic power solely to an active identity, while the passive self remained only receptive. On the contrary, the Deleuzian passive syntheses recognise the passive self of reception a simultaneous contractive-contemplative power. The profounder significance of this difference is the role and position the two philosophers

¹⁰⁷ Related to what elsewhere will appear as the *need* of reason, or what in *Chapter 1* we called the quest for its justification.

attribute to 'the given' respectively. Thus, although Kant secures the given against any doubts that may assail it, attributing to it an *a priori* character independent of concepts and sensations, Deleuze "takes a foundation shot through with sensations and concepts, an individual's particular sensation";¹⁰⁸ in Deleuze everything takes place in the plane of immanence, yet not everything is empirical even if it is *within* experience. This allows Deleuze not only to look for the conditions of the given but also to test the conditions against the conditioned in a process of co-modification. That is, the given for Deleuze aspires to be both *a priori* and immanently tested and renegotiated, open to becoming. But then, the challenge and criticism that Deleuze risks to face and needs to overcome, is that of falling prey to a vicious circularity.¹⁰⁹

Rather than filling the fracture with a new form of identity like Kant, Deleuze will instead expose it, following the Nietzschean doctrine of the eternal return. The thought of the

¹⁰⁸ James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition*, supra, p. 100.

¹⁰⁹ We have already encountered the problem of circularity at least twice: first, in *Chapter 1* our discussion of the Baroque, which having collapsed the possibility of transcendence and with it the possibility of configuring meaning in the world, it also liquefied the distinction between good and evil. In order to come to terms with this liquidation, the baroque has invented the figure of the intriguer. The problem of circularity has also appeared in the case of the modern work of art and the doctrine of self-referentiality: the fractured opened in the work of art was quickly capitulated by the museum. In this case, circularity was resolved in a more conservative way, by replacing the death of God (truth) to the mere guarantee of the museum. Having become conscious of this evolution, Conceptual art structures itself as an institutional questioning and critique. Nevertheless, despite the different attitudes, what becomes apparent in both cases is that the problem of circularity far from just being a problem of Deleuze, is the problem of immanence itself, the problem of having lost an external point of reference from which we could illuminate the world or the self and would guarantee its unity. Moreover, it appears that it is modernity, which has structured itself solely in the plane of immanence (death of God, destruction of authority, no external point of critique); circularity then is the problem of modernity and Deleuze having recognised such a thing attempts to reconsider the conditions of possibility for the re-organisation of experience in this new distribution.

eternal return is perhaps the simplest and the most monstrous (inhuman) thought.¹¹⁰ Everything that happens and can happen has already happened before and must also happen again. *This* moment is the gateway to a double eternity, the eternal repetition of the past and that of the future. Zarathustra's eternal return is not the circular time of the Ancients, but rather the straight line of a double infinity.

In the ancient conception of time things revolve, and this circularity of time is exemplified in the "cyclical transformation of qualitative elements into one another" or in the "circular movement of incorruptible celestial bodies" (the physical and the astronomical eternal return) [DR, 242]. In both cases however, the eternal return remains according to Deleuze a "law of nature", or a "generality"; that is, in both cases the eternal return can only be an empirical doctrine, which only affects the order of qualities and extensities, the order of a bare repetition. The crucial point remains that its conception presupposes the identity of that which returns. If for Nietzsche the eternal return is also a cosmological and physical doctrine, it rejects the idea of a principal or terminal state of equilibrium.¹¹¹ It therefore reverses the Ancients' recognition of the eternal return of Being (of the Same) and transforms it into a thought of endless becoming. As Deleuze puts it: "returning is the being of that which becomes".¹¹²

¹¹⁰ If we want to be more precise we would have to assert that eternal return cannot be thought but only in its simulacra. It is instead what forces every thought, an intrinsic violence that thought attempts to recuperate, or probably, thought is born as its recuperation.

¹¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968) p. 377.

¹¹² Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: The Athlone Press, 1983) p. 48.

Moreover, the Nietzschean doctrine appears to maintain a most intricate relation to the scientific principle of the conservation of energy. It is true that Nietzsche wrote that: "The law of the conservation of energy inevitably demands *eternal recurrence*".¹¹³ But this statement attempts to appropriate the scientific position rather than be appropriated by it. The idea that energy is a total quantity conserved in all its transformations is founded upon the guarantee of its initial identity. What this conception totally misses is that energy is constant activity (becoming), and by considering it as a quantity science transforms it into being and distorts its essential character.¹¹⁴ For Nietzsche instead there is indeed something that is conserved for ever – "*escape is impossible!*"¹¹⁵ – but this is not like a totality (a Unity). What is conserved is not the timeless but the for all times.

"Timelessness" to be rejected. At any precise moment of a force, the absolute conditionality of a new distribution of all its forces is given; it cannot stand still. "Change" belongs to the essence, therefore also temporality.¹¹⁶

What distinguishes 'timelessness' from 'for all times' is not so much that the former is a-temporal while the latter is temporal, but rather the *risk* entailed in the latter conception. Timelessness affords no risk for it is itself the guarantee of unity; but that which returns for all times *earns* its return,

¹¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, supra, p. 547.

¹¹⁴ "That 'force' and 'rest' and 'remaining the same', contradict one another. The measure of force (as magnitude) as fixed, but its essence in flux". *Ibid.*, p. 547.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 545.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 547.

selected *in action*, only on condition that it has let itself to death, that it has risked its own extinguishing.

This is why Nietzsche alerts us at several points and in different ways (most expressively with Zarathustra's crisis and convalescence) that the thought of the eternal return is not the thought of lightness or fleetingness, which would allow us not to value things too seriously. And yet, it is the thought that *makes us* lighter or free. But then it is not a thought but only at a first instance, when as an ethical thought it urges us, whatever we will, to will it in such a way that we can also will its eternal return.¹¹⁷ It calls the will to eliminate everything that is negative and reactive, everything that restrains the will to its power.

But in its profounder and true meaning, the eternal return is a cruel, esoteric doctrine of death, destruction and annihilation. Not anymore the destruction of the small man or of reactive forces but primarily the destruction of the self and the reactive forces that *we are*.¹¹⁸ It is not anymore memory but forgetfulness, expulsion, and primarily self-forgetfulness.¹¹⁹ Not everything returns in the eternal return; the order of extensities and qualities, the order of the same and the similar, of identity and the equal, do not return but perish, once and for all. This is the condition for the return of intensities, of the truly active forces.

¹¹⁷ Thus Deleuze argues that "as an ethical thought the eternal return is the formulation of the practical synthesis". See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, supra, p. 68.

¹¹⁸ For Nietzsche a body is made by active (the superior and dominant) and reactive (the inferior and dominated) forces. Great activity is unconscious and consciousness only expresses the relation of certain reactive forces to the active forces that dominate them; as such it is essentially reactive. For a more extended analysis on that see Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, supra, pp. 39-42.

¹¹⁹ In this second instance the eternal return expresses the new sense of the "disjunctive synthesis". Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. M. Lester, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (London, New York: Continuum, 1990) p. 300.

But what brings Zarathustra back to life? What makes the compulsion of repetition, the striving to death, also a convalescence, a coming back? What urges *again*? Only a belief of the future, as a pure and empty form of time, freed from any events that would make up its content. The "straight line of time" that "abjures all empirical content" is neither the cyclical time of the Ancients nor the linear time of the Moderns but exposes the illusion of both conceptions as well as the illusion of their supposed opposition. For both conceptions extract time from empirical observation, the former from that of qualities the latter from that of extensities; they both subordinate time to movement.

Yet, the Kantian or Nietzschean straight line of time is not a spatialization of time but overturns its relation to movement, by creating the *possibility* for the temporal series.¹²⁰ It undoes the foundation of habit (the arrow of time) and the ground of memory (the curve of time) in favour of the straight line of universal ungrounding. It is only on the condition of the eternal return that depth is no longer and deploys itself on the surface but may become light: "*My abyss speaks, I have tuned my ultimate depth inside out into the light*".¹²¹ It is at this moment that everything is equal and everything is the Same, that one has become equal but only to the Unequal itself and one returns transformed.

The eternal return does not produce an external change of things, making them lighter or more intensive. It is not

¹²⁰ For a more extended analysis of Kant's creation of a specifically modern topology of time, which "enfolds the intensive character of our becoming in time" see Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) pp. 197-204.

¹²¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for None and All*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1978) p. 216.

merely an external selection of the 'fittest', or of the more active forces that ensures their return. For such a conception would entail that what lives today is definitely better than what lived fifty or hundred or thousand years ago, that history, humanity and all nature necessarily evolve and that progress is *granted* somewhere *outside* of us and our will.¹²² But in this case, evolution, or change, would be given rather than creative and created.

For both Nietzsche and Deleuze the doctrine of the eternal return is an affirmation of the will to power, the one cannot be read or exist without the other. Deleuze precisely expresses this connection when he states that: "the will to power does not at all mean 'to want power' but, on the contrary: whatever you will, carry it to the 'nth' power" [DR, 8]. It is the will that wants itself to return and which thus also risks its own annihilation. Thus, as Agamben argues, "[w]hat Nietzsche tried to do in the concept of the eternal return is precisely to conceive

¹²² Darwin had famously argued that evolution takes place by selection of the fittest, conceived in terms of the immanent capacity for reproducibility. His account is immanent although it also grants a radical externality to selection. H. Caygill criticises Deleuze that he presents us with a humanised account of selection, which lacks the radical externality of the Darwinian concept. By implicating choice and value in selection, and making it the ethical requirement that 'while existing we must select joyful passions' he ends up with a sentimentalised nature and a brutalised ethics and politics. In our view, however, something else is at stake: first, Deleuze seeks to create the conditions for the translation of an ontological question into an ethical (for he recognises that it is not just a matter of applying the rules). And second, which maybe only follows from the first, Deleuze is driven by a different question than Darwin: namely, not what are the criteria of selection (external or internal) but rather granting the externality of selection (*it* selects) how do we have a chance, how can it be made ours? See Howard Caygill, "The Topology of Selection: the Limits of Deleuze's Biophilosophy" in *Deleuze and Philosophy: The Difference Engineer*, Keith Ansell Pearson (ed.) (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) pp. 149-162.

the final identity of the two *potentiae* [*potentia activa* and *potentia passiva*], the will to power as a pure passion affecting itself.¹²³

Moreover, as a doctrine of selection, the eternal return is also the power of transformation. Of course, this does not make the eternal return a matter of our conscious selection and change is not a *product* of our actions. If the eternal return brings a change in the product or in the object, this is only secondarily. First, it has transformed *us*, not as the agents of the action but primarily as a will. It has not changed the object of our will, it has not made us will something different, but it has made us will differently, it has made us will to the *n*th power. But what makes the will to power is not just the intensification of the will (Will more! Will intensively!) but rather *the will's envelopment of its caesura, the will's envelopment of the necessity that contradicts it. ("One day I want to see as beautiful what is necessary")*. One should not just fill the caesura, one should *arrive* to will it that is also to *let* oneself to it. For there is neither will without passion and passivity, nor passion without an energetic will. The power of transformation is not the transformation of our caesura but the transformation of our *envelopment* of the caesura (*us*, as this envelopment).

One might say that there is external necessity (God), or one might say that there is only chance (immanent necessity). But at the end of the day these are both questions of *knowledge*. What matters instead is that we arrive to make of chance, *our necessity*; this alone constitutes *creation*.

¹²³ Giorgio Agamben, "The Eternal Return and the Paradox of Passion" in *Nietzsche in Italy*, Thomas Harrison (ed.) (Saratoga, Calif.: Anma Libri, 1988) p. 17.

Rhythm is a temporal whole but only on condition that it is cracked. It is this crack, the suspension or the caesura of time that prevents rhythm from becoming a temporal synthesis, One, once and for all. Instead rhythm is a singularity unfolding itself in a multiplicity of ways (poly-rhythm), alternating its masks, yet transmitting all the way through that power – the power of its caesura, which unceasingly dissolves and recreates it anew. The ecstasis of rhythm is the risk and the death it undergoes so that it can return, be selected again, in a new life. Being ambiguous itself, rhythm dissolves life in an ecstatic death and envelops dying in the course of its life.

VI. On the mode of existence of the work of art

Where is the work of art? Is it the material entity, the canvas with its colours and spatial forms that stands in front of my eyes? Just a painting? Or, is it an idea intended by its creator and communicated by the representation of it? An idea, which would place the work in the mind of the artist or of the spectator that entertains it? Benjamin endowed the work of art with an aura, which he defined as “the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be”.¹²⁴ Similarly, Agamben identified the idiosyncratic mode of existence of the work of art with its strange capacity “to give and withdraw itself at once”. Could we say that these formulations only repeat the bourgeois

¹²⁴ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, in *Illuminations*, edited and with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992) p. 216.

cult of art which has invented the aesthetic attitude? Following our discussion in the earlier parts of this chapter, it would be a reduction and a mistake to consider the idea of beauty as merely a product or construction of modernity. What is modern is the separation of beauty from truth, which has subsequently collapsed it to an identification of the spatial properties of the work. In our view, both Benjamin's and Agamben's formulations address a more intricate issue, namely that of the ambiguous *mode* of being of the work of art. Though in what does its ambiguity consist?

The modern conception of the work of art has conceived it as a double entity, form and content. But once separated how could the two components ever come together again; how could the work reclaim a unity? It is the unity of the work of art that is at stake in modernity, not the fact of a material unity but the event of consistency. The problem of consistency concerns the way that the work arrives to 'stand on its own', it signifies its moment of completion. Completion, however, does not refer to the finished work (Rimbaud is complete even if unfinished), rather completion and consistency both address the same question, namely "what makes *this* work art?"

A common response to this question was usually provided by a formalizing, centralized, arborescent model, which might be expressed in two fashions. Both of them however, would remain subordinate to the order of resemblance. Thus in a first instance, and similarly to the Platonic model of mimesis, art imitates or resembles an external world of nature and things. As a representation, the work of art is measured against the reality, the external model it represents, and it is judged according to its degree of faithfulness. In

another view, the work's consistency is granted to the intentions of the artist: whether as an expression of the artist's genius (the idealist version), or of the unconscious (the materialist version), art is once more the copy (even if exemplary) of an original. In all instances, it remains *referential* to something, which is other than it, external to it and probably superior to it. As opposed to the aforementioned views it is proposed here that the work of art far exceeds the prior intentions of the artist and her -or our - lived experience.

But then do we succumb to the modernist doctrine of art's self-referentiality? As Agamben had clearly shown, the problem of art in modernity is not its status as a copy, which subordinates it to an original (i.e. a religious or moral Idea, a truth content) but rather the contrary, the problem is its autonomy from any external Idea. But the process in which art has gradually emptied itself of any content aspiring to attain the pure form has resulted in a reversal movement, it has annihilated art's own idea and has rendered it fully dependent on the aesthetic institution. Agamben's exposition of the fate of modern art draws an absolute parallel between the recognition of art's self-referentiality and its self-annihilation.

Art's quest for autonomy, exemplified in the separation of beauty from truth, has signified the demand for inventing its own internal and self-sufficient criteria. But it has resulted instead to an even greater heteronomy, which has subordinated art to the authority of the institution and its power to validate. Consequently, it now becomes clear that the problem of whether art refers to something other than itself or not, does not address the status of art *vis-à-vis* reality (superior, inferior, or equal) nor does it so much concern the possibility of a non-

representational art; it is instead a problem addressing the criteria of judgment. Thus for example, abstract art does not really tell us that art can go beyond representation; rather, it posits a challenge to our perception and experience of art, by requiring that we invent new ways to view art, beyond external references.

But when art frees itself from external reference it ends up in circularity: it posits itself as a question to itself. The impossibility of such a circular structure is revealed and confirmed by the all-empowered role of the museum. Self-referentiality, which entailed the radical aspiration for an art which bears its own reason, and which creates its own criteria for judgment, has trivially ended up to surrendering art to the institution and the demands of the art market. Thus, the modern work of art founded on the fracture between form and content, creator and spectator, rather than sustaining itself in vertigo, appears to have entrusted the guarantee of its unity to the museum.¹²⁵ Could there be another way, internal and immanent, that the work of art might gain consistency?

Benjamin had insightfully diagnosed in mechanical reproduction the increasing substitution of art's intrinsic value for an exhibition value. But what is the exhibition value of the work of art? Is it the value attributed to it by the museum, the collectors and the art market? And could it be said that art's monetary value is the immanent expression of its power, in the same way that truth was the transcendent?

¹²⁵ One might say that the museum, the art market and the whole institution are not merely external and arbitrary authorities in relation to the work of art. Art's monetary value is the immanent expression of art's power (truth is the transcendent). However, in our view this is an artificial construction: monetary value cannot be attributed to the artwork's power but totally to the market's power to appropriate the artwork (which the more it is emptied the more it is available to such appropriation).

Thierry De Duve has argued that the “most primary convention, the most elementary of all *modernist* artistic practice, [is] that *works of art are shown in order to be judged as such*”.¹²⁶ The need that the work is exhibited is not merely a convention, but rather it is the condition of modern art, and De Duve also states that, “even if it is informed and crossed through and through by discursive practices, the field of plastic arts, [...] is not discursive but *ostensive*, even for that art which calls itself Conceptual” (emphasis mine).¹²⁷ The condition ‘to be shown’ is not merely the material necessity of appearance, but rather it is a movement by which the work of art opens itself to the *viewer*. Moreover, once they’ve passed the test (of exhibition) works bear, implicitly at least, the label: ‘this is art’. That is, the process of exhibition in the museum context which names the work as art, is an *irreversible* process, a historical fact.¹²⁸

Clement Greenberg identified the “essence of Modernism” as lying “in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline itself – not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence”.¹²⁹ Yet the question is whether after all Duchamp is also a modernist: doesn’t the readymade precisely test art’s own conditions? An initial response to this question would be that the readymade tests art’s conditions but it does not do so with art’s proper means, like a painter does, in the sense of technique or violation of aesthetic criteria; it does not do so in the *retinal* sense.

¹²⁶ Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, An October Book (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996) p. 379.

