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Complete Affirmation: Nietzsche, Critique, and Freedom

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M.A., Stony Brook University, 2015

Advisor: John Lysaker, Ph.D.

An abstract of
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Abstract

Complete Affirmation: Nietzsche, Critique, and Freedom
By Michael Chiddo

This dissertation develops a framework for evaluating the transformative potential of ethical and political concepts. It does so through Nietzsche's analysis of nihilism and call for affirmation. Nihilism expresses a movement of existential devaluation. It follows, ironically, from exclusively prioritizing the value of truth, which Nietzsche terms the will to truth. To combat this, he turns the will to truth on itself, less to embrace skepticism than to pursue its self-overcoming in an affirmative stance toward partial and limited knowledge, or untruth, in the name of values such as creativity, growth, and power. This process, I argue, exemplifies what Foucault later presents of critique as a practice of freedom. By reading these lines of thought together, I develop a way to assess the transformative character of political initiatives. I pursue this assessment through discussions of types of counterpower. I assess destituent power, a concept employed by various left-leaning initiatives such as insurrectionary post-anarchism. I conclude that despite their intentions, these destituent perspectives remain trapped in the orbit of nihilism. After presenting affirmation as a project of composing dynamic unities of thought and life, I argue a more genuine, affirmative approach can be found elsewhere, as I demonstrate through reconsidering, or completing, counterpower.

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Introduction

Opening Thoughts

This project is very much a personal effort. It is an exploration and articulation of several singularities: violent dances, recurring problems, absolutely tremendous moments, and total disarray. Like a philosophical transposition of the rhythmic movement between freedom and restitution, both personal and political—I won't begin by pretending that a strictly philosophical investigation of Nietzschean affirmation led me to sense its promise for political philosophy. I have been, for better or for worse, invested in pursuing life affirmation for a long time. Loving fate is something I aspire to; its promise and challenge have carried me through many long nights. Today, whatever it is I have become owes itself in no small part to the impact of that promise. With regard to this project, and at the risk of echoing Nietzsche's self-aggrandizing style, allow me to humbly agree with what he says of inspiration in *Ecce Homo* regarding his writing *Zarathustra*: I had no choice.

I might similarly express that radical politics have always been important for me, that my care for them has shaped me, but this would misstate things just a little. While I have been and remain committed to radical politics, the terms of that commitment have virtually always been sites of tension. More often than not I have felt them as problems that force, or demand, further consideration, resonating alongside my concern for life affirmation. What follows in this project moves through questions that articulate movements between that consideration and concern. They can more or less be described as follows.

First, *how does the problem of nihilism appear in radical ethical and political critique?* In efforts to contest a cruel status-quo our accounts of power often smuggle in moral semantics

that bolster our mobilizations for freedom. In a word, I think we take ourselves to be fighting the good fight. In fact, and in spite of (or perhaps because of) my Nietzschean proclivities, I think we are. On occasion, though, that fight gets the better of us. We drift into semantics of global destruction, of disruption for disruption's sake. This is not necessarily in and of itself an issue, and I am sympathetic to projects of disrupting power for the sake of creating something new. *This life is what we make it.* The problem, though, is that posing problems in this type of moral manner can undermine the very capacities for freedom, creative solidarity, and overcoming that radical philosophical concepts ought to augment and embolden. In other words, I think (and will argue) that certain contemporary radical political and ethical philosophies lapse into nihilistic refrains, particularly in their accounts of political-economic and social power.

Second, *what can affirmation do for the work of freedom?* Nietzsche offers semantics of power that break with and transfigure such moral-nihilistic terms into those capable of overcoming nihilism. To that end I extrapolate an *agonistics of power* from his works that provides important criteria for how we pose philosophical problems, because the manner in which we pose them itself expresses our disposition toward solving them, toward dwelling with, learning from, and overcoming them. I turn to Deleuze to ontologically substantiate (forgive the expression) an agonistic typology of problem posing. Problems, for Deleuze, impose questions upon thought. Questions are *cogitanda*—the pure elements of thought: they force it, catalyzing and grounding its activity in encounters that both exceed and qualify its searches for solutions. Problem-posing, or what in Foucauldian terms is called "problematization," is therefore a matter of conduct. Critique as conduct, then—when we pose problems by interrogating the limits of the present, we express dispositions toward difference—or, in Nietzsche's language, toward

becoming, toward the tragic uncertainty of finitude. If affirmation, on Nietzsche's account, signifies values that celebrate finitude and becoming, the conduct of critique, the *work of freedom* must become, on Foucault's account, experimental. Experimentation is not *skepsis,* but partiality and perspective—singularity—become active and creative.