¹²⁷ Thierry de Duve, “Echoes of the Readymade: Critique of Pure Modernism”, trans. Rosalind Krauss, in *October*, Vol. 70, Fall 1994, p.97.

¹²⁸ Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, supra, p. 380.

¹²⁹ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting”, in *The New Art*, ed. Gregory Battock (New York: Dutton, 1973) p. 66.

But, in De Duve's and our view, the readymade has pushed to something more than that. Rather than questioning the condition, it really makes it a fact. Once exhibited, a work *is art*. So the name 'art' becomes a status rather than a quality.¹³⁰ It is a given, rather than the product of the spectator's judgment or creation. Instead, as Duchamp wrote, now "the role of the spectator is to determine the weight of the work on the aesthetic scale".¹³¹ But this evolution does not simply assume the spectator as the bearer of the *qualitative* judgment, attributing to him a relatively passive role. De Duve concludes:

[t]he fact that the readymades have passed the test successfully does not absolve us from having to judge them again. [...] To call them art [...] is to make our judgment as to their quality bear on the very fact of deciding whether, in their case, status equals quality. Whether, in other words, we simply read the label pinned on them, or whether we write it.¹³²

The transformation of aesthetic judgment into a qualitative judgment does not simply alter the kind of judgment we are making, or the question that we need to answer. In order to make the qualitative judgment one does not simply decide for oneself, nor express a subjective opinion. Instead, Duchamp has radically transformed the question we need to ask, namely: how could *I* see this as art? Consequently, it is not merely a matter of testing the object but mostly of testing *us*: *how could I become* such that I would see the fountain in the urine? Would *I*

¹³⁰ Thierry de Duve, "Echoes of the Readymade: Critique of Pure Modernism", *supra*, p. 123.

¹³¹ Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (eds.), *Salt seller: The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975) p. 140.

¹³² Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, *supra*, p. 425.

pass the test? Passing the test is not merely a matter of external conformity, but a matter of inventing one's own reason, as a will to power. Duchamp's readymade, which transforms aesthetic judgment into qualitative judgment, marks also the transformation of freedom (Kant) in affirmation (Nietzsche). What he attempts to do is to turn the given fact of passivity ('this is art') into the conditions of activity ('I *can* see it as art, because I willed it'). If Duchamp radically transforms (or illuminates) Kant, this is not because he moulds him into Nietzsche but because he reveals that the possibility of judgment necessarily implicates my own becoming.

We can now say that the work of art is an intensity (in-itself), which also appears in enveloping itself. A rhythm. That is why it is primarily a whole, rather than the addition of form and content. It is this rhythm as a whole which becomes consequently distributed into form and content. Form and content constitute modalities, in which the same Unequal whole *redistributes* itself, rather than dividing itself. As such, both form and content implicate and unfold the rhythm of the whole but in different degrees of contraction and relaxation.

In the discussion of art in *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari draw the distinction between 'actualization' and 'embodiment'. The work of art stands as a monument to the event; and "the monument does not actualize the virtual event but incorporates or embodies it; it gives it a body, a life, a universe" [WIP, 177]. But if everything is rhythm, which simply redistributes itself, how can this distinction still be possible? Actualization and embodiment are two different rhythms, that is, different modes of enveloping the caesura. Thus actualization tends to fill up the caesura by rendering intensity outside itself,

such as the external instances of matter or explication. Embodiment on the other hand, envelops the caesura, and 'conceals and reveals' it like Benjamin's origin. Yet, this is not so much a dialectical movement but, following our analysis, rather an inhuman tendency (yet mostly implicated in the human) to risk oneself; yet, one risks only because one wills to live.

Consequently, the work of art does not express something but in its being it gives the conditions for participation; we *become in tune*. Becoming in tune, that is the primary becoming, the condition of all becomings. For Levinas in rhythm "there is no longer oneself, but rather a sort of passage from oneself to anonymity".¹³³ In this passage, we recreate the multiplicity of rhythms haunting us from within; we are taken by rhythm, *compulsively*. It is not a matter of representing the thing, by actualising its rhythm in memory or imagination, but rather it is really a matter of letting us being infused. The difference between representation (imitation) and the becoming of rhythm, is that *we* do not create it, but *it becomes through us*.

But then, if rhythm is what becomes through us, then it is really *our* becoming - *we* become Giacometti's fragility, and *we* become Modigliani's blind girls. We do not imagine how a blind person feels, but we let ourselves to her look *at us* and thus we become a blindness that opens to the light. When I look at a painting, it is a will that is aroused and which activates the life of the painting; a will, which reflected on the surface, that is *taken* by the 'object' it wills, returns on us and *fills* us with a new life. Rhythm: theft and gift. This is how a painting returns our gaze in a pleasure without fulfilment; not because of the lack of

¹³³ Emmanuel Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow", in *The Levinas Reader*, Sean Hand (ed.) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) p. 133.

a desired object, but rather because we cannot cease wanting it *again*. Pleasure without fulfilment is the moment of ecstasis, the moment which wills,¹³⁴ and by willing it risks and forgets itself, so that it returns in a new life (power of metamorphosis).

In the last chapter, we will elaborate this last instance of becoming, where things or the work of art become or live through us. They do not live in us, as if we contained or have stored them but rather we recreate them in our becoming. Such a conception would be possible and plausible only if we managed to show that it is the body itself which is a becoming, a rhythm which creates itself rather than something given.

But first, let us follow some of Bill Viola's video works as a questioning and stimulation to our thinking of art's desire to touch the body and art's will to live.

¹³⁴ Will (or desire for Deleuze and Guattari) is primary or *a priori*. It is therefore without an object and non-empirical. This is a significant point of their divergence from other French post-structuralist thinkers who posit 'lack' as primary and desire as being driven by this lack. This is exemplified in their conception of 'the body without organs'. "The BwO is the *field of immanence* of desire, the *plane of consistency* specific to desire (with desire defined 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" [TP, 154]. This also leads to a different account of passion or self-affection. Thus, for Levinas would see the 'passion' of rhythm in a 'radical passivity' of passing to anonymity; on the contrary, we would argue that for Deleuze and Guattari one is affected because one wills, because one (the body) opens oneself (itself) to the future.

Chapter 4

Materializing time: Bill Viola's video works

I. Introduction

What is the status of the image? Although traditionally the consideration of the image has been the providence of art and art history, in recent years it has also preoccupied cultural theory. The question recurs in different guises and points to the image's own ambiguity. Thus, on one hand, the discussion of the image takes place as a critique the ocularcentrism of western culture, in terms of a "denigration of vision" due to its tendency to reify the world and establish subject/object relationships.¹³⁵ In this context, the image is conceived not just in opposition to

¹³⁵ There is an extensive bibliography addressing these issues from different perspectives (philosophical, sociological, psychoanalytic, art historical), which would be pointless to cite here. From a cultural theory perspective, Martin Jay's study is characteristic in the field. He gives an illuminating account of the fate and critique of vision in 20th century French theory and art. Martin Jay: *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in 20th Century French Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993).

the thing itself, but primarily as our mode of relating to the world - i.e. through the perceptual modality of vision - which tends to separate us from the world. Vision has been considered to be the most immaterial of the senses and the one which mainly sustains the emergence of the subject. The origins of this conception are not to be found in twentieth-century philosophy (e.g. Sartre) and psychoanalysis (e.g. Lacan), but in the birth of Renaissance perspective and it is intricately connected with the contemporaneous rise of the subject/object, mind/body dichotomies.

However, in a different context *or* from a different perspective, the image is privileged in comparison to language, because of its greater attachment to materiality as opposed to the conceptuality of language. Thus the image is closer to the concrete and material (although it remains a representation of reality), and therefore it keeps us embedded in the concrete and the material. This is also the reason for the 'visual turn' in theory, which comes as a response to the 'linguistic turn' of structuralism and post-structuralism. In other words, the image is on one hand charged for reifying and disenchanting the world by dematerializing it and rendering it pictorial, while on the other it is praised for its material qualities. Television images of war render reality of pain and agony into spectacular pictures, but the image of a painting can overflow in us with sensations and feelings. Where does the difference lie? Is it in the skill of reproduction of the artist rather than of the news cameraman?

However, the interest in the image attains a crucial significance once it is recognised that contemporary culture becomes permeated by images to such an extent that visual representations do not only substitute language and

conceptuality but also reality and life. These conditions appear to alter not only the paradigm of perception but also of experience, and to affect the established presupposition of the real.

Bergson found in the ambivalent status of the image the sufficient correlate for his universe. His plane of immanence is not formed by things as material givens, nor of our representations as our ideal constructions, but of images in the broader sense; not simply pictorial, but sensuous/material, rather than abstract signs (visual, olfactory, auditory, haptic). As we have elaborated in the first chapter, the Bergsonian conception of the 'image' posits it in-between the *thing-in-itself* and our representation of it, between pure reality (or materiality) and pure ideality (immateriality), and between the objectification of the thing/content and the formality of a pure concept.¹³⁶ In Bergson the image is not a spatial, fixed entity but a spatio-temporal process.

In this chapter, we will explore this ambiguity of the image in the case of video. We will begin our discussion by considering how video shifts the temporal paradigm that had structured cinema and therefore creates different conditions and possibilities for experience. We will then discuss some of Bill Viola's video works aspiring to show how time and intensity is not determined by the technology but is enveloped and enveloping in its fragments.

¹³⁶ These distinctions only take place in principle (*de jure*) rather than in reality (*de facto*). According to Bergson experience always gives us composites. Although states of things are mixtures one could discern the pure tendencies in them, which differ in kind.

II. Time and video technology

In the *Cinema* books, Deleuze saw in cinema the conjunction of art and technology in the creation of the correlate to the universal flux of images. It seems that it is the technology of video and electronic media that translate literally Bergson's account of the image. However, although both cinema and video reproduce a moving image on the screen they are based on substantially different principles. Although their difference may not always be directly perceptible, it provides not only a different conceptual basis but also different possibilities in the implementation of time; most importantly it structures different spatio-temporal coordinates of experience.¹³⁷

Cinema has emerged from the technology of photography, as it is an analogical medium operating on the basis of light and still images. Running the film footage in a certain speed rate (standardised to 24fps) the still images produce to the viewer the perceptual effect of continuous movement. And although movement cannot be reconstituted from the addition of static points (as was the constant Bergsonian critique), what allows cinema to create the impression of movement is the delay of human perception - the fact that it is always a bit off-phase or a bit slower than reality.

More specifically, studies in neurophysiology have distinguished three time scales arising through the phase-locking of neuronal activity into synchronous emergent

¹³⁷ For a phenomenological approach of the difference between cinematic and electronic technologies, in their concrete 'materiality' and particular existential significance see Vivian Sobchack, "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic 'Presence'", in Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (eds.), *Materialities of Communication*, trans. by William Whobrey (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994) pp. 83-106.

neuronal ensembles. At the lowest level, non-perceptible microphysical registrations self-organise and form a durational whole that we immediately sense as 'now'. This duration of the 'now' has been identified as lasting 0.3 seconds and it is not given as an information unit but as a 'horizon of integration'.¹³⁸ This means that what happens in an interval shorter than this is not registered as such, but in contraction and implicated in a longer event. Cinema does not reproduce real movement but creates *for us* the impression of movement based on the durational rather than instantaneous character of perception. The impression of movement is the result of the memory *retained* in the formation of perception, and that is why cinema's temporal paradigm is sequentiality, where time is created in the fragments between frames or shots.

Conversely, video is a much more malleable technology in the incorporation of movement. It is not based on the inscription of light on a photosensitive surface which becomes reproduced, but on the simultaneous transmission of the electronic signal through a network, even though images then also unfold serially. For video, the primary value is the electronic signal which materializes time and movement. In cinema, the image is projected as a whole, analogically as it is imprinted on the film reel, and movement is superimposed, while in video there is no image stored, but each time it is created in the movement of the electrons; movement *informs* the video image, which is rendered more fluid and malleable, open to greater manipulation. In video, contrary to cinema, it is stasis which is an illusion.

¹³⁸ Francisco Varela, "The Specious Present: A Neurophenomenology of Time Consciousness", in Jean Petitot, Francisco J. Varela, Bernard Pachoud, and Jean-Michel Roy (eds.) *Naturalizing Phenomenology: Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999) pp. 272-273.

But what is the meaning or significance of this difference in the temporal structure of the two media, since it only concerns a micro level of perception outside the rate of normal or conscious perception and therefore goes unnoticed? In 1976, in an insightful and controversial essay, Rosalind Krauss defined video as “the aesthetics of narcissism”. By identifying narcissism as “*the* condition of the entire genre” she founded video art on a psychological rather than material factor.¹³⁹ Although she uses particular examples in her discussion (such as Vito Acconci’s video tapes *Centers* (1971) and *Air Time* (1973)) her argument is not simply addressed to the specific works’ content or to the condition of the artist, but to the structure of the genre and therefore it includes the medium. She bases her idea on video’s fundamental capacity to record and transmit at the same time – producing instant feedback.

The body is therefore as it were centered between two machines that are the opening and closing of a parenthesis. The first of these is the camera; the second is the monitor, which re-projects the performer’s image with the immediacy of the mirror.¹⁴⁰

Video’s simultaneity creates a self-encapsulation in a present lived and mirrored by the synchronous feedback, which disengages from the spatio-temporal context, from the world, and from past and future. Krauss rightly notes that video’s auto-reflection is not the same as the reflexive movement in which “consciousness doubling back upon itself [...] perform[s] and portray[s] a separation between forms of art and their contents, between the procedures of thought and their objects.”

¹³⁹ Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism”, in *October* (spring 1976) 1: 51-64 at 51.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

The difference is total. Reflection, when it is a case of mirroring, is a move toward an external symmetry; while reflexiveness is a strategy to achieve a radical *asymmetry* from within.¹⁴¹

Although we do not intend to reproduce Krauss' whole argument here, and would rather not psychologize a technology, there is a significant insight in the basis of her argument, which must be investigated here. The technological insertion into the spatio-temporal whole of experience and the flow of life, segments and extracts a part of it. This is equally the case in photography, cinema or video and that is why all these technologies operate on the basis of the spatialization of time. In this extraction and disembeddedness, time becomes objectified, because (as we have already noted) duration cannot be divided without changing in kind. However, video's electronic signal is a much shorter duration than the one captured in the photographic frame; video then does not create a greater affective intimacy with the real or the present, nor does it bring us closer, but it only analyzes it. That is why video's distinctive temporal principle is *simultaneity*, or the present, even if its images are also unfolding.

Although the signal forms itself into the image, this is a process *contained* in the closed circuit of the medium and therefore cannot be compared to a living process of becoming, which is bounded yet open.¹⁴² However, art does not simply rely on the capacities of the medium but rather attempts to

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁴² Thus in our view Lazzarato totally misses this detail which makes photography, cinema, video and digital media, in principle technologies that spatialize time, rather than "crystallizing time" as he argues. The 'crystals of time' are not properties of the technological apparatus. Maurizio Lazzarato, "Machines to Crystallise Time: Bergson", trans. by Matthew Hyland, in *Theory, Culture and Society*, forthcoming issue.

render them expressive. In the following part, we will consider aspects of Bill Viola's work in order to see how he attempts to open the simultaneity of the video image into time and intensity.

III. *The Reflecting Pool*: eccentric temporalities of an instant

We will begin our discussion on Viola's work and the complex implementation of time in his images with a video made during 1977 and 1979 - the *Reflecting Pool*. Its initial format was that of a video rather than a video installation (like much of his later work), although it has subsequently been exhibited in different ways as a video projection.¹⁴³ Our choice to introduce time through this particular work is because it illuminates several aspects of Viola's creative process and his interest in the possibilities of the technology, but also remains a beautiful piece with an immediate impact.

Viola characterises his works of the early 1970s primarily as experimentations with the medium of video itself - its technical capacities and expressive possibilities. It is in this sense that he views the *Red Tape*, from 1975, as "a sort of bridge. Before that, the tapes were didactic, the content was the medium, like structural film in a way. [...] [T]he act of making a tape became a process of discovering and demonstrating

¹⁴³ For example in the *Video Acts* show hosted at ICA in 2003 it was simply projected on the upper part of a wall, above the stairs. This kind of staging of the work emphasised the feeling of suspension, entailed in the work.

something about video.”¹⁴⁴ Thus, for example, in the *Passage Series* from 1973, he experimented upon the different – despite appearances – perceptual effects produced by a zoom and a dolly. First, he walked down a hall holding the camera in a way that the image looked like it was created using a zoom lens and then he zoomed in a way that appeared like walking along the hall, blurring the difference between the two types of shooting and making them appear interchangeable. Then, however, he placed the camera against the wall, noisily scraping it all the way down and back again. In this way, he emphasised and rendered perceivable the implication of embodied experience in space, which in the case of the zoom was bound to remain only a pictorial space (in the conceptual strand of the Renaissance perspective) while in the dolly it incorporated its physical reality of movement.

If the early tapes constitute a kind of ‘structural video’ (to paraphrase) this is because “the camera was given its primary role as a monitoring instrument, that is, as an ‘object’; but ever since about 1976, [...] Viola employs the camera not only as an ‘object’, but – with preference – as a ‘subject’: that is, as the ‘inner eye’”.¹⁴⁵ In other words, during the early stages the gaze is turned upon the camera, which is a separate, external object; man and the apparatus form a closed circuit. Gradually, however, through use, struggle, mistakes and accidents,¹⁴⁶ or

¹⁴⁴ Raymond Bellour, “An Interview with Bill Viola”, in *October* (1985) Vol. 34, pp. 91-119 at 93.

¹⁴⁵ Rolf Lauter, “The Passing: Remembering the present, or pain and beauty of being”, in the exhibition catalogue *Bill Viola: Unseen Images/ Nie Gesehene Bilder! Images Jamais Vues*, edited by Marie Luise Syring (Düsseldorf, Stockholm, Madrid, Lausanne and London: R. Meyer, 1992) p. 65.

¹⁴⁶ Viola describes how he made a 1973 tape called *Information* when, while trying to make a copy between two machines he accidentally “plugged the output into the input of the same machine, pushed the record button, and suddenly there was this strange feedback, a signal that was no signal at all.” Although merely a product of mistake, he considered it to be the best tape he

else through repetition, it becomes incorporated to the body as a kind of extended limb itself or a new integrated system, which then allows for the eye (both the natural and the technological) to open and free itself to the outside.

The Reflecting Pool was made in the period 1977-1979, together with a series of tapes which form part of the same cycle.¹⁴⁷ It initiates us in his work in many ways: thematically, since it introduces basic themes and ideas which recur in a similar or disguised way in much of his later work; technically, in terms of the ways he manipulates time and image in the course of the realisation of the work – in the recording, editing and matting of images process; and more importantly, rhythmically, that is in the complex orchestration of distinct temporalities in the viewing experience of the work. Although we may distinguish these as different levels of the work, in the course of this chapter we will attempt to show how they are inextricably linked.

First, we will describe this video in terms of what takes place on the narrative level of the image, or else what we actually perceive. A static camera frames a pool in the foreground surrounded by a forest visible in the background. On the soundtrack an airplane's hum gradually subsides giving way to the sound of rushing water, seemingly the water in the pool. A man emerges from the forest and walks up to the edge of the pool; he stands still for a few seconds, we see his reflection in the water, then he suddenly jumps over the pool

had made at that time. See Raymond Bellour, "An interview with Bill Viola", *supra*, p. 94. Maybe accidents of this sort are not only accidental; not that they are in any way fatal or predetermined. They also constitute a kind of *passive interest* produced by repetition, a surplus or remainder of the generated energy.

¹⁴⁷ *The Reflecting Pool* cycle is a videotape collection consisting of the homonymous video as well as *Moonblood* (1977-1979), *Silent Life* (1979), *Ancient of Days* (1979-1981) and *Vegetable Memory* (1978-1980).

and is frozen in midair. In the pool the light darkens, but the water is animated by the movement of concentric circles. In the meantime, the figure suspended upon the water in the foetal position gradually begins to dissolve into the landscape. There is more movement in the water, this time in backward motion and the reflection of non-existent people. The water turns black and the reflection becomes light. In the last sequence, the man emerges from the water, naked, his back to us, climbs onto the edge of the pool and disappears into the forest in a discontinuous movement.

Although on the level of its reception the work appears as a single, continuous piece with special effects superimposed, on its production level it is more complicated. The piece was made by combining three series of recordings: first, a series of recordings of the things happening within the pool (reflections, throwing of small objects forming circles in the water, play of light/darkness); then another recording of the man coming out of the forest, jumping into the water, coming out and leaving the pool again; and finally, a recording of the scene while completely empty, with no action taking place at all. The key element, which allowed for the reconstruction of the separate recordings in a single piece, was the stationary camera; as he explains "[k]eeping the camera in the same place automatically means that any objects that have not moved between different recordings can be registered (aligned) again, broken up and put together, and reconstructed to make a whole image."¹⁴⁸ The recordings were edited together using slow dissolves, in order to create an impression of continuity merging the different activities, a freezing frame (when jumping in midair) and the

¹⁴⁸ Raymond Bellour, "An Interview with Bill Viola", *supra*, p. 96. Viola gives a detailed analysis of the technical process he followed in the making of the piece in pp. 96-97.

external key to bring the three temporal levels in a single image. As a result, since there is no change in viewpoint or movement of the camera, the spatial dimension of the image remains static; change occurs on the temporal level as the "frame is broken up into three distinct levels of time -real time, still, and time lapse."

The video begins with a recording of action in real time - a man walking out of the forest. Since this is the only movement taking place within the frame that is within our field of vision, our gaze is mainly concentrated upon it; we begin with a general view of the whole scene, and then the eye focuses upon the action. The camera by remaining static during the whole piece gives up any activity on its part. Instead of leading our gaze, it only frames for us a field of vision and withdraws to an inactive position. It is simply switched on (which is nevertheless enough to transform it from inert object to receptive surface) recording action and non-action and the passage of time and its traces upon the scenery. The static view transforms the video piece into a kind of painting or an instantaneous image where the camera plays the role of the frame, with the sole difference that this is a spatio-temporal frame.

The static spatial view becomes animated by the movement occurring within the frame. Or rather, isn't it the eye itself, which becomes activated by movement?¹⁴⁹ Movement attracts the eye, it makes it move, alternate its intensity and focal point from the general view of the landscape to the man coming out of the forest. The sequence appears as description of the action, recording its duration; nevertheless, there is already a disturbance provoked by the sound of an airplane's engine in

¹⁴⁹ The more spatial an image the easier it becomes appropriated in recognition of the same, and the eye tends to withdraw from it to a more passive position. It is movement, or time, or difference, what activates the eye.

the air - an auditive image introduced in the field of perception. This sound gradually fades away and the sound of water emerges in the foreground. The introduction of the auditive image does not simply extend our perception of the scene, but introduces movement to the pool (even if this is not yet a visual movement but only acoustic). We become aware of two (simultaneously and heterogeneously) unfolding durations, not just of a human action and of water's flow, but different durations of the image (rather than within the image as its content). Man's stillness at the pool's edge, becomes interrupted by a mutation on the soundtrack with the sound of an airplane. This disruption between stillness and movement produces a *décalage* of tension in the image of the whole - an evasion of its concentration or a dissonance. Nevertheless, we are still in the realm of human time; the sequence is shot in real time, which corresponds to the time measured by the action of the body.¹⁵⁰

Real time becomes suspended when the man performs the leap and the frame freezes in the air. The piece is about the moment of suspension, which constitutes a difference *in* time. The leap removes him violently from the flow of time (which now stands still for him) and space (where his body no longer produces a reflection). The leap, which freezes him in the air, creates an *ek-static/ecstatic* sense, by bringing a centrifugal force in the image or a tendency to an outside. The consequence of this created tension is a dismantling of the temporal order and coherence of the image. The image of the body in the air begins

¹⁵⁰ The expression 'time measured by the action of the body' does not restrictively mean the amount of time the body takes to perform an action. The body does not only perform an action but it is already itself an action; following Bergson "the body is actual and acting". The active body however is not the whole body; there is also the affective body, which envelops and is enveloping in a different temporality. The technical principle of video's real time is the thirty frames per second, a division based on the measurement of the active body.

to dissolve very slowly (in about four minutes), creating a caesura in the image, a haemorrhage. Although the suspension begins to 'melt' into the image and from intensive to become spatial again, it also initiates the unfolding of heterogeneous durations.

The water in the pool continues its movement forming extending concentric circles but without the viewer ever seeing the objects that caused them; similarly reflections of non-existent people appear on its surface. In a backward movement the circles intend to their centre, as if swallowed by a force coming from the depth. Shades of light and darkness in the water reflect the passage of time. These variations in the image are created by the use of time-lapse videography, which condenses time. The apparent stillness of the landscape is in fact the result of a highly compressed time, which intends movement in space and only manifests itself in the spectral variations of light.

At the end of the video piece, the man comes out of the pool in a real time sequence. Just before disappearing in the forest, Viola performs a last dissolve of his movement, a final suspensive impression, as an allusive comment on the piece.

Critics refer to the symbolic meaning of the work as an allegory of human "baptism", spiritual purification, death and rebirth.¹⁵¹ But it is also about an instant of suspension, or a tension created outside of time which then freezes or dies within it by initiating some internal change; it is about

¹⁵¹ Caterina Maderna-Lauter, "The Reflecting Pool", in *Bill Viola: European Insights, Reflections on the Work of Bill Viola*, Rolf Lauter (ed.) (Munich/London/New York: Prestel, p. 157. Viola has also identified as key element in the piece the frozen action and described it as "as a transformation that's all based on the original decision to give up; I think it relates to death in some way, or letting things that you know, just releasing everything." In Raymond Bellour, "An interview with Bill Viola", *supra*, p. 97.

contraction and relaxation. Of course, the materialization of this rhythmical web was allowed by the specificity of video technology and computer editing, which gave him a holistic rather than linear sense of composition.¹⁵² On one hand, this technology “freed him from the constraints of working in real time” and allowed him “to challenge the conventional nature of the video present – an immediacy predicated on the continuous quality of the electronic signal, yet rendered spurious by the paradox of instant feedback.”¹⁵³ Moreover, on a conceptual level, the holistic sense of composition consists in the use of the static camera, which serves the logic of simultaneity rather than sequentiality. However, the static camera does not create an objective time, in which events (the body, human actions, natural cycles) take place, but gives rise to an image which moulds itself in variability. By interweaving different durations of sound, of light or of the water’s movement, it achieves not simply to combine several movements in the image but to render the image polyrhythmic, and to envelop complexity in simplicity and create temporalities in simultaneity.

IV. The liquid image of *Hatsu-Yume* (*The First Dream*)

Hatsu-Yume is a single-channel video work produced in 1981. It was all filmed in Japan while Viola was artist-in-

¹⁵² Bill Viola: “Will There Be Condominiums in Data Space?”, in *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House: Writings 1973-1994*, Robert Violette in collaboration with the author (eds.) (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002) p. 101.

¹⁵³ J. Hoberman, “The Reflecting Pool: Bill Viola and the Visionary Company”, in *Bill Viola: Installations and Videotapes* (The Museum of Modern Art New York, 1987) p. 65.

residence at the Sony Corporation. The video, composed in parts and lasting for 56 minutes, comprises of images of the secluded rural landscape of the mountains and the sea, but also of the life of the city. The imagery, which oscillates between representation and abstraction (or maybe it abstracts representation) can be 'read' on different levels. On the narrative or conceptual level of the image, the work may be viewed as a meditation on Japanese culture as well as a 'poetic' insight on the relation and clash between nature and civilisation.¹⁵⁴ On a material/aesthetic level, the work manifests a unique sensibility in its treatment of light and time. The whole piece experiments with the material fluidity of light and the malleability of time, and affects the viewer in a profound way in the experience of the work. In this part, we will look at the images of *Hatsu-Yume* and the temporal orders they are unfolding, prior to the representational content they unfold; as we will show, the 'story' of the work is primarily *experienced* in the temporal form of the images rather than *narrated* in their content.

The video begins with abrupt images filmed in time-lapse of the sun rising over the sea and setting (in a backward movement) behind the mountains as it dissolves in red and blue hues, followed by fragmented close-ups of sea waves in very slow motion and stills, the sound of wind and the deep sound of waves, and a long, time-lapse shot of clouds passing over the mountains. This is an image of nature as comprised of primal elements, such as light, water, air and the earth. These appear like images of the origins of formation, although we are not presented with them by way of description; it is not so much

¹⁵⁴ For such a reading see: Katja Bloomberg: "Hatsu-Yume (First Dream)" in *Bill Viola: European Insights: Reflections on the work of Bill Viola*, Rolf Lauter (ed.), (Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 1999) pp. 178-180.

Viola who narrates how the world came to being, but rather time-images which dramatise this process. But does this mean that they imitate life's or nature's processes?

All images are filmed with the stationary camera, which does not engage the viewer as a participant in the scene but maintains the distance of the observer. The distance is primarily expressed in an absence of an emotive impact (e.g. shock, awe, fear, vertigo). The viewer - like the camera - remains an observer of the scene rather than a participant.

However, we do not stand in front of a description, and the camera's eye is not that of the human observer. The crucial factor here is time and the way it is implemented; for a description (which is ultimately human) would have been shot in real-time, that is, in the time a human being would actually have perceived it. Instead, we are confronted with the temporal orchestration of time-lapse and slow-motion videography, freeze frames and cuts, which represent temporal velocities and rates, which although they may not be those of the things in-themselves, neither are they those of conscious perception.

More specifically, time-lapse as a video technique consists in the high acceleration and condensation of time, which means for example that the duration of an act, which would actually be unfolded in several hours can be contracted in the duration of a minute. Time-lapse corresponds to a velocity more rapid than the human, and thus we could say that it condenses the *human* past and future in the creation of an *inhuman* enduring present, that is not the present *actually* perceived by the senses. Time lapse creates a temporality more intensive than the time of human perception (which is more extensive and slower) and it can be viewed, not as the

equivalent but, as the technological metaphor for the time of light; or rather, as the time of dream.

Dreams happen as intensities, faster and more instantaneously than the extensive order of human consciousness (in the strict sense), and as such they do not so much constitute something *other than* the human but rather they create an *internal* otherness to the conscious self. In other words, dreams prove that human experience simultaneously unfolds in different intensive layers, which literally means in different speeds or wave-lengths, which are constitutive of the modalities of experience.

Returning to the eye of the camera, could we say that it represents a point of view? Following our earlier discussion, it cannot be identified with an empirical point of view which would occupy the plane of actual experience; these images cannot be reduced to fragmented views of the world because they are not the images extracted by the human body in perception. If these, however, are images unfolding in dreams, we cannot exactly talk about a point of view, unless this is a disembodied one. However, the disembodied eye of dreams structures neither a reificatory vision nor merely a pictorial one, deprived from sensuousness; dreams abound of intense sensations. Rather, it constitutes an a-centered vision since the subject itself (a consciousness, which coincides with itself and centres perception) is split. In dreams, I both act and see myself acting, I become an object to myself, but yet not entirely, because I continue to experience, sense and feel through the image of myself. This ruptured subjectivity, which is opened up and revealed in the dream process while it remains implicit and disruptive in action, substitutes the centre for a schism.

Nevertheless, these images do not simply recount a dream, rather they are dream-images *resonant* to the early ontological processes. However, since the latter take place before the appearance of the human, they cannot in anyway be described, represented or dramatised by us without becoming mere anthropomorphic accounts. This impossibility is not due to the fact that such processes were never actually experienced, but rather because the fact that they have preceded human consciousness is not merely indicative of a temporal order but one constitutive of an otherness. But although we do not have a direct knowledge of things in-themselves, it is maybe through dreams that energetic processes, which pertain both nature and humans becomes communicable. Dreams are translations of a single life in different languages, dreams as passages which create *intensive analogies*. The resonance of dreams is not a matter of transcendent premonitions but rather the material passage and 'translation' of inhuman energies through the human.

In the following part of the piece we are presented with images of organic life - a bamboo forest. The sequence begins with an abrupt composition of still (or time-lapse?) images before the camera, placing itself among the trunks and recording in real-time. It is in this last instance that the camera occupies a point of view for the first time. The point of view as a static, bounded and empirical view only emerges from a more dynamic, unbounded view - one which cannot properly be ascribed to a body and is therefore not empirical. The actuality of visual perception is only subsequently given by a virtual, destabilised vision.

However, even when the camera assumes the point of view within the forest, it does not simply provide us with a

spatial view of the surrounding space. In fact, what the camera is really looking at is not the space of the forest but the entwinement of light with the trees and leaves – luminous cathode rays, which appear almost material and tactile through their contrast with the tree shades. It is this sensuous (rather than only optical) play of light, which gives movement, vivacity and tension in the static image; optical tension, between light and darkness, and also bodily tension between what is given visually and what is implied haptically. The materiality of light is also stressed by the alternation of deep focus and depth-of-field where the focus of the camera lens in extreme close-up moves from the foreground to the background. In the first case, the light sensually implies the material surface of the trunk, evoking the concentration of the hand, while in the latter it spreads itself in space and floods the body.

The camera pans horizontally among the bamboo trees, and becomes suspended in a still image which gradually fades out. Simultaneously though, a new image of a valley fades in and the camera performs a full movement of rotation, describing the surrounding space of the mountains. In this innovative camera movement, Viola does not so much alter the point of view, but rather he changes level of experience; from the immersed experience of light among trees, where the sense of vision and touch are inextricably mingled, to a coming on the surface of sense perception, the body of action where vision assumes its clarity and distinction from the other senses. This performative leap is made possible by a pause of the still image, which lets the first image dissolve and at the same time initiates the formation of a new image; the latter is both discontinuous and integrated in the movement of the whole.

The next part consists in a medium shot of a rock; the camera remains still as if shot in real-time and only later we become aware of the time-lapse videography, as the clouds slide across the sky.¹⁵⁵ We listen to the deep sound of wind and we see people appearing from behind the rock in slow-motion and then disappearing in dissolves.¹⁵⁶ We experience a strange assymetry in the scene, caused by the unnatural correspondence between the size of the human bodies and that of the rock, and we gradually become aware of the zoom quality of the image. Although in terms of its representational content the sequence appears quite straightforward, Viola disturbs our perception by employing particular temporal (time-lapse and slow motion) and spatial (zoom) video techniques. Our perception of the image becomes estranged from actual experience not so much because of the techniques themselves but from their synchronous, rather than sequential, implementation (it is within the same shot that parts are zoomed, others are filmed in slow-motion or time-lapse, which means the shot is in fact a collage of different shots). The image is a collage (rather than a condensation) of layers in a single surface and the result lends it an oneiric or aerial quality of alienated perception. Moreover, the experienced assymetry stresses the relativity of perception. This relativity does not mean that perception is something purely subjective with no necessary correspondence to the objective world but rather that it is a *translation* of the world or things-in-themselves to the human order or level of experience.

¹⁵⁵ In time lapse videography there is a significant amount of time between each exposure. As a result the action will be speeded up considerably so that an action, which in reality takes place during several hours may unfold in few seconds.

¹⁵⁶ What we commonly call slow motion corresponds to the frame rate. The real time rate is 24fps or 30fps (depending on the type of the camera); filming in a higher speed will slow down the action and running the camera in a lower than the normal frame rate will speed the action up.

We do not perceive in general but always *in relation to us*, the human body - and its plane - acting as a point of reference. The disproportion of the image originates from fusing together, not so much the points but, the planes of reference.

The effect of alienated perception becomes further explored in more complicated ways in the last sequences of the piece. Viola films in real-time a fish-market and he then moves on to give us slow-motion images of the sea and a night fishing boat. The real-time shot is the image of actual perception, the description of what happens. However, by effectively slowing down time and zooming to give close-up images of waves and a boat, Viola passes from a perception-image to luminous affective images evocative of how it feels. Together with the image Viola slows down sound and extends its duration. The mechanical sound of the boat becomes transformed into a deep roaring sound, one of a profounder, more primordial and indiscernible duration of life. In this way he creates the passage (or the dream) of a mechanical object to a deep and vibrant matter. Organic, inorganic and elemental nature appear to be only temporal aspects of a single duration, which renders solid matter and light fluid, diffusive and passing.