Lastly, *what concepts can enliven and augment radical political projects of becoming otherwise?* The question, the problem, is an encounter with life as active, radical potential. If affirmation, as I will argue, has to do with *dynamic unities of thought and life*, then it ought to be able to invigorate radical potentials. But things are not so simple, for affirmation also mounts a challenge to the very terms through which oppression, freedom, and radical ways of life often become legible. How can we contest oppression, fight that which separates us from becoming and growth, and cultivate new ways of life without either slipping into moral frameworks that are hostile to life or, conversely, rejecting them and slipping into despair? If the work of freedom can survive, and indeed overcome, the problem of nihilism—and full disclosure, I think it can, does, and will—then Nietzschean affirmation is crucial to that end. At this juncture it is important to insist that affirmation is always an agonistics. As such, it is relatively far from tolerance, harmony, and peaceful coexistence; it is proximate with figures of joyful struggle, or gay contestation. The work it can do for possibilities of freedom and becoming is premised on affirming that agonistics. Absent this, there is no affirmation, only bad faith caricature or, even worse, an invitation to annihilation as absolution: nihilism.

There is another reason I turn to Deleuze. Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* is, as with his other monographs, far from a re-presentation of the original thinker's ideas. For Deleuze, repetition is always a difference. And while his thoughts certainly *seem* to iterate Nietzsche's

own, both semantically and rhetorically, they are nevertheless, *categorically*, repetitions of difference. Put differently, they are expressions of Deleuze's encounter with Nietzsche. What happens when we encounter a figure like Nietzsche? What do the thoughts he conveys become through encounters with our own? In my own attempt to stay close to Nietzsche, and somewhat similarly to Deleuze, my aim is to build momentum for transforming the character of the concepts I propose. Whether or not I get them *right,* while important for building that momentum, is not what is *primarily* at stake. Put differently, I'm in good faith that I drift from Nietzsche, especially in the chapters that are not specifically about his works. I know as well that I'm playing a bit with Deleuze, and this by shooting him back through a Nietzschean analytic, as it were. Deleuze's language helpfully inflects Nietzsche's towards semantics of difference, variability, and multiplicity; Nietzsche anchors Deleuze to those of active figuration, affirmative unities, and concretely formative growth. I take affirmations of becoming to invite these experimental movements. One can follow texts and stick close to them in order to approach limits, like thresholds at which thought is creatively transfigured.

Speaking of momentum, I should mention before continuing on that throughout what follows I often quote lyrics from punk bands close to my heart. I admittedly enjoy doing so, but it is not simply a stylistic gesture. Perhaps better put, I would call it a philosophical stylistics. These lyrics are refrains I return to for creative momentum, or moments I revisit to harness and exploit their transfigurative energies, like truths that call for a dance. Insofar as I attempt to iterate experimental philosophical thought, and inasmuch as experimentation requires we take problems *personally*, that we stake ourselves in them and craft concepts from material that is both impersonal and intimate—events that place us in singular times and places, that write

themselves into our skin—these lyrics, these songs, are materials for my own philosophical compositions. They are invitations into and responses to events that continue to express themselves through the trajectories of my thought and life. Thought as life, life as thought—I'm getting "my voice and my fist on the same page as my heart, as my heart."[1]

Chapter Outline

In Chapter One I set forth a preliminary account of how Nietzsche views willing truth, and how this in turn relates to the problem of nihilism. I argue that his early investigations, specifically from "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense" and to an extent *The Birth of Tragedy*, problematize truth as a matter of artistic figuration and psychology. From where these two perspectives meet, the will to truth expresses a valuation of existence, a figuration of meaning through a "mobile army of metaphors," that responds to all-too-human needs. These latter in turn refer truth to extra-propositional content—the rhythms of will and wave, or what Sarah Kofman describes as a primordial, libidinal kind of artistry—that are the *real conditions* of significance, even if not primed, so to speak, for strictly conceptual analysis. Contra some commentators, I argue that this is lost is we refer questions of truth solely to propositional form. This is not to say there are not insights to be gleaned from an analytic, propositional analysis, only that I take them to be largely secondary to the thrust of the work. The latter I take to open onto questions of psychology and typology.