Fluidity becomes accentuated in the following images of the city's night landscape of cars and neon lights. Viola introduces the city not in a descriptive shot of buildings, cars or people, but in vertiginous movement and fluorescent lights. The camera is performing wavy movements and slow speed blur, which slows down and blurs the action of the image.¹⁵⁷ In this

¹⁵⁷ The slow speed blur is a special case of off-speed filming which produces a blurring effect, achieved by running the camera slower than usual (most often at either 12fps or 6fps). The effect is blurring but the action runs at normal speed, and although it looks very much like it is slowed down, it is not. "The reason that it is acceptable to shoot at such a slow speed is that, due to the persistence of vision, the frames perceptually overlap slightly and

way, it abstracts the initial representational image by melting down its content; what remains in this process is only movement and refractive light. The flowing camera attaches the viewer (through his gaze) in its dizzying swirl. There are two unfolding durations in these images produced by, on one hand, the off-speed filming, and on the other, the wavy movements of the camera itself. The sequence is not about the movement, speed or energy of the city but rather about how the city is experienced by a dizzied man who is slower than the city, one who does not fully adhere to its rhythm and yet is taken by it. Maybe, this is the contemporary flâneur in conditions of high speed; the stimulation of the city is both overwhelming and too fast to be retained, it comes and is already gone and it leaves the wavy movement and the flashing of fluorescent lights.

While light becomes liquidated, water is treated as a modality of light. Through the use of extreme close-up, the drop of water on a car's window dissolves into colourful refractions of light embodied in abstract images of purple, green and yellow. Images of waves become indistinguishable from images of fire. We have come a full conceptual circle; from images of light and water, to the city's neon lights and its movement as a sea. The correspondence between the two is not a matter of resemblance nor a poetic metaphor, but rather the repetition of a resonance. Civilisation and culture do not stand in opposition from nature but rather they translate, they create passages to a different level of 'contraction and relaxation, one in which it is not anymore the image, but rather the rhythmic and affective

mask the unsharpness. With very rapidly moving objects, the blur is apparent, but this generally reinforces the feeling of speed and energy". A highly blurred image, although it may not stand up itself as a still photograph, may be very effective as a moving video image. Blain Brown: *Cinematography: Theory and Practice: image making for cinematographers, directors, and videographers*, (Boston: Focal Press, 2002).

flow of its movement that becomes generated; not in order to substitute or equate it, but rather to remind us how our existence is inescapably bounded to it.

Hatsu-Yume begins and ends with images of light and water, and the whole video explores their relation on symbolic/conceptual and aesthetic/material levels. Light and water are not two different elements but two modalities of the energy of life. The same applies to the modalities of experience: for Viola, actual perception, dreams or bodily sensations are only more contracted or more relaxed temporal structures in the elastic thread of existence.

In both the *Reflecting Pool* and *Hatsu-Yume* Viola uses video as a technology which modulates time. As opposed to cinema which creates time in the fragments of static frames, the video image is continuous transformation. Viola attempts to 'break' this continuity (which is nevertheless the spatial continuity of technology) to invent fragments, by the incorporation of different time-speeds in the image. By stretching or condensing time, he attempts to reveal the image and our perception as a temporal aspect (or plane or point of view), which does not so much makes it relevant but rather renders the animate and the inanimate, perception and dream, primal nature and cityscapes as planes of intensive analogies. However, in our view, it is the *Reflecting Pool* which achieves to fragment video's continuity and presence and to create an intensive effect. In this work Viola 'breaks' the present of the image with contemporaneous durations, disturbs the natural perception with an artificiality of suspension, which also keeps the tension of the technological estrangement; nevertheless, he arrives to envelop all these in a single duration of a man's leap into the pool and he creates a temporal asymmetry and rhythm.

V. A shifting surface of *The Passions*

In his latest series of work (begun in 2000 and entitled *The Passions*), Viola engages with new cinema and video technologies in the exploration of his fundamental artistic concerns with time and the body. It includes, amongst others, works such as *The Quintet of the Astonished* (2000), *Anima* (2000), *Six Heads* (2000), *Silent Mountain* (2001). The title of the series explicitly recuperates a theme, which had inspired much of the devotional painting of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, namely the representation of extreme emotional states.

This originary similarity is consequently recuperated in the staging of the actors, their poses and expressions, as well as in the chromatic spectre of the images, which create a visual/aesthetic allusion to the work of old masters. Viola's work both pays a tribute to those early paintings and irrevocably differentiates itself. One might validly say that any similarities are only apparent and phenomenal; rather than imitating the early works, they precisely stress the impossibility of creating again that kind of art. This is not an observation about the authenticity of these works, neither is the difference between the two cases simply to be reduced to the different media involved (painting/video), nor to the religious or secular investment of the passions. Instead, the difference drawn is that between the history of art in the centuries lapsed, in the time that took art from representational painting to conceptual art; all subsequent differences spring from and explicate this profounder difference born in time. It is not our intention here to undertake a comparative analysis between Viola's videos and

the original works that inspired them. Nevertheless, we will try to show that these works require us to *also* view conceptually, while at the same time they also attempt to create a *supple sense* of the present moment.

The novelty of the *Passions* series when compared to his earlier videos and installations, is largely related to the particular means of production and the deployment of the latest cinema and video technologies which extend the range of possibilities for the manipulation of time. The technical principle is the same for all the works: shot on 35mm film at very high-speed they are then transferred to digital video and thus drastically slowed down so that the minutest shifts in facial expressions and bodily movements may become visible. The images are not anymore formed by the projection of light on a surface such as was the case in his earlier installations, but they are displayed on flat LCD screens, which deliver a high-resolution image without scan lines. The new plasma screen allows Viola not only to give us images of vivid clarity but also to allude to the form of the painting, by presenting the videos as moving pictures in frames. From the creation of total environments in the form of the video-sound installation, Viola returns to a classical two-dimensional form of display, yet with the significant difference of an image unfolding diachronically, that is in or through time, rather than synchronically, and instantaneously in the space/time conjunction.

In this section, we will attempt to show that *The Passions* series is a complex body of work in the sense that it simultaneously unfolds and entwines different layers of experience and interpretation. This diversity, however, is not identical to the relativity of points of view; it is not so much a horizontal difference of points of view but rather a vertical

difference of levels of experience, a multiplicity sustaining the unity of the work. *The Passions* constitute Viola's *explicit* attempt to create the affection-image. Such an aspiration is not new, on the contrary, it has been underlying all his earlier work even if only implicitly; here, however, it also becomes the *theme*. But as we will argue, the attempt to explicate affection and to represent pure passion creates a decisive ambiguity in the work.

All videos in *The Passions* consist in frontal close-up (*Anima, Four Hands*) or medium shots (the *Quintets* series) with a static camera. The latter, however, are treated as and function as the former, with the sole difference that what is in close-up view now is a group of people, rather than a face or bodily part. This is achieved by the compression of depth on a flat surface and the particular usage of light, which, much like in medieval religious painting, illuminates the action in the foreground while obscuring all background.

Deleuze in the *Cinema* books identifies the close-up as the affection-image by arguing that "the affection-image is the close-up and the close-up is the face". The identification of the close-up to the face as affection-images is instructive for the former's function. He writes in relation to the face that:

When a part of the body has had to sacrifice most of its motoricity in order to become the support for organs of reception, the principal feature of these will now only be tendencies to movement or micro-movements which are capable of entering into intensive series, for a single organ or from one organ to the other. The moving body has lost its *movement of extension*, and movement has become *movement of expression*. It is this combination of a reflecting, immobile unity and of intensive expressive movements, which constitutes the affect [emphasis mine] [C1, 87].

The close-up, like the face, has lost its mobility, not because the camera remains static but because it is deprived from the capacity to describe an action. Movement is not absent from the close-up nor is it merely cut out of the frame; rather closeness condenses it implicitly, as if what is lost in extension is gained in intension. The inhibition of explicating movement in the action turns it back upon itself, radiating as expression. The close-up then is not defined extensively as measuring a distance (between the camera and the object shot) but intensively, for its virtual capacity to enfold movement in expression. It is in this sense that, according to Deleuze, a particular treatment of light and depth may render the medium- or full-shot to also function *as* close-ups, that is, to double themselves as affection rather than only perception-images.¹⁵⁸

In the *Quintet of the Astonished* a group of five people, standing close together, are seen undergoing the experience of an intense emotion, which like a thread traverses each one of them while simultaneously holding them together. Although “the five individuals experience the rising emotional energy independently, with no acknowledgment or direct interaction with their companions, other than occasional physical contact due to their close proximity”¹⁵⁹ – and as such they are undergoing the emotional experience individually – as viewers, we are bound to look at them as a whole. The specificity of the close-up function of the camera consists in a double operation of *condensation* and *abstraction*, by which the individual experiences are not simply turned into a collective one, but even more, the individuals themselves are becoming parts of the

¹⁵⁸ C1, 107.

¹⁵⁹ From the description of the *Quintet Series*, in the exhibition catalogue *Bill Viola: The Passions*, John Walsh (ed.) (London and Los Angeles in association with The National Gallery and The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003).

unfolding whole of emotion. In other words, this is not a piece about five people *in* astonishment but rather about astonishment itself; not so much as a feeling but as a *rhythmical compound*. Accordingly, what is delivered in close-up view is the aggregate itself as an emergent choreography of movement, which envelops the individual constituent parts.¹⁶⁰

Deleuze ascribes to the close-up "the power to tear away the image from its spatio-temporal co-ordinates in order to call forth the pure affect as the expressed" [C1, 96]. The fragmentation operated by the close-up has nothing to do with a partial object as it neither creates a continuity nor marks an essential discontinuity in the sequence of images; instead, it creates different levels of their experience.¹⁶¹ He writes:

As Balazs has already accurately demonstrated, the close-up does *not* tear away its object from a set of which it would form part, of which it would be a part but on the contrary *it abstracts from all spatio-temporal co-ordinates*, that is to say it raises it to the state of Entity. The close-up is not an enlargement and, if it implies a change of dimension, this is an absolute change: a mutation of movement which ceases to be translation in order to become expression [C1, 95-96].

¹⁶⁰ It is interesting that, although the actors were not necessarily feeling the same emotions – ranging from joy, sorrow, anger, fear – nor expressing them in the same way, what held them together was the traversing thread of intensity, or in Viola's formulation 'the arc of intensity', which gave the piece "an emotional and physical shape". In other words, what rendered form to the aggregate was not a common emotional quality, nor any intentional form of communication or interactivity between the actors but only a power of intensity, which initially was enveloped in their expression but consequently they became enveloped in it. See also the description of an actor, in *ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁶¹ According to Deleuze, both psychoanalysis and linguistics miss the point when they view the close-up as presenting "a partial object, detached from a set of which it would form part" and consequently discover in this fragmentation a structure of the unconscious (castration) or a constitutive procedure of language (synecdoche) [C1, 95].

The abstraction "from all spatio-temporal co-ordinates" signifies primarily the extraction of the image from the empirical order of linear time and spatial perception. The close-up, by tearing the image from the narrative sequence of which it forms part, does not simply disrupt the action but rather, by cutting its link, it also performs a leap on the level of experience. The abstraction of the object does not turn it into a general concept, but on the contrary, it *de-signifies* it. Signification is tied up with action since it does not so much concern the thing itself but *our* interest in it (for action); as a result the object's detachment from action equally dissolves its signification, suspending it in its a-signifying material excess. Such a thing, in its overflowing materiality, resists its appropriation by conscious perception, not because we do not recognise it but because we do not know how to use it; and since it can no longer function as a means to the end of action, it becomes an end in itself to which we can only relate in the mode of affection.

Moreover, the abstraction of the thing from its spatio-temporal co-ordinates does not render it a-temporal nor general. In the case of the close-up, abstraction does not consist in tearing away from the empirical conditions; it does not mutilate the object from its sensuous particular context in order to assimilate it to the generality of the concept. It does not cut off from extension if only to condense it in the minute, activating in matter its intensive depth or else, its virtual capacity for affection.

Viola's work also focuses on the minute details of facial and bodily expressions not only in the spatial mode of the close-up but also in the temporal mode of extreme slowness. Slowness (and slow motion) is favoured and recurs in Viola's

works.¹⁶² It is mostly in his installations that slowness becomes the exemplary rhythm of the affection-image. Slow motion here is achieved as the perceptual effect of running at a normal speed what was shot at a very high speed. For the viewer, the difference between slow-motion and this kind of temporal conversion consists in the degree of clarity and visual detail of the image, for the two ways of temporal extension correspond to different technical/conceptual principles; in the first case (that of the slow-motion) the instant is *stretched* in order to occupy a longer duration, while in the second, it is *unlocked* in tiny, constitutive temporal units. In both cases time is treated as a co-ordinate of space (whether as a material or an informational unit) rather than as its radical difference; nevertheless, we could say that in the latter case we have a more detailed *description* of the constitution and experience of time.

Viola shot the *Quintet of the Astonished* on high-speed film (384 fps) which he then played back at normal speed (24 fps now channelled through video's 30 fps). The result is a radically slowed down movement and a highly resolute expression, exposing us to the minute details of its occurrence, which pass imperceptibly not as a result of our lack of attention but rather because they stand outside the temporal threshold of normal perception. As we have said earlier, the basic cinematographic principle of running the film at 24 fps corresponds to the requirements of the active body and the conscious perception of movement. Movement however, happens constantly and continuously far beyond this limit, and this excessive aspect of

¹⁶² In Viola's video installations slowness is extensively used in the creation of the affection-image. The reason why we have not discussed any of his video installations, which create environments of vision and sound, is that it shifts the role of the body in the experience of the work and would require a more extensive discussion. Instead we wanted to stay with the paradigm of vision.

its constitution we (subconsciously) contract it *in* our (conscious) perception. Shooting at 384 fps, the camera's eye *perceives* roughly 16 times faster than humans do; this inhuman perception when translated into the human perception (video's 30 fps) analyses what we contract. In other words it brings to conscious visual perception what was formerly only unconsciously experienced by a passive or affective body, which means that it renders to actual perception what remained virtual in it. But what are the *affective* consequences of such a move? Mark Hansen in his book *New Philosophy for New Media* writes:

[w]hen the viewer takes in this intensely oversaturated temporal object, the guiding mechanism of cinematic temporality – the perceptual coincidence between the flux of the film and that of consciousness – gives way to a kind of affective contagion through which consciousness, by being put face-to-face with what it cannot properly perceive and yet what constitutes the very condition out of which the perceivable emerges, undergoes a profound self-affection. In this incredibly intense experience, consciousness is made to live through (affectively, not perceptually) the very process through which it continually emerges, from moment to moment, as a selection from a nonlived strictly contemporaneous with it.¹⁶³

Hansen believes that in this video piece we are made to perceive the (normally unperceived) process from which perception emerges, and that through this encounter with its affective double, consciousness “undergoes a profound self-affection”. The latter assumption however, is highly

¹⁶³ Mark B. N. Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004) p. 265.

problematic since it equates conscious perception – and thus *knowledge* – of the affective substratum of perception with the experience of affection itself; and this is because he has made an earlier reduction in assuming that we come to face the affective process itself, while we only face its perceivable aspect (rather than the affective). For as we have already argued earlier, Viola's technique in *The Passions* consists in analysing what our normal perception contracts. However, it remains a question whether expression is only a contracted movement, that is whether it is the explication of time in space that is, movement, yet with the sole difference that it happens faster and cannot be consciously perceived. Hansen equates the two when he concludes that:

Viola's work can thus be said to *enlarge* the now by putting perception into the service of affection, or in other words, by opening perception to the very principle of its own self-perpetuation, to its own radical imperceptible – affectivity. In this way, Viola's work anticipates a new configuration of human experience and machinic recording that can help us tap into the potential that "machine time" holds extending the scope of the perceptual now and thus, in a way that pushes the Bergsonist vocation toward its most radical potential, for *expanding* our grasp over the material world¹⁶⁴ [emphases mine].

Hansen's 'enlarged now' is only quantitatively enlarged not qualitatively deepened. When he explains that "by oversaturating the now with information, [new media] enlarges it, and by enlarging it, catalyzes the self-affection of consciousness that is constitutive of time-consciousness";¹⁶⁵ he neglects the difference in kind between perception (actual) and

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

affection (virtual), which can only be bridged in a leap of intuition rather than in a continuous quantitative expansion.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, in our view, his interpretation over-intellectualises Viola's work and misses the ambiguity enveloped in the image.

The series is called *The Passions*, but in its realisation it ends up becoming something different. For by depicting *pure* passion, and thus to *thematize* pure emotion as an autonomous entity, Viola abstracts it, in exactly the same way that the close-up abstracts its object. In films however, the close-up constitutes one instance of the shot among others (medium and long shots, tracking shots and long takes etc.) and it realises its function as affection-image, not only in and by itself but mainly in the *dynamic* of its relation to perception and action-images. It is only when *implicated* in a spatio-temporal order, that the close-up can *abstract* from it; for otherwise, any 'abstract' order by-itself very soon becomes consolidated to just *another* order.¹⁶⁷ Emotions are no longer implicated in actions but are treated as pure instances, no longer impending upon their causes and conditions. The first consequence of this move is that the viewer cannot share the emotion because he is not given the conditions of its emergence in order to *participate* experientially, but he is only *shown* it; in

¹⁶⁶ In other words, Hansen repeats the same obliteration of heterogeneity that Bergson had accused of associationism. The latter believed that the principles of similarity and contagion are enough to take us from perception to memory; similarly for Hansen we can get from perception to affection simply by expanding our perception. Bergson, however, absolutely insisted on the *discontinuity* of the passage from perception to memory despite the continuity of the reverse process, namely from memory to perception.

¹⁶⁷ The claim put forth does not assume the close-up in *juxtaposition* to the long or medium shot stressing the necessity for a *dialectical* relation. Rather, what is suggested here is that the affection-image is not constituted *by* the close-up but in a difference created in its implication to different types of shots. According to Deleuze the shot is only a *relatively* closed set since it is always linked to other shots as ensembles and to the film as a Whole. This fundamental openness of every shot implicates it into movement in general and thus guarantees its movement of expression. This means that the affection-image cannot be viewed as a *property* of the close-up, considered as spatial configuration, but only as its *expression*.

this latter case the intensity of emotion becomes explicated in the body's image. The passions then are rendered visual and the viewer is led to envisage them as *images* rather than sharing their experience emotionally.

Thus for example, *Silent Mountain* is a study of "the onset and aftermath of an explosive emotional outburst as it courses through the human body". The gradual intensification of emotion is rendered visible through the body's tropisms: the expanded veins on the neck, intensified wrinkles, hollows. Body and face are taken to their edges, deforming themselves through expansions and cuts - a face/body which is no more human, than animal, than desert. The 'thread of intensity' permeating the actors is also like a force, which has assumed the whole body, but in a movement of paramorphosis (or of metamorphosis?). And where has it sprung from? Where did it reside before? What is it that strives to come out in a cry?

But violence is betrayed by slowness. Slowness relaxes the violent impetus into a visible movement. The explosive outburst and the force it releases are contradicted by the aerial movement of the hair. Is this after all, the lightness of passion? Various questions (without answers necessarily) may arise from these images: is passion a cathartic lightness? Is it only human or is it of the world? What accounts for the different intensive weight it assumes in the two orders?

On another level, as we have already mentioned, *The Passions* instantiate the appropriation and repetition of devotional Medieval and Renaissance painting by the new media technologies. Considering the profound auratic quality of those paintings, it is really a question of how this aura could ever be reproduced or what it becomes in the age of new media. The high-speed camera delivers images, which do not only

describe every little detail of facial expression, but also present a striking clarity and vividness of colour. One might say that technology restores to a vibrant perception the luminosity of things normal perception has lost. What differentiates these works from the early paintings (besides the former's unfolding in a movement the instant that the latter contract) is an imperceptible sense of 'flatness' of the image.

Now, this kind of flatness is not like the 'condensation of depth on the surface'; the latter refers to the image as representation even if this is only the *way* the representation is given, while the former attaches itself to the image as presentation, as object itself. The dense shine of oils, a certain coarseness of the layers of paint, a mysterious 'weight' colours carry on their surface - such invisible sensations residing on 'oil on canvas' render light and matter adjacent to the coloured surface. On the plasma screen of digital technology, colours assume a sleek quality, almost artificial, or flat - a luminosity *without* matter.

In the essay entitled "A Small History of Photography" Walter Benjamin finds in early photography a particular aura, "an atmospheric medium, that lent fullness and security to the gaze even as it penetrated that medium". These early pictures did not just capture the image of reality but they somehow sipped its whole atmosphere. He writes:

[t]he expressive coherence due to the length of time the subject had to remain still", says Orlik of early photography, "is the main reason why these photographs, apart from their simplicity, resemble well drawn or painted pictures and produce a more vivid and lasting impression on the beholder than more recent photographs." The procedure itself caused the subject to *focus his life* in the moment rather than hurrying on past it; during the considerable period of the exposure, the subject

as it were grew into the picture, in the sharpest contrast with appearances in a snap-shot. [...] Everything about these early pictures was built to last¹⁶⁸ [emphasis mine].

For Benjamin, it is as if the long exposure time allows duration to soak through the image. The *lasting* impression has nothing to do with the intentionality of the photographed subject; rather it is a modest and dense way that he delivers himself. The interval of long exposure entwines the quantitative (duration of exposure) to the qualitative – *to focus his life*, with the result that the developed image contracts in the instant an infinite duration.

In such an interpretation of technology's treatment of time, Benjamin's 'aura', as "a strange weave of space and time" which renders "the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be",¹⁶⁹ unveils itself beyond the romantic and mystical idea. It attains an almost technological reality, one, however, enveloped in the metaphysics of technology in its relation to time.

Extending Benjamin's argument in Viola's video works, the high-speed camera has minimized the interval of exposure, and it has thus achieved perfectly detailed and polished images, yet with the price of having eliminated their aura. By shortening the interval of exposure in an impossible aspiration of almost capturing time, the camera has only achieved to perfectly capture time's inscription in space and emotions' disguise on the body, and has therefore translated tension to extension. Viola's works ironically represent the desire "to bring things closer to us", to capture and analyze them from all their facets

¹⁶⁸ Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography" in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, (London: Verso, 2000) p.245.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

and points of view. More specifically the question haunting his exploration is *where* do emotions reside? In which space/time? In which instant do they begin and when do they end? When does time coincide with space?

Despite the advanced technology, the camera fails in its aspiration to become *contemporaneous with time* and to capture the decisive moment. Emotion unfolds its slippery surface. The luminous, more-than-life, *airy* images testify to that minute ungraspability of emotions. Passion does not belong to time, not because it is eternal, but because it remains infinitely fugitive, even if it has to metamorphose itself in water or air in order to slip through our fingers.

Aura - that "strange weave of space and time" - is not a romantic notion but a historical one. 'Historical' does not describe a phenomenon which appears at a certain moment and totally disappears at another, but rather that tendency which runs through historical time in disguises, assuming different forms of expression. The aura of Medieval painting was entwined with a 'immaterial density' of the painting's surface. This is not about the materials of the surface but rather about an immaterial, which is bound to this surface; on these surfaces is accumulated an infinite time, not only of the artist but also of the viewers who have surrendered their passionate, dreamy, distracted eyes.¹⁷⁰ This infinite time captured in the poses of the painted figures becomes lost in the rhythms of modernity and under the conditions of art's mechanical reproduction; yet,

¹⁷⁰ This idea of the viewer's implication and durational *inscription* on the work originates from Benjamin who, regarding the relation of photography and art in the photographic reproduction of works of art, writes: "They [great works] can no longer be regarded as the work of individuals; they have become a collective creation, a corpus so vast it can be assimilated only through miniaturization. In the final analysis, mechanical reproduction is a technique of diminution that helps men to achieve a control over works of art without whose aid they could no longer be used." *Ibid.*, p. 253.

Baudelaire will recreate it in the image of the fugitive. In Benjamin's early photographs the aura becomes a sense of endurance or a lasting impression with an air of permanence.¹⁷¹ Viola's work offers us a lyrical description of emotions and expressions in order to beautifully testify its failure to grasp the *shifting* being of passions.

But the same technological principle finds a singular expression in *The Greeting* which restages a renaissance painting with the theme of Visitation. It results in enveloping in a slow aerial motion a luminous orange colour which cloths fecundity, the folds of a dress like flying in the air, her bending, the whispered sound of a secret, and the strict geometrical perspective. Thus the piece creates a continuous unfolding tension between the voluptuous and the sharp and at the very back it reserves two figures, which go almost unnoticed (but then you do notice) - the intriguers.

¹⁷¹ "Everything about these early pictures was built to last; not only the incomparable groups in which people come together - and whose disappearance was surely one of the most telling symptoms of what was happening in society in the second half of the century - but the very creases in people's clothes have an air of permanence." *Ibid.*, p. 245.

Chapter 5

The Creative Body: perception and affection in a plane of immanence

I. Introduction

In the third chapter of the thesis we argued that the work of art is in-itself and appears only latently; it is a rhythm that awaits the viewer to activate it. As such, the work of art can only in principle be distinguished from its experience, because it is only in it that it can live. But what does it mean that art lives in the experience? Does this recognition reduce art to a subjective and empirical content of experience despite all our efforts to counter this assumption, especially with the notion of rhythm? The aim of this chapter will be to show that art lives in the body and at the same time it generates the life of the body; aesthetic experience is a bodily becoming. This means that the

question is no longer what art can do but what might a body create? Affects.

But what is an affect? Deleuze and Guattari wrote that “affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them” [*WIP*, 164]. In this formulation they aspired to grant affects a non-psychological existence, which distinguishes them from feelings of pleasure or displeasure. Rather pleasure and displeasure are explications of affects - actual qualifications of experience - and as such, belong to a subject. Instead, affects neither belong to a subject, nor are contents of experience; affects are becomings, and if “they could be said to exist in the absence of man”, this is because “man himself is a compound of percepts and affects” [*WIP*, 164]. Thus affects for Deleuze and Guattari are a-subjective and necessarily embodied.

In this chapter, we aspire to show that the body is an affect. However, affect is a-subjective, in the sense that it happens prior to conscious and unconscious (in the Freudian sense) volition. This means two interrelated things, namely, that it already takes place at the neuronal level of the body before the emergence of consciousness, and moreover, that it turns bodily functions, perceptions and consciousness into neuronal processes. Whether one considers biological functions or consciousness, the principles of operation remain the same, they repeat different levels of ‘contraction and relaxation’, or else, different levels of intensification and complexity. In other words, it is not only that affect refers to a bodily substratum but rather that consciousness itself is an affect. Our argument is concerned with showing that affect is the rhythm of the body

which is constantly repeated at different levels or modalities of experience.

We will elaborate our argument by presenting the neurobiological account of the body. More specifically, we will follow Gerald Edelman's and Jean-Pierre Changeux's evolutionary theories, according to which the body itself invents and co-ordinates its movements without following the instructions of a transcendently given consciousness; instead, consciousness emerges immanently. Thus, we will show that the body is not given as properties, qualities, determined movements or capacities, but that at all levels it creates itself in experience. It is a variability, which unceasingly becomes determined (and re-determined) in action through selection.

We will begin our discussion by presenting the principal aspects of the organization and connection of the brain and the body and by showing that they are a single thing which occupies double (or rather multiple) temporalities. Moreover, we will distinguish between the two main systems of the brain - the thalamocortical system of perceptions and actions, and the limbic system of vital behaviours. Then we will turn to the problem of perception or perceptual recognition, and will elaborate the neurobiological account according to which recognition is not the identification with a 'correct' content (what entraps us in a problem of infinite regress) but rather takes place in terms of selection and re-entry. This account radically reverses our conception of the body which reveals itself as a continuous becoming - a process by which it creates both the environment and itself. However, the body has a practical relation to the world rather than an aesthetic one, and so in the following part we will attempt to show how the

effectivity of its actions is tested, recognised and retained through the affirmation of pleasure. We will conclude our chapter by recapitulating affect as the rhythm of the body - its singular mode to will and to risk itself.

II. The body and the brain: aspects of organization

In both animals and humans, the brain constitutes the central mechanism for the organization of sensory-motor behaviour and the anatomical condition for the emergence of consciousness. Neurobiology considers the development of the mind as embedded and emerging during the evolutionary process of the species rather than as transcendently given. But what is the brain's central role in relation to the rest of the body?

First, we will introduce some aspects of the anatomical, organizational and functional relation of the brain to the body. The results of modern investigations suggest that there is nothing special about the *material* constitution of the brain compared to the rest of the body; it is made up of chemical elements which form parts of intricate molecules and make up complex structures in the cells of living tissues. One of the most specialized of these cells is the nerve cell or neuron, which is the vector of electrical and chemical energy through the body.

The comparison of the human to the animal brain reveals a common general plan in the *structure* of the brain, which has been preserved in the course of evolution. Furthermore, in mammals there is a similar evolution and expansion of the neocortex (or cerebral cortex or simply cortex), the frontal part

of the brain which is central to higher brain functions such as speech, thought, complex movement patterns etc. However, the most determinate result of the growth of the cortical surface in the human brain has been a consequent *quantitative* evolution in the total number of neurons, which in turn increased and rendered more complex the operations performed by the cortex.

The body is connected to the brain through the nervous system. As opposed to the old theory of a continuous axonal network unifying the action of the nervous system, the *discontinuity* of the nerve net is now acknowledged. Nerve cells receive connections from other nerve cells at sites called *synapses*. Synapses are the loci of conjunction of an axon terminal (presynaptic neuron) and a postsynaptic membrane, "clearly separated by a cleft a few nanometers (thousandths of a micron) wide".¹⁷² Electrical energy passed down the axon of the presynaptic neuron releases a chemical (neurotransmitter) that in turn induces electrical activity in the postsynaptic neuron. What is interesting about the synapse as a mode of nerve connection is that the discontinuity it introduces to the nerve net does not so much individualize the neuronal elements and fragmentize the action of the nervous system.¹⁷³ Instead, we would argue, it inserts an interval or discrepancy in the process

¹⁷² J.-P. Changeux, *Neuronal Man: The Biology of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) p. 52.

¹⁷³ That was the fear of Golgi, a supporter of the nerve-net theory, which had taken over from holistic, even spiritualistic ideologies. At his Nobel prize lecture of 1906 he justified his insistence on the theory as follows: "I have never had reason, up to now, to give up the concept which I have always stressed, that nerve cells, instead of working individually act together. [...] However opposed it may seem to the popular tendency to individualize the elements, I cannot abandon the idea of a unitary function of the nervous system." Cited in, *ibid.*, p. 26. However, as it will become clear in the course of this chapter the failure of Golgi's theory does not renounce the view of the body as an interconnected whole, but rather it makes the mode of connection more energetically complex and less mechanical.

of neuronal communication; its function expresses *indeterminacy* even on the neuronal level.

The brain is connected to the whole of the body and the outside world. More specifically, it is connected to the world in two ways, namely through the periphery of the sensory apparatus and through the motor apparatus (musculoskeletal system). The sense organs are made up by specialized neurons (sensory transducers) which provide input to the brain and the cortex. On the other hand, the cortex sends its output by means of neurons, which connect to muscles and glands. Nerve fibers (axons) from all sensory modalities are sent to the cortex after relay to the thalamus. The cortex and the thalamus form the *thalamocortical system*, which is principally responsible for the perception of external stimuli and the execution of movement. The thalamocortical system in the brain corresponds to the *active body* - the body of perceptions and actions. Bergson had suggested that perception is interested because it is always directed to action; in this sense perception is also equated to action. Indeed the neuroanatomy of the brain confirms the Bergsonian insight, the sensory organs are connected principally to the back half of the thalamocortical system, and the front half is mainly devoted to action and planning.

In order, however, to illuminate the role of this system and its relation to the rest of the body, we need to talk about the principle of mapping. Maps are the projections of the sense organs to distinct cortical areas after relay in the thalamus; they relate the receptor sheets of the body to corresponding points of the cortical surface. We could simply say that maps are the *localization* of sensory-motor functions in the brain. Changeux describes each area as,

'represent[ing]' a physical *parameter* to which the sense organ is *sensitive*. A first level of representation of the world in the cortex thus consists of territories distributed like continents, each corresponding to a major category of physical signal, reaching the organism through impulses in the sensory nerves [emphases mine].¹⁷⁴

The whole sensory-motor surface of the body is mapped in the brain. Brain maps, however, scan neither a simple spatial surface, which is represented on the cortical surface, nor a ready made sensory-motor function (vision, hearing, touch). Rather they also *analyze* the sensory modality to its constitutive parameters. Thus for example vision is 'represented' in primary and secondary (association) areas, each one representing a different parameter (colour, shape, orientation, direction etc.), which is then incorporated in our single image of the world. In other words, every sensory modality is not only represented in the brain but also *analyzed* in sub-modalities, or according to Changeux, parameters of sensitivity. Consequently, not only every image we consciously perceive has subconsciously been analyzed but also we only recognize those aspects of an image which are represented in our brain maps. Nevertheless, it is not at all clear (and yet very crucial) *what* is represented in the maps, *how* this representation is possible, or even, whether *something* is *represented* in the first place *or* at all? We will suspend the discussion of these questions until later.

This great anatomical segregation however, is recovered by an impressive anatomical integration. All these areas constantly interact and are reciprocally connected with fast *reentrant* circuits, "a process of signaling back and forth along

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

reciprocal connections".¹⁷⁵ Reentrant connections constitute a highly dynamic and rapid way of neuronal communication; within a temporal range of milliseconds to seconds it allows the assemblage and integration of signals coming from different maps in a single perception. All sensory and motor maps constantly and simultaneously send and receive signals among themselves, which allows for the continuous coordination of bodily activity to the environment.

Connected to the sensori-motor body, the thalamocortical system 'represents' the body's *tendency* to the outside in its interaction with its environment. There is also a different organization of the nervous system, (another brain/body connection) which is oriented to the inside, to the body itself. This is the brainstem together with the limbic (hedonic) system and it is situated within the deeper layers of the brain. At its core is the hypothalamus, which is connected with a group of structures arranged in a ring-like formation.

This system is concerned with appetites, and sexual and consummatory behaviour, which originated from the more basic metabolic processes of the organism - its *internal economy*. Metabolic processes aim at the maintenance of the internal *equilibrium* of the organism - its homeostasis. In their simplest forms they are connected with respiratory and digestive processes, body temperature etc. As such, appetites (the term used by modern neurobiologists to denote what Freud termed 'libido') are more complex forms of this 'vital' type of activation connected with metabolic processes taking place in the body. As Luria notes however:

¹⁷⁵ G. Edelman and G. Tononi, *Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) p. 44.

[t]heir difference lies in the unequal *complexity of their level of organization* and the fact that whereas the first, the more elementary, processes evoke only primitive, automatic responses connected with oxygen deficiency or the liberation of reserve substances from their reserve depots in starvation, the second are organized into complex behavioral systems, as a result of whose action the appropriate needs are satisfied and the necessary balance of the 'internal economy of the organism' is restored.¹⁷⁶ [emphasis mine]

Despite the difference in complexity of these processes all pleasure and displeasure is the outcome of this internal economy, the maintenance or loss of the organism's internal equilibrium (homeostasis), regulated by the limbic system, which is also extensively connected to many different body organs. As opposed to the thalamocortical system, the circuits in this limbic-brain stem system are often arranged in loops, which respond relatively slowly (from seconds to months) and do not consist of detailed maps. This type of temporal organization was selected to better fit the aim of this system, the maintenance of a balanced internal state of the organism.¹⁷⁷

Consequently, the brain and the body are made up of the same materials and therefore there is nothing *substantially* different between the two. The centrality of the brain corresponds principally to its connection with the entire body - both the body of perceptions and actions, and the body of metabolic processes and appetites. The whole body intends to

¹⁷⁶ A. R. Luria, *The Working Brain: An Introduction to Neuropsychology*, trans. by Basil Haigh (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976) p. 53.