In Chapter Two I turn to Nietzsche's drive psychology to extrapolate terms for developing an agonistic ontology of problems and types of willing. I argue Nietzsche's philosophical-psychological concepts allow for substantiating willing truth as interpretive valuation. Valuation

1. Defiance, Ohio "I Don't Want Solidarity If It Means Holding Hands With You," 2004, track 5, on *Share What Ya Got* (Gainesville, FL: No Ideas Records)

is tied to specific *interpretations* of experience; interpretation is folded into the ambit of certain arrangements of drives, or "orders of rank" in Nietzsche's language, each of which designate psycho-social types that seek opportunities to grow, to overcome and integrate—to expand and proliferate their arrangement, as it were. Writ large, as is well-known, Nietzsche calls this "will to power." Will to power is the subject of an ontology of psycho-social types organized via agonistics of power. It is will to power that interprets and valuates; it is will to power that casts experiences in terms of what in them can be overcome. To clarify, and to recover the joyful, affirmative potential of the contest, I expound on Nietzsche's sense of the *agon.* I then integrate it with Deleuze's differential ontology. I conclude that different types of willing, different schemas of valuation, so to speak, correspond to a typology of problematization.

These ideas allow me to in Chapter Three interrogate nihilism as a crisis of devaluation that has certain typological coordinates. How is nihilism a problem of the *one who wills truth*? How does the one who wills truth become the one who wills nothingness? *Can they become otherwise*? To ask the former two is to invite the latter—questions that yearn for new interpretations of morality, of philosophy, and of power, reaching out from their nihilistic spirals. For insofar as we believe in or *operate in terms of* a belief in truth—insofar as we maneuver within and *leverage* the effects truth produces on power and subjectivity—we are caught in the problem of nihilism: "'Either abolish your reverences or—*yourselves!*'" (GS 346) And who is it that operates in this manner? Who is it that weaponizes and leverages figures of truth, as it were? The development of nihilism, I argue following Deleuze, turns on the psychology of the *ascetic priest* who crafts ideals that separate us from conditions of growth, undermining possibilities of overcoming. Consequently I present nihilism as a proliferation of slavish types hostile toward

growth and becoming, mobilized by vengeance and shepherded by ascetic priests. And if we wonder where such priests may exist today, we have only to look for where the ideals are crafted.

Chapter Four is a rather pivotal moment in the project. I steer the analysis of nihilism toward the question of philosophical critique. That is, I consider philosophical critique in terms of a typology of nihilism. I begin by distinguishing Nietzsche's "perfect nihilism" from both active and passive nihilism, and this for two reasons. First, I argue that the self- and world-transformative character of affirmative valuation, which celebrates becoming, is at odds with the active nihilist's punitive impulses. Second, I take Nietzsche's characterization of his own age as one of "incomplete nihilism" to indicate that both the active and the passive nihilist are *conditions* of nihilism's perfection, or its *completion* in affirmative value creation, but that neither are adequate to the task of affirmation. This, I argue, helps us to understand Nietzsche's own identification as "the first *perfect* [*vollendeter*] nihilist of Europe" as well as to evaluate certain tendencies in philosophical critique.

Critique, for the analysis of which I turn to Foucault, unfolds in terms of a relationship to truth. The one who wills truth questions the limits of the present: of what can be known and tolerated in a given socio-historical setting. Doing so both undermines present arrangements of power and augments radical possibilities of resistance, such that the one who wills truth becomes the *one who wills freedom.* Willing freedom and willing truth are consequently genealogically entwined, such that the value of freedom is fatally tied to that of truth. Hence, *critique risks nihilism*. Without truth, or even truths, critique, as an *ethos* of willing freedom, risks falling into patterns of radical de-stratification that repeat moral-nihilistic condemnations of existence, as if *all* ought to be sacrificed or destroyed for the advent of our new world. Let me be clear: in such