¹⁷⁷ The circuits forming this system "have been selected during evolution to match the body, not to match large numbers of unanticipated signals from the outside world. These systems evolved early to take care of bodily functions; they are systems of the interior." G. M. Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind*, (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 117.

the brain and renders the cortical surface the site of intense energy concentration.

Signals received by the sensory organs are processed to the brain through the nervous system. However, this is not a linear development but rather a discontinuous neuronal transmission, and this discontinuity introduces a fundamental *indeterminacy* in the body. This does not mean that the body operates on pure contingency and chance, for if that was the case it could never have evolved to such a specialized structure. Indeterminacy in neuronal firing is two-fold: on the one hand, it is never certain which, or how many, neurons will fire (as there are always some that remain silent) while on the other, it remains undetermined to which neurons the energy released in firing will be transmitted, or, in other words, what kind of synaptic connections will be made. Therefore, indeterminacy - which is neither pure chance nor conscious choice, but is bound up with neuronal activity - is the sign of the body's radical openness.

Moreover, what is the 'signal' that is transmitted, and doesn't it risk becoming distorted if there is not a single and determined path to the brain? It is important to note that energy transmitted in neuronal firing differs significantly from information processing. Thus for example in the case of a computer information becomes processed by being codified into digits 0 and 1 and then decodified. Information occurs as the *content* of the process of communication while the activity of processing remains external and indifferent to this content.¹⁷⁸ Conversely, in the case of neuronal activity, the activity and its

¹⁷⁸ That is why the hardware and the software are clearly distinguished and we can run "a given program on two digital computers of radically different construction or hardware design and successfully obtaining identical results." *Ibid.*, p. 220.

message *coincide*. Neuronal firing does not transmit anything other than *its firing*. However, doesn't the fact that in synapses electrical energy becomes transformed into chemical and then electrical again testify to a content of transmission? Isn't it a quantity of energy that is transmitted? This is only partly true, and as it will become clearer later, we cannot dissociate energy transmission from the process in which it is enveloping without committing the fallacy of spatialization. This is also why in the case of the brain - as opposed to a computer - program and machine "exhibit from the first stages of development a very intricate interplay. It's difficult, perhaps impossible to define a program independently of the cerebral machine's connectivity".¹⁷⁹

Moreover, there is one more critical difference between information and energy transmission. In the first case the content is already determined in advance, unambiguously. While in the second case, what is transmitted is something positive, but not determined. It is inherently ambiguous and only becomes determined in action, that is, in the process of transmission.¹⁸⁰

The discontinuity of the nerve net also entails neuronal silence or the possibility that certain neurons may not fire. However, it compensates for this potential loss by producing a more significant profit for the body. Synapses, by connecting every signal transmitted to several receivers, open up a multiplicity of simultaneous pathways and result in the

¹⁷⁹ J.-P. Changeux and A. Connes, *Conversations on Mind, Matter, and Mathematics*, ed. and trans. M. B. DeBevoise, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995) p. 168.

¹⁸⁰ Edelman repeatedly refers to the ambiguity of the signal in order to show how the operations of the human brain significantly differ from those of a Turing machine. He criticizes all attempts (of physics and cognitive science) to understand mind without biology. G. M. Edelman, "Mind Without Biology: A Critical Postscript" in *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire*, supra, pp. 211-252.

increasing complexity of the system. In the same way that energy is not transmitted like content, neither does it increase by *extending* itself to the brain. On the contrary, it increases by *distributing* itself to a multiplicity of different neuronal circuits; it infiltrates the body by spreading and contagion. This kind of organization results in the signal arriving at the brain analyzed and maybe partly lost, but in the process it has enriched the whole system by informing several pathways. The delay of travelling from the periphery to the centre does not so much enrich the signal, or increase *its* energy, but the system itself, which becomes affected in several ways. The intention of the signal to the maps is like a multiplied echo, a repeated firing which also results in its analysis; at the sensory organs, signals are more extended and fused, while they become more intended and analyzed in the brain.

Consequently, what differentiates a neuronal signal at the sensory organs from the one arriving at the brain is the *distance travelled*. When the nervous system of an organism differentiates and develops a centre and a periphery, what in fact has happened is the introduction of a spatio-temporal distance between the movement received and the response; in relation to its first reception by the body, the signal arrives belatedly at the brain. This interval introduces a temporal discrepancy between the periphery of the body and the centre - the sensory organs where the stimulus is received and the cortex where it is analyzed. The brain responds with *delay* to what has already happened to the body, it responds to what is already past. Consequently, the centre and the periphery of the nervous system are essentially *one* thing but inhabit a *double* temporality.

Moreover, we have already described two kinds of cortical organization and brain/body connection: the thalamocortical system and the limbic-brain stem. The former consists in fast re-entrant circuits 'representing' the body of perceptions and actions, while the latter is arranged in long slow loops regulating its biological functions. At first it appears that the one is a system of the exterior and the other of the interior. However, this is not entirely accurate because if the organism needs to maintain its homeostasis and even develops a mechanism for this purpose, this is because it is primarily the environment that threatens its equilibrium. Moreover, we know that the two systems did not appear at the same time in evolution, but that the limbic system is phylogenetically older. However, the two cortical systems are distinguished not only topologically but mainly temporally; they operate according to different temporal principles of organization.

The limbic-brain stem system is the more primal and extended system as changes in this system are slower, and its mode of operation appears to be more repetitive. This system evolved to regulate the organism's vital functions as responses to the environment's changes. It is not oriented though to the organism's interior but rather it creates an interior. The thalamocortical system on the other hand, the system of perception and action, was developed later and *intensifies* the relation with the environment. It takes the relationship of the organism to the environment further by creating a mode of *acting* upon the world. The evolution from the first to the second expresses the passage in the relation of the organism to the environment, from co-existence to interaction.

The development of distinct organs of perception is a movement of specialization, which brings the organism closer to

the present by giving it more tools for grasping present stimuli. The sensory organs of perception embody the capacity to analyze the signals received. They bring us closer to the present, for what was formerly only implicitly 'perceived' in contraction is now analyzed in expansion. Perceptions then *extend* us to the present and its analytic details. In perceptions we have limited the scope of temporal contraction but have been compensated with an expanded present upon which we can act more effectively. This is then also the difference between intensity (that is memory for Bergson) and intensification that is perception: the former consists in a temporal contraction while the latter in temporal analysis in expansion.

Nevertheless, the evolutionary tendency, which led to the development of specific organs for perception, cannot be conceived of as merely a mechanical process of division of being and the world. It does not consist simply in the analysis of an existent function but rather in an explosive effort which actualized an implicit active tendency as *capacity*. The creation of distinct organs for perception is a movement of *actualization of virtual tendencies*.¹⁸¹

Although sensory and motor organs are dissociated and represented in distinct brain areas, they remain connected in the brain and the motor system acts on the basis of 'information' derived from all the senses. The principal role of the sensory organs as our 'terminals' to the world, then is not so much to give us information about it, but to guide our action. They constitute our *grasp* of the world or our *capacity* for action.

¹⁸¹ Bergson distinguished between division of labour, which is only based on analysis and creative evolution, which consists in the actualization of the virtual: "[w]herever there is division of labour, there is *association* and also *convergence* of effort. Now, the evolution we are speaking of is never achieved by means of association, but by *dissociation*; it never tends toward convergence, but toward *divergence* of efforts" [CE, 117].

Perceptions *aim* for the world, even if they take a detour. That is why perceptions are not aspects of receptivity but, as Bergson had argued, *possible actions*. Perception does not bring us closer to the present nor does it enrich the present but rather it extends us over the present. Or, isn't it rather that it creates the present as the extension of being? This movement of specialization that is perception would remain analytical and extensive were it not for a significant consequence, on which lies its true inventive character: according to Bergson, the dissociation of the sensory and the motor organs introduces an interval of indetermination. Perception is only possible action rather than real (but this does not annul its actual character; see our chapter I, section IV. b).

[I]n the measure that the reaction becomes more uncertain, and allows more room for suspense, does the distance increase at which the animal is sensible of the action for that which interests it. [...] [W]hatever be the inner nature of perception, we can affirm that its amplitude gives the exact measure of the indetermination of the act which is to follow. So that we can formulate this law: *perception is master of space in the exact measure in which action is master of time* [MM, 32].

This temporal distance from the sensory organs to the brain constitutes the '*amplitude of perception*', in Bergson's terms, which conditions the indetermination of the act. By presenting the neurobiological account of perception we will argue that the body *creates its process of perception*. This argument implies two things, namely (i) that the body does not follow prior instructions (i.e. by consciousness) but itself invents its actions, and (ii) that perception opens to a creative process that is affect.

III. Perception: the model of selection

The problem of perception does not concern perception *per se*, that is how the body receives stimuli from the environment, but rather perceptual categorization, that is how it is able to *recognize* them in order to provide a *relevant* response.¹⁸² For the brain sciences, this problem does not simply concern how an action is organized by unifying its composite parts, but rather how a response relevant to the environment is made possible from the part of the body. Thus for example, if I want to grasp a glass, it is not enough to organize the movement of my arm (extending towards the glass) and hand (opening in the shape of a semi-circle), but these movements need to fit the particular glass whose distance and shape may vary. Since the environment is constantly changing, how can the body co-ordinate its movements to these variations, or rather how can it become synchronized to conditions of continuous novelty?

In other words, the problem of perception is a problem of recognition. Edelman's theory adapts Darwin's model of 'population thinking' in order to understand how recognition is possible in conditions of novelty. By inventing 'population thinking' Darwin performed a significant reversal in the traditional mode of thought: until then the idea of nature and

¹⁸² Perceptual categorization is the 'first' level at which the problem is posed – although the terms first and last have only relative significance since the problem is repeatedly and endlessly posed. Thus, for both Edelman and Changeux's perceptual categorization, primary and higher order consciousness constitute different levels (modalities) of experience, which are rendered possible in the course of evolution by increasingly more *complex* mechanisms and processes, but which are all based on the same principles.

species was fundamentally informed, in a Platonic way, by a model of pre-existent species perfection. Nature had been assumed to consist of classes defined by properties from the top down, fixed as self-sufficient totalities; individual variation was only a 'noise', the fallibility of earthly existence. Darwin's subversive move consisted in considering *individual variance as real*, rather than as simply noise, and as the basis of change. Evolution became possible through the process of natural selection of those individuals who could better adapt to the environment, leading to their higher rate of reproduction. Consequently, evolution did not aim to preserve the identity of the species, although it did work for its benefit.¹⁸³

Edelman considers neurobiology to be a science of recognition and his theory suggests that we regard brains as 'selective recognition systems', what

relieves us of the horror of the homunculus. Because diversity exists beforehand in a selective system, and because specificity arises as a result of selection *ex post facto*, we are no longer faced with an endless regress of information processors in the head.¹⁸⁴

There is no direct transfer of information occurring nor a central mechanism which reads or decodifies it; instead, recognition is selective.

Following his 'theory of neuronal group selection' (TNGS), there are three tenets one should explain in order to

¹⁸³ "Whatever the cause may be of each slight difference in the offspring from their parents - and a cause for each must exist - it is the steady accumulation, through natural selection, of such differences, when beneficial to the individual, that gives rise to all the more important modifications of structure, by which the innumerable beings on the face of this earth are enabled to struggle with each other, and the best adapted to survive." Charles Darwin, *The Origin of the Species*, edited with an introduction and notes by Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) p. 139.

¹⁸⁴ G. M. Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire*, supra, pp. 79-80.

give the image of how perceptual categorization became possible, and the first is the question of *morphology*, which is concerned with how the anatomy of the brain is first set up during development. It implies that perceptual categorization became possible because the body and the brain developed in certain ways which therefore bound this capacity to its material conditions.

It is the common view that the morphology of the body and the brain are, to a large extent, given genetically by the species and the inheritance of a genetic code. However, this is only partly true and closer inspection reveals great diversification in the morphology of individual brains within the same species. Diversification takes place during development and concerns the local connectivity of neurons. Dendritic and axonal connections within defined anatomical structures are never identical on the individual level but are subject to enormous variation and overlapping connectivity. Synaptic connections then become determined at their finest levels and ramifications developmentally, through a process of *somatic selection*, which involves populations of neurons engaged in topobiological competition.¹⁸⁵ A population of variant neuronal groups (or local circuits) is formed epigenetically and is known as a primary repertoire. The morphology of the body and the brain, and the material conditions for the development of capacities are not given as the 'hardware' of the individual animal belonging to a species, but rather they undergo many variations and only relatively become stabilized in the process of development. Moreover,

¹⁸⁵ It is not our point here to enter in a *description* of the process of formation of the primary repertoire but rather we are interested in its *principles*. For more detailed account see also: G. M. Edelman, *The Remembered Present: A Biological Theory of Consciousness* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1989) pp. 44-46. J.-P. Changeux, *Neuronal Man*, *supra*, pp. 180-186.

[t]he genetic code does not provide a specific wiring diagram for this repertoire. Rather, it imposes a set of *constraints* on the selectional process. Even with such constraints, genetically identical individuals are unlikely to have identical wiring, for selection is epigenetic.¹⁸⁶

Contrary to what is commonly believed regarding the determination provided by genetic information, the genetic code neither initially nor ultimately *determines* the selectional process but rather it only informs somatic development *negatively*, by imposing a set of constraints. Does the genetic code then give us the framework of individual development? Are its constraints absolute limits of the animal's neuroanatomical formation? However, if we assume as determinately given the *content* of any kind of limit, we cannot avoid evoking some kind of transcendent (beyond the reality of the body), pre-existent authority. This is a difficult and crucial question to answer, namely what is given by heredity? Although we will not fully engage with this issue, some of its principal aspects will be addressed indirectly in the following section of this chapter. Here, however, we need to stress the remarkable *non-linearity* between the simplicity of the DNA content and the enormous complexity of the brain.¹⁸⁷ Thus genetic constraints, such as phenotypic aspects of an organism that have been selected during evolution, rather than being absolute determined limits, they function as an envelope to the organism's activity. They constitute a form of resistance to its development rather than positively determining its course; it is the organism instead who invents the latter.

¹⁸⁶ G. M. Edelman, *Bright Air Brilliant Fire*, *supra*, p. 83.

¹⁸⁷ J.-P. Changeux, *ibid.*, p. 185.

Although they are dynamic formations, anatomical connections of primary neural repertoires as the material condition are not enough in themselves to account for perceptual categorization. Selection also takes place at another level - that of experience. Experiential selection does not involve an alteration of the anatomical pattern, its impact is more plastic and concerns the strengthening or weakening of synaptic connections by specific biochemical processes. This mechanism, which underlies memory and a number of other functions, effectively 'carves out' a variety of *functioning circuits* (with strengthened synapses) from the anatomical network by selection.¹⁸⁸ These variant functional circuits form the secondary repertoire, which affirms the role of experience and repetition in the development or atrophy of capacities, by stabilizing certain synaptic connections and leaving others latent, and therefore creating functional circuits, whose role is to facilitate the performance of an action. Thus, the body learns an action and performs it automatically when "certain preexisting connections are selected by activity or 'experience' without inducing any synthesis of new molecular species or structures".¹⁸⁹

But there is a further important consequence of this process of synaptic selection. It is observed that the same afferent message may stabilize different arrangements of connections which nevertheless result in the same input-output relationship.¹⁹⁰ The same cause may produce the same result while having followed very different paths of execution. Moreover, since the mechanisms leading to the formation of primary and secondary repertoires are interconnected, the consequence of such variability is that behaviour and

¹⁸⁸ G. Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire*, supra, p. 85.

¹⁸⁹ J.-P. Changeux, *Neuronal Man*, supra, p. 229.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

experience affect and may even alter an existing neuroanatomy – in which new neural processes form additional synapses – not only in the early stages of formation but also in a developed brain.¹⁹¹

The secondary repertoire is more dynamic than the primary repertoire. It is more 'flexible' because it does not effectuate somatic/material changes but only dynamic/intensive. For the same reason it is also less localized and more of a process nature. However, this is only a relative difference of degree; what is more crucial in our view is that levels of both morphology and experience are based on the same principles and express the same tendency: the primacy of becoming over being. They constitute the individual animal not as something which varies, but rather as a variability, which does not cease to be *determined* in selection. In this sense, the course of an action is a *process of determination*. Repetition strengthens synaptic connections and creates functional circuits; repetition affirms not only the past retrospectively but by strengthening the synapses it also 'wills' that something returns in the future. Nevertheless, determination is never absolute and every repetition remains an open event of selection.

A perception or an action, however, is a *unified* event rather than merely a series or an addition of selective events. These latter terminate and become analyzed into different brain maps, though when I see a round, yellow glass on my right side, I see it in a single, coherent perceptual scene instead of adding the analyzed sub-modalities of my perception. This is the 'binding problem', which has been a major area of dispute

¹⁹¹ Edelman gives the example of the development of bird song and frog metamorphosis, where the formation of new parts of the nervous system involving simultaneous primary and secondary repertoire formation occurs during behaviour in the world. *Bright Air Brilliant Fire*, supra, p. 85.

among neuroscientists. It questions how the integration of selection events is possible.

Edelman's response is that integration is possible due to the principle of reentry, which accounts for the dynamic interaction between maps. Although every map receives signals from the world or other maps (principle of segregation) *independently*, "within a certain time period, reentrant signaling strongly connects certain active combinations of neuronal groups in one map to different combinations in the other map. This occurs through the strengthening and the weakening of synapses within groups in each map and also at their connections with reentrant fibers. In this way, the functions and activities in one map are connected and correlated with those in another map".¹⁹² Reentry describes the activity of neural firings which go from one map to the other, through parallel, reciprocal threads connecting them, and then return (reenter) in a constant dynamic interchange.

Reentry is the *dynamic principle* sustaining all neuronal activity.¹⁹³ It allows for the communication between neuronal groups, local maps (topographically connected) and global maps, not by the transmission of some kind of 'information' in a feedback loop fashion, but through the strengthening or weakening of synapses, or in other words through *intensification* of circuits. The main difference between the two is that "feedback occurs along a *single* fixed loop made of reciprocal

¹⁹² G. Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire*, supra, p. 87.

¹⁹³ The unit of selection for the brain is not the individual nerve cell but "rather a closely connected collection of cells called a neuronal group". As opposed to the individual neuron which can be either excitatory or inhibitory the neuronal group is a mixture of both kinds of neurons and is characterized by a 'strong cooperative property' binding together the activity of the neurons in group. *Ibid.*, p. 86. This point also confirms that transmission and selection at synapses does not merely concern a *quantity* of energy. The same principle which binds together neuronal activity is also repeated at the levels of memory and consciousness.

connections using previous *instructionally* derived information for control and correction, such as an error signal. In contrast, reentry occurs in selectional systems across *multiple* parallel paths where information is not prespecified."¹⁹⁴ Information is always determined *in advance*, it is a content and constitutes a closed system. This does not mean that it cannot be altered in the feedback loop but that it changes by external addition. The feedback loop does not occur as a temporal process of duration but as successive instants (spatialised time). On the contrary, Edelman explains reentry in terms of *temporal coordination* or *synchronization* of firing neurons in functionally segregated areas of the brain. Exploring its function in a computer simulation of the visual system, he discovered that:

[t]he activity of neurons responding to different attributes of the *same* object was *synchronous* at the time scale of tens of milliseconds. [...] However, the activity of neurons responding to *different* objects was asynchronous. Thus, the objects were differentiated from each other at this time scale. Despite these fine temporal differences, all these neurons were active together at the longer time scale (hundreds of milliseconds) required for 'behavioural' output.¹⁹⁵

The neurological function of reentry requires as its anatomical precondition the presence of reciprocal connections within and between areas. This connectivity is not limited to a single pair of maps or to a moment of time, but is continuous and it involves the interaction of multiple maps, both sensori and motor. Moreover, due to a higher order structure of the

¹⁹⁴ G. M. Edelman and G. Tononi, *Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination*, supra, p. 85.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

nervous system called *global mapping*, multiple reentrant maps are able to interact with nonmapped parts of the brain. Thus:

[a] global mapping allows the selectional events occurring in its *local* maps to be connected to the animal's motor behaviour, to new sensory samplings of the world, and to further successive reentry events. Such a global mapping ensures the creation of a dynamic loop that continually matches an animal's gestures and posture to the independent sampling of several kinds of sensory signals.¹⁹⁶

Reentry and the activity between maps (local or global), are intricately related. For what is implied in both cases is the possibility of different neuronal groups not simply to interact but to connect their activity in such a way that would form a *whole*. What is most important and critical about reentry is that the *effects* of constant interactions constantly *reenter*. In other words, reentry accounts not just for the action but also for *its repetition*, that is, the possibility of being *retained* or of being remembered. Is then reentry a principle of memory at the neuronal level?

Following Edelman's earlier description, the coordination of neuronal groups consists in achieving *relative synchronous* firing. Discernment between objects corresponds to the differentiation of neuronal firing on a very short time scale, while coherence is given by their synchronicity over a longer time scale. But then the principle of reentry only describes the process of the *exchange of energy* between neuronal groups, areas etc., which by strengthening their synaptic connections intensify their interactions with each other (rather than with non-related groups of neurons) and thus *tend* to form a unified, or

¹⁹⁶ G. M. Edelman, *Bright Air Brilliant Fire*, supra, p. 89.

synchronized, whole. Rather than a mysterious principle which renders memory a capacity immanent to neurons, reentry as a materialist principle of energy reverses the order: it renders *memory a matter of distribution of energy*, a modality of neuronal groups' synchronization.

Moreover, according to Edelman's description:

the conjunction or integration of the appropriate attributes of an object to yield a correct output was not achieved in any one particular simulated cortical area or by just one particular group of neurons.[...][I]ntegration was achieved not in any place but by a coherent *process*.¹⁹⁷

Integration then is not only caused by a process which leads to synchronization, but rather it is itself a process. Integration is a temporal event and a process, and as such it can neither be substantiated into properties of certain neuronal groups, nor localized in particular brain areas and maps.

This is probably a most fundamental characteristic of the brain and its functions: rather than being a special 'substance', what is 'special' about it is merely its innumerable set of connections, which render the formation of a great number of neural circuits possible and unpredictable. Topology is also characteristic of the brain's impressive specialization (i.e. areas, maps etc.), but this is an intensive topology which renders local maps more cooperative in action. Nevertheless all brain areas (as well as the brain and the body) are connected to a greater or lesser degree of intensification, through longer or shorter

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

circuits, which means that any change in one particular area affects the *whole*, although in more or less direct ways.¹⁹⁸

Consequently, let us extract some conclusions from our discussion of perception. The course of experience consists in stabilizing and eliminating a labile variability of synapses. According to Changeux: “[e]pigenetic selection acts on preformed synaptic substrates. To learn is to stabilize preestablished synaptic combinations, and to *eliminate* the surplus”.¹⁹⁹ However, selection of neuronal groups and synaptic pathways does not consist in a merely passive elimination, nor does it simply realize pre-existent possibilities. It is a real process of actualization, which ‘carves out’ routes from a more or less undifferentiated field; in a single stroke, it differentiates and invents them. Learning an activity and performing it ‘automatically’ benefits action because it shortcuts the process of its execution to the stages which are necessary, while at the same time it also renders it economic for the organism to perform, since a circuit which is already ‘carved out’ requires much less effort. On the contrary, selecting a labile synapse, one

¹⁹⁸ The fact that the body and the brain are organized as wholes and that together they (in-)form a single whole is also made apparent in cases of bodily impairments and cerebral lesions. Thus for example, the loss of a bodily limb does not only result to the individual’s reorganization of its behavior, but much earlier than that such a reorganization has taken place at the neuronal level in terms of the distribution of neurons. This is the process of remapping, by which one area of the brain takes over the function of an adjacent area due to a lack of input to the latter (because of the limb loss). This is what happens in the pathological cases of the ‘phantom limb’. In such cases, a limb that one may have lost for a long time may still be remembered by the brain and felt as if it was a real limb. Various cases of ‘phantom limbs’ are presented in V. S. Ramachandran & S. Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain: Human Nature and the Architecture of the Mind*, (London: Fourth Estate, 1998). Moreover, Luria asserts the same for mental conditions, where a local brain lesion does not lead to its direct ‘loss’, but having abolished “the conditions necessary for the normal working of the particular functional system [...] [it] leads to *reorganization* of the working of the intact parts of the brain, so that the disturbed function can be performed in new ways” A. R. Luria, *supra*, pp. 103-104.

¹⁹⁹ J.-P. Changeux, *Neuronal Man*, *supra*, p. 249.

which is not yet stabilized, or an 'unusual' neuronal circuit, demands greater effort and time on the part of the individual.

Thus, action (and perception as action) is bound up with a double consequence: on one hand, it eliminates a multiplicity of virtual potentialities and therefore *restricts our world*. But on the other hand, it renders us more effective upon the world by canalizing and concentrating our expenditure of energy, and this is how, it *extends us upon the world*. Moreover, selection is an event rather than merely passive elimination, since it also opens up new possibilities for the interaction of new populations and the creation of unusual connections.

The body does not act following an initial, internal plan, but in its interactions with the environment it is constantly faced with new problems, for which it needs to find vital solutions. In the same way that the body is only given as variability, external reality itself is a continuous becoming or an unceasing movement of matter and energy. As such, it is positively, but without determination. However, the encounter between the *active* body and its environment makes the indeterminate status of reality into a problem; *the problem is the form of the encounter*. In order to act, the individual animal does not have to understand reality as it is, but rather it needs to respond to it successfully. The solution to the problem - or the determination of reality - comes by selection in action; from a multiplicity of possibilities the body selects and actualizes only some. This means that the individual and its environment are always in a *practical* relation, and in order to keep it vital (i.e. active) what is required is not identification of a true content but the invention of an effective action.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Bergson very insightfully argued against "the mistake of those who maintain that perception springs from what is properly called the sensory

In the selection and determination of neuronal circuits, the body invents the way it receives, analyzes and responds to the world. The same input may give the same output but by following very different paths of execution, and this is how the body *creates itself* by creating its perceptions and actions: not so much by producing a different outcome from its action but by creating its singular pathway of action, by inventing the process. Thus Bergson was correct to consider perception and action as being 'actual' and as taking place in the world rather than in us; input and output are external to us. Instead, what is ours is the invention of the process, during which the body determines and actualizes an undetermined given. Moreover, the development of distinct sensory organs, the creation by extension, and analysis of modalities and sub-modalities of perception are ways in which *the body analyzes and creates its environment* rather than analytic parameters of the environment itself.²⁰¹ The body creates its actions but how does it recognize that it was an effective action? Unless the body is somehow capable of retaining and repeating its actions, it would be endlessly inventive and only marginally effective. Inventiveness *per se* would not be viable. What measures *the power of inventiveness*?

vibration, and not from a sort of *question* addressed to motor activity" (emphasis mine) [MM, 46]. He therefore emphasized the practical interest of perception. That is why the activity rather than receptivity of perception was one of his basic principles.

²⁰¹ This view is also assumed by leading theorists of the school of autopoiesis: "The environment is not a structure imposed on living beings from the outside but is in fact a creation of those beings. The environment is not an autonomous process but a reflection of the biology of the species." R. C. Lewontin cited in F. Varela, E. Thompson and E. Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995) p. 198.

IV. Pleasure, value and the test of reality

The body's recognition of the action performed as the appropriate one, the possibility to retain and categorize it as it is required for learning, requires value criteria. Edelman suggests that:

[C]ategorization always occurs in reference to *internal criteria of value* and that this reference defines its appropriateness. Such value criteria *do not determine* specific categorizations but they *constrain* the domains in which they occur. According to the theory, the bases for value systems in the animals of a given species are already set by evolutionary selection. They are exhibited in those regions of the brain concerned with regulating bodily functions: heartbeat, breathing, sexual responses, feeding responses, endocrine functions, autonomic responses. Categorization manifests itself in behavior that appropriately fulfills the evolutionary selected requirements of such life-supporting physiological systems.²⁰² (emphases mine)

According to Edelman the bases of value criteria are set by evolutionary selection, though they do not determine categorization but rather provide its constraints. As was the case with the formation of the primary repertoire, the entwinement of the genetic code and somatic selection, value is given as constraint rather than as specific determination, which means that it is constantly 'renegotiated' by selection in experience.

Neural value systems are connected to the hypothalamus (whose maps regulate vital behaviours) and the limbic system, especially in the more complex case of emotions (i.e.

²⁰² G. Edelman, *Bright Air Brilliant Fire*, supra, pp. 90-91.

pleasure).²⁰³ They are implicated in the completion of the action, as by releasing some chemical substances (neuromodulators) they are responsible for the strengthening of synapses in a *retrograde* manner²⁰⁴ and affect neural plasticity, yielding adaptive responses.²⁰⁵ Consequently, the appropriate act retrospectively strengthens (*retains*) the synapses that were involved in its operation and thus facilitates its repetition. The implication of value systems does not involve the performance of the action but operates as an *act of approval*.²⁰⁶ By releasing chemical energy they “make final decisions about the *balance of energy*” (emphasis mine).²⁰⁷ In the neurobiological account, the act of approval becomes a matter of energy distribution and regulation, which repeats once more, the principle of the energetic equilibrium, which in the case of the living organism becomes translated as a homeostatic tendency. Pleasure, whether conscious or subconscious, is related to the maintenance of an internal equilibrium.

Freud had also provided an economic account of pleasure and mental processes, in addition to the

²⁰³ As we mentioned earlier in this chapter (section II), emotions are regulated by the hypothalamus and the limbic system. Although they take place as much more complex processes, they are based on the same principles as basic vital behaviours. Thus, pleasure cannot be identified with a specific ‘pleasure centre’ and it is recognised to be a complex process not yet totally understood. However, it is also clearly connected with certain chemical substances. But this observation is not really new; it is as old as the use of drugs. See J.-P. Changeux, *supra*, pp. 107-111.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

²⁰⁵ G. M. Edelman and G. Tononi, *Cosnciousness*, *supra*, pp. 87-90.

²⁰⁶ Similarly, another kind of neurotransmitters function as *motivation* substances. As Changeux rightly observes: “the sensations of thirst or hunger or sexual desire do not immediately lead to drinking, eating, or copulating. Instead, a state of *motivation* is created that incites one to drink, eat, or make love; it disappears after these desires have been fulfilled” (emphasis mine). This is the role played by dopamine synapses which can be regarded as ‘pleasure’ or ‘hedonic’ synapses, which “participate in the development of motivational states that enable us to ‘go into action’”. J.-P. Changeux, *supra*, pp. 108-109.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

'topographical' and 'dynamic' ones. He linked pleasure and unpleasure to the quantity of excitation present in the mind but not in any way 'bound', arguing that "the factor that determines the feeling is probably the amount of increase or diminution in the quantity of excitation *in a given period of time*".²⁰⁸ Unpleasure was related to an *increase* in the quantity of excitation, while pleasure to a *decrease*. Yet Freud further complicated his economic account in two instances: first, he connected the pleasure principle with the principle of *constancy* (rather than merely with the quantity of excitation) according to which "the mental apparatus endeavours to keep the quantity of excitation present in it as low as possible or rather to keep it constant".²⁰⁹

But he also went further; in his discussion of traumatic neuroses, he asserted that "the chief weight in their causation seems to rest upon the factor of surprise, of fright", which is not at all the same as anxiety and fear.²¹⁰ What distinguishes fright is the element of *unexpectedness* of the event *from the part of the individual*, a state of relaxation which renders the effect of the traumatic event much more intense. In all these cases, Freud's sophisticated and energetic account considers psychic energy not merely as a quantitative economy, but rather as an *intensive* one. Measuring the modification of the quantity of energy in relation to a given period of time implies that what matters is not the quantity but the intensity of the modification.

Moreover, by stressing the element of fright, Freud rendered the intensity of the excitation (as opposed to its quantity) as equally dependent on the particular attitude of the

²⁰⁸ S. Freud: "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. XVIII (1920-1922)*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, (London: Vintage, 2001) p. 8.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12

organism and its degree of relaxation. The intensity of excitation can only be approached in terms of a *differential* emerging in-between the organism's internal disposition and the external event, rather than in terms of a quantity, which would account for energy as substance. Energy as the intensive is always an in-between and never a substance. It is only us who turn it into a substance for our measurements. By pointing to the intricacy of the relation between the quantity of energy and the body's attitude, Freud did not simply render the intensity of pleasure relative and subjective, but rather he invented *intensity as inextricably and irreducibly happening in embodiment, as singularly taking place in action*. Furthermore, by inserting the dimension of "a given period of time" Freud performed a most decisive, Bergsonian move of reversal: he substituted for the spatial relation between subject and the event, the temporal relation of two internal psychic states - as quantities of excitation. In this single stroke he invents *affect* as the movement, which *envelops an external relation in internal differentiation*.

Although Freud did not extend his argument in the direction of time, there is an important consequence following his movement of reversal. It implies that although we are immediately related to the world, we cannot have a pure objective knowledge of the world as it is in-itself. The reason is precisely that we are immediately implicated in the world. We only come to know the world (perceptually or cognitively) through experience; that is, through the impact all things have on us and our affective response. In other words, although we cannot identify the 'true' content of things we cannot doubt their real existence; we feel because there is a world. And moreover, we feel the world, which means that to feel is to *implicate the world*.

In our discussion of perception we argued that perception has no theoretical interest in the world (it does not aim to know the thing in-itself) but it always has a practical interest in that it is a problem posed by the environment to our action. In the same way that perception is a question to *our* motor activity, affective states (i.e. pleasure, pain etc.) are internal acts of approval. The appropriateness of our action is always *tested in the world*. However, what is tested is not the correctness of our action in the way it fits into the form of the world. The world has no given form, it is a becoming. What is tested in reality is how an action on the world benefits the body, satisfying its needs and desires.

Consequently, the results of our action are not only external but also internal. The release of neuromodulators making final decisions about our internal equilibrium (the vital state of the organism) and retrospectively strengthening the synapses thus facilitating repetition of the same action, proves this: that every action is caused by an outside and that it is oriented and expires to an outside, which provides for the body the platform on which to test its powers. But it is only the body that can *affirm* the test according to how the action and the world had infused its vital powers. Our actions, once performed would be forever lost, remaining external from the body, unless the body, could appropriate its action, making it its own, by recapitulating in pleasure the expenditure of energy.

However, what is recapitulated is not merely the deed but rather the whole process of the action as it encounters and responds to the world; what is recapitulated is the expended energy. Consequently, pleasure is the way the body envelops the effects of an action and affirms it as its own. Pleasure or pain or any affective state, is the way in which an action is

irreducibly self-referential. Nevertheless, self-referentiality cannot be the aim of the action without annihilating both the power of action and of pleasure: the necessity of action which tends to an outside is the necessity of energy expenditure, and therefore self-referentiality can only pass *through* the world. It is only in this way that every action aims at the world but it finds its reason in life, and remains subordinate to what every single time is 'considered' by the body as vital, yet its affirmation *renders it life*, and makes it vital.

Truth is not external, it is not internal, it is embodied.

V. Affect: the rhythm of the body

The body is not one thing but the co-existence of a multiplicity of temporalities, of different degrees of contraction and relaxation. This is a vertical co-existence organized according to different degrees of intensification and complexity. However, all levels of organization (i.e. the thalamocortical and the limbic systems, perception and consciousness, vital functions and emotions) are interconnected, whether in more or less intense circuits, but nevertheless in such a way that everything that happens at any point of the centre or its periphery resonates to the *whole*. All levels of organization are informed by the same dual tendency, which is constantly repeated, and at all levels it becomes split again in two movements - a centrifugal tendency to action, extension and externalization and a centripetal movement of reintegration and envelopment.