affirmations of destruction I see a thinly veiled impulse to punish that thrives on castigation. Critiques that call for "active destruction" are the empty refrains of those fiending to punish the whole fucking world, spiting freedom for self-hatred. Typologically, they are far from any disposition toward creative growth. Now, in contemporary political philosophy (as I will demonstrate), one often comes across affirmations to the contrary. Destruction, they say, even world destruction, *is* the creation of a new world. In this, I see moral-nihilistic residue. Bad faith affirmations of destruction substitute semantics for a sensitivity to conditions of life, and possibilities of life are short-circuited.

In Chapter Five I trace such awry paths. Maintaining that the completion of nihilism is categorically *not* opposition to it—perfection is not abolition—I critique the concept of "destituent power." As a critical development of "counterpower" its origins are promising, specifically in the Argentinian Colectivo Situaciones. Its travels, however, are less so. Destituent power, I argue, goes on to iterate nihilistic perspectives on problems of political power. Giorgio Agamben offers a Paulinian figure of destituent power: a form of life lived in terms of the "as-not" that "deactivates law" not by opposing but by turning away from it, like Christ. Thus does it herald a "coming politics" premised on a rejection of all previous forms of political rule, law, and organization. Saul Newman steers Agamben's sense of destitution toward insurrectionary anarchism, and this through Max Stirner. His destituent figure takes on the guise of a nihilated ego. Lastly, the Invisible Committee call for "destituting everything," for turning away from all social, political, and economic institutions so as to let them wither, which presumably enables us to find each other in the ruins. In spite of their seemingly radical valuations of freedom, I diagnose in each case the expression of punitive impulses that speak power in moral tenor, and

this through moral-nihilistic agons. This leads to nihilistic politics inadequate to the task of buliding solidarities capable of contesting the problems we seek to overcome.

Pivoting again, in Chapter Six I return to Nietzsche to follow nihilism into its perfection —that is, into affirmation. I connect his ideas of redemption, eternal return, and *amor fati,* and I construct a sense of affirmation as the *composition of a unity of thought and life.* I begin arguing that affirmative redemption contests ascetic hostility toward and revenge upon becoming and finitude. Interestingly, though, because acetic hostility ultimately mounts opposition to *the world*, it generates a radical tension Nietzsche thinks he can exploit for transfigurative, transvaluative ends. *Completing* nihilism thus requires a figural composition that elaborates those exploitative energies: the image of eternity in eternal return. Nietzsche's circuit of eternity radically revaluates becoming. Eternal return ties becoming to singular conditions of growth, such that the *one who wills return* becomes the *one who loves fate*. And, crucially, the *one who wills return* is disposed toward *creatively responding* to the problems we confront by *composing unities*—affirmative unities that augment a reciprocity of thought and life through which we can continue learning to become otherwise.

I conclude Chapter Six with some critical refinements. First, I argue that affirmation transvaluates normativity, and is thus creatively normative. Because it is a harnessing and exploitation of the *ascesis* of willing truth, affirmation does involve taking up certain normative positions. The difference, however, is that norms are less criteria of sameness or predictability, and more like conditions of becoming. Second, I argue that feminist critiques of Nietzschean affirmation countervail the patriarchal tropes Nietzsche seems to uncritically adopt. Singular conditions of growth are not exhausted by the purview of a bootstrapping, self-sufficient

individual. They are events that invite a plurality of responses. This allows me to propose a sense of affirmation that is decentered, or shared out, insofar as our responses to events are never solely our own.

The final question, then, is this: what does this mean for willing freedom, for counterpower? In Chapter Seven I complete my critique of destituent power by returning it to a more active sense of counterpower that ties destruction to creative acts that can properly contest and overcome the problems we confront. Counterpower, in my view, requires building alternative institutions that can generate and reproduce solidarities capable of contesting the problems the one who wills freedom confronts. To substantiate my claims I work through Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's concept of "the multitude," gathering momentum from their argument that destituent power requires a constituent project. This sense of constituent power I then critically inflect through Silvia Federici's critique of Hardt and Negri, as well as her sense of feminist commoning. Through Federici, I argue that counterpower must be conceived as both horizontal and socially reproductive, and that this bolsters its movement across different contexts without glossing over their singularities. That movement refers to what Vernoica Gago, co-founder of the Colectivo Situaciones and to whom I then turn, calls a "vector of transversality." Gago's sense of feminist, transversal, grassroots counterpower provides another perspective on counterpower that, in my view, exemplifies its affirmative tenor. Lastly, to give a concrete sense of what such institutions might look like, I explore proposals from the activist group "CounterPower" for building and networking alternative institutions of communist counterpower that contest the political hegemony of capitalist, racist, hetero-patriarchal institutions.