We described perception as the process, during which physical signals from the outside world are received by the sensory organs and translated into neuronal signals, which are then transmitted to the brain. Brain maps re-integrate the analyzed signal by co-ordinating their neuronal activity and firing in differential synchronization. Perception then *happens* in a process, which is the time needed for the neuronal signal to arrive to the brain. But also perception *is* a process, a differential synchronization rather than merely the release of a certain amount of energy.²¹¹ The same goes with affection (pleasure, displeasure etc.). But both perception and affection are processes and rhythms, only from the point of view of a body enveloping them.²¹² This is then the persistent ambiguity that has constantly recurred in our account, namely why is the body a rhythm rather than energy since everything that we have described corresponds to patterns of energy distribution?

For both Bergson and the neurosciences perception is oriented to action and its exigencies (i.e. utility). However, if perception was *merely* oriented to utility it would never invent different pathways, for different ways of perception. Once it had created them, and tested their utility and effectiveness, it would always follow the same path. Even if it created anew, it

²¹¹ Our argument that perception is a process rather than merely energy release and that there is a significant difference between the two is also supported by the comparison of epilepsy and consciousness. Conscious experience is characterized by the occurrence of effective, long-lasting distributed connections among groups of neurons, and as such it is rendered possible by the discharge of neurons at high rates. Strikingly enough however, epileptic seizures also engage the brain in neuronal hyperactivity but are invariably associated with the loss of consciousness. There is a hypersynchronous discharge of neurons and neural states alternate every third of a second between unison firing and unison silence, as opposed to "the continuous switching among the billions of different patterns of firing observed in normal waking". G. M. Edelman and G. Tononi, *Consciousness*, supra, p. 71.

²¹² Thus we have tried to emphasize the *impossibility to expel the point of view*. This is not the empirical point of view of a relative horizon, on the contrary it is *a point of view which opens up all horizons*.

would be only in order to shortcut the process. In other words, the invention of new circuits, the elongation and complexification of the process of perception are totally uneconomic events for the organism and do not serve utility. If utility was the law of life, creative evolution would never have taken place. Utility then, is indeed a law that should not be forgotten, but it is not the driving force. What is it then that urges the body to the luxury of this process?

Neuroscience claims that the same input can produce similar outputs having followed very different processes. This is both true and not true. On one hand it confirms that life is a multiplicity of ways of living or that there are many pathways leading to the same end - invent your own, and even if it doesn't work, invent another one. But is that all? Does the process *make* any difference, apart from being just... a different process? Does it *produce* difference or is it only ornamental?

Based on the example of perception and its neuroscientific description, we can discern only this difference: the process of perception or else, the amplitude of perception, consists in neuronal transmission in such a way that it opens up to a (potential) multiplicity of connections. In this way, depending on the *openness* of the body, that is the time it allows for the transmission - but probably a certain effort as well, although a non-psychological effort but maybe an effort of life or a *will* - it invents new and unpredictable circuits, connections, ways of perceiving. But it would be mere anthropomorphism to think that the body is concerned with inventiveness. So, we arrive to conclude only one consequence of the process of perception and of the inventiveness it entails: the production and distribution of neuronal energy in the body. Or rather, the *production by distribution*; the contagion of life.

Consequently the process that is perception in no way has an aesthetic value, such as inventiveness. It has a vital value in the empowering of life and the generation of energy in the body, which becomes expended in action but is then enveloped in affection. Consequently, the affection of an action has enveloped the action as the amount of expended energy. With pleasure and affection actions do not expire in the world but recur to the body, which by expending energy it is also generating its life. This is then what renders the reality of the process indeed a *reality* rather than merely a succession of states, because it is not merely time lapsed but vital energy expended (or failed to). That is also why every process becomes irreducibly singular, as it is bound up with its spatio-temporal happening, and its reality is this spatio-temporal happening.

But the body would have no passion were it only for this creative vital force unceasingly urging it to create more, to expend more and to expand. The body is not machinic, but is truly creative, and that is why it is not without its darkness; the singular passion that does not possess or own or create, but rather is possessed by it. This darkness is nothing else but the constant *repetition* of something that nevertheless does not appear, except as a constraint and takes up various guises: in one case, it is the number of cortical neurons which cannot increase after birth;²¹³ in another, it is the constraints of the genetic code; in a third, the internal criteria of value which are selected evolutionary but only as constraints; and finally the paradox of life itself as a tendency to regression. Is then the creativity of the body, its generation and transmission of vital

²¹³ They are given at that moment and in the event of lesions the lost neurons cannot be replaced. Moreover, development of the brain and the nervous system is not the only tendency but it is also countered by regressive phenomena. Redundancy and regression is the *natural* tendency of the body. See: J.-P. Changeux, *supra*, p. 202 and pp. 216-219.

energy an expression of its constant battle against its own natural condition, its mortality? Is the adventure of the living body that of a constant effort to overcome itself?

In an imaginative essay, Roger Caillois suggested that the instinct of self-preservation and distinction is a luxury on the part of the organism, and alongside it, a dark process of "depersonalization by assimilation to space" is taking place - a tendency to exteriority and matter. He calls this "a sort of *instinct of renunciation* that orients [the creature] toward a mode of reduced existence, which in the end would no longer know either consciousness or feeling - the inertia of the *élan vital*".²¹⁴

However, the penetrating insight of this essay, its beautiful darkness, does not consist in the revelation of such an instinct but rather in something that the author never explicitly tells us, a haunting idea that risks itself as unsaid. Caillois's argument is driven by the problem of distinction (or its opposite, assimilation) as posed in the relation between the organism and its surroundings and clearly observed in certain animals' and insects' habit to develop a bodily organ or to make the whole body itself similar to their environment in order to imitate it. Isn't it this the whole problem of *creation as real becoming*? Not how one creates something similar, by imitating externally, but rather how one *creates something similar only by herself becoming it affectively*. In the course of his discussion Caillois will attribute this tendency to "the instinct of renunciation", a regressive tendency of the *élan vital* to become matter. This is his thesis, but isn't it rather something that he doesn't say that reverses his argument?

²¹⁴ R. Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia", translated by John Shepley, in *October: The First Decade, 1976-1986*, eds. Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Joan Copjec (Cambridge, Massachusetts/London: The MIT Press, 1988) p. 74.

When the animal imitates its surroundings it does not die, quite the opposite. Although, as he rightly points out, mimicry is a much greater phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a defensive or offensive mechanism, in the end it has to benefit the life of the animal in some way, and that is also why it has been evolutionary selected and survived. Consequently, we need to draw a different conclusion from the essay, namely that it is an instinct of renunciation that somehow informs or urges the activity of mimicry. In other words, it is always a death that conditions the abyss of true creation. It is only then that creation at the moment of the most intimate resemblance ceases to be something similar, and becomes instead *the affirmation of an imperceptible and decisive distinction*.

But how are the two tendencies related in a single body? The living installs itself, in a single stroke, as this ambiguous singularity: the clinch of life as a force of expansion, to its own caesura. The body is not constituted as a polarity of two antithetical tendencies, nor as a dialectic which overcomes itself in synthesis. The body is a rhythm developing in perceptions, enveloped in affections and enveloping its affect, the singular clinch. It constantly risks and loses itself in action, regains its energies and recreates itself in affection, and in every moment it is re-living its own passion, that by which it is possessed and which it will not possess but it has a chance - this life - to become.

Kafka wrote: "[t]here is goal, but no way; what we call the way is only wavering".²¹⁵ The body is a bounded surface, it has a limit, and the fact that it is not determined in advance but only in experience indicates precisely that finitude is not given

²¹⁵ Franz Kafka, "Reflections on Sin, Pain, Hope and the True Way", in *The Great Wall of China and Other Pieces*, trans. Willa Muir and Edwin Muir (London: Secker and Warburg, 1946) p. 145.

as a content of experience but rather as its form. Indeed finitude as boundedness is already inscribed in the principles of energy: neuronal signals do not extend themselves, they transmit themselves in firing. It is transmission that opens up infinite ways for the body to create its pathways, that is, its modes of affection and action in the world, different degrees in which it can generate and expend its vital powers. The process of life is not a procession to death, not really a gradual process of dying, but rather it is the process in which the living creature by inventing its pathways strives to make the mere form of its existence, its own creation and will; to create the singular reality of its passion.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis has addressed the problem of art in modernity identified as the separation of form and content, which opened up an incommunicable gap between art and the viewer, art and society, and between art and life. Art's incommunicability is *or* had previously been expressed in the doctrine of autonomy, which reified art into the perception of beauty, fetishized it in the form of the museum-object and ultimately commodified it following the demands of a continuously expanding art market. Consequently, the standard modernist demand for art's autonomy has resulted in a greater heteronomy where art has become subsumed to the institution and its power for validation.

Nevertheless, the secularization of art, (as the separation of beauty from transcendent truth) is an irreversible process; it is contained in the general movement of secularisation, and it is this separation of the physical from the metaphysical that has founded the modern era. This separation has inherited a series

of dualisms and, once established, could only account for the mode of communication between the split terms, as the activity of a subject and the passivity of an object. This is not only a problem of power relations and established hierarchies, but is also one of validation and authority of the active term itself. Nietzsche's 'death of God' and Freud's discovery of the 'unconscious', have shaken, if not collapsed, the ground of criteria for judgment, morality or truth and the guarantee of an autonomous, active self.

The haunting problem of modernity is how could one account for an immanent absolute? This question does not simply address the necessity to re-enchant the world from its state of objecthood, but is intricately related to the possibility of inventing immanent criteria for judgment, and reasons for action other than mechanistic, external causality. Art and aesthetic experience constitute an exemplary field for the consideration of this problem, only because the judgment of beauty is one that does not follow objective rules. And yet it resists being merely an arbitrary, contingent and subjective judgment; it aspires to reclaim a ground – this time, that of *subjective universality* (Kant). In this thesis we have attempted to show that this is a kind of groundless ground, *perhaps* the groundless basis of a rhythm of the body, of affect and of the felt.

Following Bergson and Deleuze we have aspired to give an immanent account of 'what is art?'; or rather, we have envisaged the plane of immanence as modernity's given and, following their theories, we have tried to think of the possibility of difference, or of the absolute, under these conditions. Bergson conceived in duration the idea of internal difference (as

opposed to ontological difference) and Deleuze created the plane of immanence as difference and repetition; we called it rhythm. Since difference is not simply added to repetition but is enveloped and enveloping in it, we defined rhythm as the mode of enveloping the caesura (difference).

In the plane of immanence things (both animate and inanimate) are intensities or rhythms. Intensities differ in degrees or in the way they envelop the caesura. Thus the inanimate, or matter, is that which infinitely relaxed is covered by the caesura, it has externalised it. The animate, however, is enveloping it; it does not fill it up, or suppress it, but on the contrary, it lets itself open to it, exposes and risks itself, and recovers. However, this is not an exposure to risk but an exposure to the risk of the will; for if the will is energetic rather than active this is because it entails self-forgetfulness. One does not simply let oneself go; one wills and is taken by the object of the will, to which one nevertheless strives to become equal.²¹⁶ Compulsive rhythm, mechanic repetition, the seduction of matter... '*Make me an object!*' But mechanism betrays itself from within, and every repetition brings back the unequal and the power of the caesura or the condition of change.

Works of art are intensities, indivisibles and wholes rather than assemblages of form and content or anything else (i.e. movement, in the case of cinema). Instead, form and matter are modalities in which *we analyze* the work of art. However, intensity is powerless in-itself; its power becomes activated at the encounter. Rhythm is the event of an encounter, where life happens - transmissibility. After art has been secularized, the work of art is powerless without the viewer; it is at the

²¹⁶ Thus to will is to challenge and render redundant the classical categories of object and subject.

encounter with the viewer where art is given a chance to live. But this is only because the encounter gives the viewer the chance to live.

Beauty is judged immanently, that is without pre-existent criteria. Instead, it embodies the invention of new criteria. But do we 'judge' a rhythm? This is a judgment performed by the body itself, prior to us, *ad hoc*. There is no difference between the perception of an artwork or 'beauty', and the perception of an object, because in all cases it is the body that both receives and recognises external stimuli. This means that the body is not only passive in following the instructions of an active mind, but at all levels and modalities it is itself body and mind, activity and memory and it disperses itself and reintegrates.

The openness of the body corresponds to the amplitude of perception that is, the time the body allows before recognition. However, this is not abstract time elapsed, but energy dispensed by the body or the generation of its life. It seems that perception of beauty and perception of an object differ only in the degree or the intensity of pleasure. Pleasure and affective states in general correspond to the body's making final decisions about the regulation of energy, and about its homeostasis; it is the way the body retrieves the outcome of its actions and envelops its expenditure. Thus, beauty is forced by an outside, or by the intensity of the encounter, which triggers a will – that is how it poses a problem. But if it is an intensity or a rhythm, then it has less to do with the object itself, as properties and qualities, and much more to do with our way of encountering it, that is how we have given time, energy and ourselves to it. In this case beauty is not our construction but we allow it to become in us. Rhythm means that we are media,

through which rhythm, as life, becomes transmitted and generated anew.

In neurobiology, every repetition 'strengthens the synaptic connections' and therefore also acts retrospectively. Every affirmation of the event, every repetition of rhythm or every time we say 'yes', we affirm the work as a whole that is now and the whole of its past. It is a whole that returns in repetition, empowered, and therefore 'yes' does not only make it pass the test now, but it also gives it a chance to recur in the future.

The idea of rhythm makes art an event of the body, not simply because it is perceived by the body, but because art gives itself as that fragility which will either be willed, experienced and felt all through the body, generating its life, or it perishes. In the plane of immanence and of rhythm, once there are no longer external criteria to 'measure' or to 'judge' actions, events and objects, it becomes clear that the impeccable test has always been a truth of the body. For the body itself as rhythm or as affect is the embodiment of a will or of a passion; how one wills is inseparable from how one is taken in willing.

But mainly, rhythm is a call to participation and sharing; it cannot be in-itself but only gains its life at the encounter. As such, it necessarily opens to a community. At our encounters one does not give or take something, but one is becoming in speaking, thinking or laughing, and one is therefore only giving oneself. The economy of energy is a non-linear economy of distribution which generates itself in transmission, rather than in reserve. This is not however, an abstract increase of energy but the generation of the life that we are. Although rhythm is never lost, it requires that it be repeated in the body, actualised

in memory, affirmed in dance and with it, not only the community of the past but also of the future to come.

Art, rhythm and technology

We have suggested the idea of rhythm as a response to the reification of art in modernity and we have let it unfold in the work of Theo Angelopoulos and Bill Viola in order to show how, through movement, film and video strive to touch the viewer in the creation of affects and bodily becomings. Film, video and new media constitute paradigmatic surfaces, in order to think and elaborate in concrete terms the notion of rhythm. This is not simply because these technologies incorporate movement but rather because they entail a profounder ambiguity, which moulds the life of our bodies; to think rhythm in these terms means to think the relation of art, technology and the body.

When art adopts technology as its medium of expression it does not simply use it in order to facilitate the achievement of its aims (a photograph is not a better painting), but rather it aspires to invent for technology its own expression. That is, it aspires to redeem it for us and make it ours.

Cinematic and video technologies differ profoundly in the way they incorporate time and relate to reality, and the consequences of this shift become most apparent with digital technology. While film creates time indirectly in the intervals

between frames, video materializes time in the electronic signal, and shifts the temporal paradigm from sequentiality to simultaneity. Digital technology shares with analog video the common conceptual basis of extending to the present – *simultaneity*. But it takes the spatialization of time further, since editing can now add in density without adding in length. Consequently, these technologies create a different metaphysics of time and alter the structure of experience by extending us to the present. In a paradoxical way, the extension to the present does not bring us closer to the real but on the contrary, it makes it redundant, as becomes apparent with the advent of digital technology and virtual reality. This appears as the threshold of a new distribution for the paradigm of experience.

The consideration of the different ways various filmmakers (Kar-Wai, Meirelles, Kiarostami etc.) and video-artists (M. Abramovic, S. Neshat, D. Gordon etc.) create rhythm would show how in the fragments of a suffocating extension to the present, one could retrieve and create a new possibility for affective experience.

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Filmography

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- Angelopoulos, Theo** (1995) *Ulysses' Gaze* [*To vlemma tou Odyssea*], Greece, colour picture, 175' (Grand Prix du Jury in the 1995 Cannes Film Festival)
- Angelopoulos, Theo** (1991) *The Suspended Step of the Stork* [*To meteoro vima tou pelargou*], Greece, colour picture, 138'
- Angelopoulos, Theo** (1988) *Landscape in the Mist* [*Topio stin omihli*], Greece, colour picture, 125' (Second Prize in the 1988 Venice Film Festival)
- Angelopoulos, Theo** (1986) *The Beekeeper* [*O melissokomos*], Greece, colour picture, 120'
- Angelopoulos, Theo** (1984) *Voyage to Cythera* [*Taxidi sta Kythera*], Greece, colour picture, 137' (Best script prize and Fipresci prize in the 1984 Cannes Film Festival)
- Angelopoulos, Theo** (1980) *Alexander the Great* [*O Megalexandros*], Greece/Italy, colour picture, 210' (First Prize in the 1980 Venice Film Festival)
- Angelopoulos, Theo** (1974/1975) *The Travelling Players* [*O Thiassos*] Greece, colour picture, 230'
- Angelopoulos, Theo** (1972) *Days of '36* [*Meres tou '36*] Greece, colour picture, 110'
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Videography

Viola, Bill (2000) *The Quintet of the Astonished*, video/sound installation, color video rear projection on screen mounted on wall in dark room from *The Passions* series

Viola, Bill (1995) *The Greeting*, video/sound installation, color video projection on large vertical screen mounted on wall in darkened space from *The Passions* series

Viola, Bill (1981) *Hatsu-Yume (First Dream)*, videotape, color, stereo sound, 56 minutes

Viola, Bill (1979) *Chott el-Djerid (A Portrait in Light and Heat)*, videotape, color, mono sound, 28 minutes

Viola, Bill (1977-1979) *The Reflecting Pool*, videotape, color, mono sound; 7 minutes; video still; *The Reflecting Pool* cycle is a videotape collection consisting of the homonymous video as well as *Moonblood* (1977-1979), *Silent Life* (1979), *Ancient of Days* (1979-1981) and *Vegetable Memory* (1978-1980).