Chapter One: Truth, Art, and Value

What is nihilism? Nihilism occurs as a total loss of meaning, a crisis of significance in the nihilist who laments the absence of moral terms with which to ground and give purpose to existence. It is a felt sense of valuelessness that disrupts the articulation of meaningful, affirmative relationships with life. Indeed, it is the extreme limit of that felt absence—the conviction that existence *as such* is meaningless, without purpose, and aimless: a struggle without value. Nietzsche describes it as the "radical repudiation of value, meaning, and desirability."[2] (WP 1) The nihilist repudiates value because they have confronted the impossibility of its inhering in the universe, the world, and humanity. Tending toward nothing at all, we are at most all born to die. More specifically, Nietzsche describes nihilism as a crisis that follows after "*the highest values devaluate themselves*. The aim is lacking: 'why?' finds no answer." (WP 2) The conviction of meaninglessness is thus the result of a devaluation. What are the "highest values," and how do they devaluate *themselves*? Perhaps more emphatically, why is meaninglessness a problem at all?

These questions express how Nietzsche provides terms with which to engage nihilism as a crisis of disposition through *self-devaluation,* a masochistic dissociation of value and life. Indeed, it is a *self*-devaluation because, as we will see, it is from their own terms of commitment that the moral values Nietzsche thinks lead to nihilism eventuate in their own debasement. In fact, taken as historical process, nihilism *is* that disarticulation. It is both a crisis as momentous and event as stretched across several moments. Assessing nihilism in these terms enables us to

2. While I cite passages from Nietzsche's notebooks as they appear in *The Will to Power*, I recognize that it is a highly edited compendium, and that its organization is not representative of Nietzsche's positions. I do not rely on the arrangements therein. My own use of the volume is for its translation, and my refernece to Nietzsche's notes are meant to supplement and expand upon ideas presented in his published works.

pose important questions about the values expressed in different concepts of ethical, political, and social life. In other words, Nietzsche gives us language for establishing the *threat* nihilism constitutes, and this in terms of a hostility to life mobilized in moral figures of truth. It is in light of that threat that Nietzsche also conceives of nihilism as something that must be *overcome*. On this point, his efforts are invaluable. For it is my contention that nihilism is a problem we—philosophers, thinkers, subjects, and any who remain in the cycles of nihilistic behaviors—have not quite seen our way through. We are still caught up in self-devaluation, still ensnared by values that undermine themselves—and us. And yet, in the final sense, the risk glimpses the reward: nihilism is at the same time the possibility of affirmation.

In what follows I extrapolate terms from Nietzsche to constitute nihilism as a problem of truth. In Section 1 I argue, following Nietzsche, that meaning is a matter of tenability and tenacity. It marks human investment in the world and in themselves. Meaninglessness, on the other hand, results from a disinvestment that derives in large part from a hyper-development of what Nietzsche calls a "will to truth." In Section 2 I articulate Nietzsche's understanding of truth, specifically as he approaches it from the perspective of an artist. I argue that art teaches Nietzsche that thought is figural, that its figures express estimations of life, and that truth is a figural composition of purposiveness and necessity tied to particular ways of life. Interrogating truth in this manner leads to the issue of willing: *for whom* is truth made? In Section 3, I conclude by anticipating Nietzsche's moral psychological account of the movements of self-devaluation that culminate in nihilism, which I engage with at length in Chapter 2.

I. The Tenacity of Truth

Nihilism can only appear as a crisis of devaluation, as "the conviction of an absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes…", if we interpret meaning and value according to figures of *investment*—of significance, value, and purpose—that direct, steer, and guide human conduct. Meaning designates the integration of human conduct with evaluation: it speaks to an *aisthesis* of significance, the ways in which belief, value, and commitment are intimately tied to desire, affect, and inclination. We can begin to understand nihilistic untenability then by positing first that meaning is principally a matter of *tenacity* and *tenability*.

Tenacity describes the quality of persistence, of sticking to something, like belief in the face of opposition. Tenability denotes a capacity to be maintained, to be held, a position capable of being defended. Both derive from consonant Latin roots: *tenere*, meaning "to hold" for tenable, and "*tenācitās,*" meaning "holding fast," for tenacity. When some thing, event, or thought is taken to be meaningful, it is *held* in these senses. I hold memories of my grandfather close. I care for and keep vigil over them. Their proximity to me is defined not chronologically but affectively: though they now reside in the past, they remain near, close—why? Why are thoughts, relationships, memories, and similar phenomena *meaningful* for certain people? There are certainly plenty of people who do not have similar memories to hold dear. Maybe they have others. The point is that a felt sense of significance suffuses our figures of investment, and in a broader sense, the *ways* in which what matters does in fact matter are themselves situated in different times and places. My symbolic relationships with loss are indexed with networks of signs I more or less share and participate in: we held a Catholic funeral, we wept, we broke bread

and shared memories. I wrote a song. These rituals sustain the significance of their respective memories because they repeat a communion between parts of myself and the world I live in. They recall me to the earth, to perspectives traced by the horizon of their concern. They glean existential and affective traction for a life otherwise characterized by loss, by the passage of time. Generally speaking, then, meaning and value are matters of traction, like refrains we return to only to leap forth in verse and melody again.

Nietzsche describes meaning explicitly in terms of value. He considers value to express that in some fundamental sense humans desire significance: they need tenacity. Interpreting that desire in evolutionary biological terms, he early on identifies it as a need to "preserve the species." (GS 1) Preservation of the species implies a kind of crude Darwinism, wherein value is selectively attributed to whatever useful traits enable human survival. Nietzsche was certainly interested in Darwin and advances in evolutionary biology contemporary with him, however his emphasis on "preservation of the species" speaks to a broader set of phenomena.[3] He sees it as the seat of human instincts whose ramifications into myriad impulses and arrangements radically differentiate human forms of life. To the extent that he insists on the primacy of instinct within them, Nietzsche extends "preservation of the species" to social, moral, and cultural phenomena. These phenomena do not always cleanly map onto a calculus of utility (such as that implied in a vulgar "survival of the fittest"). Consider, for example, the very first section of *The Gay Science*. Nietzsche opens by discussing preservation of the species, but then he insists that even folly, squander, and damaging the species has advanced and preserved it. He laments that humans have

3. Cf. John Richardson's *Nietzsche's New Darwinism* (Oxford University Press, 2004). Richardson argues that to truly understand will to power, particularly as it refers moral, social, and political phenomena to "drives" and "instincts," we have to understand the resonances and disagreements Nietzsche harbored with Darwin. See also Charles Pence's "Nietzsche's Aesthetic Critique of Darwin" in *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* Vol. 33, No. 2 (2011).

lost the ability to live like this, that is, paradoxically both for and *against* the species. Not even God can harness evil; not even God is capable of innocent cruelty. What's happened? "Teachers of the purpose of existence," he explains, have managed to insert value judgments into each and every event, stringing them together into grand narratives that inject purpose behind *every* action, and *every* event. In such figures instinct "erupts as reason and as passion of the spirit" and creates, as it were, reasons and purposes by which it effaces its own partiality as "instinct, drive, folly, lack of reasons." Thus emerges the "ethical teacher...as the teacher of the purpose of existence; and to this end he invents a second, different existence and unhinges by means of his new mechanics the old, ordinary existence." (GS 1) In place of instinct, species, and human tenacity is a world stripped of its spontaneity, its "lack of reason," that appears absolute, universal, and unchanging. Significance is thereby delivered into a world detached from the one wherein we desire it.

It is in light of this second, different existence that this one, the world in which we actually live, begins to darken. Ethical teachers turn away from this world and toward one that secures them, that affords existential tenability against the inevitable waves of change. Their lives are preserved, they achieve a position capable of being defended, by virtue of a dream world they hold dear. But of what do they dream? Paradoxically, they dream of *truth,* as if it were housed in the heavens and this world is but "the fiction of a god: colored smoke before the eyes of a dissatisfied deity." (TSZ "On the Afterworldly") Indeed, the figures that populate the dream world behind this one, the scene of significance, express a sense of truth as eternal, immutable, guaranteed by God or gods—truth as the apotheosis of preservation. The point, at this early stage, is this: *the tenacity of truth is a function of the psychology of species*

preservation.[4] And indeed, that tenacity harbors an intimate relationship to error, to unreason, and to earthly life—an intimacy it seeks to expunge.[5]

Insight into this relationship characterizes Nietzsche's eventual criticisms of philosophical prejudices insofar as they articulate disdain for error—a disdain he considers in terms of instinct and psychology—into concepts and ideals. For example, his criticisms of Platonic metaphysics largely turn on what he considers a disingenuous and negative stance toward the body, the senses, and the empirical world in favor of the "true" world of Forms: Beauty, Truth, the Good, etc. Platonic truth is immutable, eternal, and universal; it bears upon, but is not beholden to, the sensual particulars it shapes. The value of art, knowledge, and human life broadly construed are all determined by their respective capacities for cultivating relationships with "Truth"—for leading one out of the cave, so to speak. Through a kind of twisted logic wherein the purpose of human life is articulated through figures that oppose its actual conditions, value is slowly extirpated of any earthly reference. Now, the question is: what happens if, after a few thousand years, the true world itself begins to recede?

Nihilism, what Nietzsche calls an "uncanny guest," knocks at the door. Whose door? Precisely those who inherit an over-developed belief in truth as opposition to error and sense, to folly, instinct, and becoming—the substance of life itself. Nihilism occurs in the nihilist who

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4. Robert Pippin, in his seminal work *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 2011) argues that Nietzsche prioritizes psychology and refers philosophical problems back to the psychological dispositions they express. For example, when he interprets Nietzsche's passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* that invokes the image of "truth as a woman," Pippin states, "So the suggestion of the passage seems to be: think of our attachment to some ideal (like the philosopher's ideal, truth), some goal of satisfaction, in as complexly psychological a way (neither naturally caused nor reflectively deduced), and then think of that attachment as a condition of life, a condition of any practical sense in a life." (15) It is in this sense that I describe Nietzsche's understanding of meaning as a matter of tenacity, or perhaps in Pippin's words, of *"eros*."
5. Ofelia Schutte (1984) argues that the construction of the theoretical human being out of a Socratic respect for "Truth" requires turning "away from the life-affirming, ego-transcending voice of the instincts…," and that to maintain that denial, the instincts must be kept "under ever vigilant and tight controls." (23)

realizes that life cannot possibly attain to their highest values, those that transpose value into afterworldy terms, alongside "the realization that we lack the least right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things…" (WP 3) Damned on both sides: existence cannot possibly approximate truth, and conversely, humans have no right to posit a sense of truth in the first place. When Nietzsche states, "*Radical nihilism* is the conviction of an absolute *untenability* (my emphasis) of existence," he thus marks entry into an abyssal spiral. It is radical because it provokes and unsettles that most basic, all-too-human need for purpose, such that the characterization of existence as absolutely *without* value is at its core a matter of the same existential, psycho-physiological investment, that is, of belief and conviction rooted in the visceral world.[6] In short, the dream disinvests the dreamer, who drifts untethered from the reality they invariably awaken to. If existence is absolutely untenable, it means nothing holds us to it: no purpose or plan, no rhyme, no reason, no worth. It's unbearable: we can longer endure the world and yet we can no longer deny it. At most, we are all born to die.

The turn toward a different world is a function of all-too-human investment. It signals a binding law for the preservation of a specific way of life. It is, in other words, a fundamentally *moral* gesture. Now, how is such a world made up? How is truth *figured*? To understand this, Nietzsche turns to art. Art demonstrates the activity of fashioning *aisthesis* and *pathos* into image, tone, and figure. The construction of meaning is an art, an endeavor in the figuration of human investment. Indeed, at the heart of Nietzsche's reflections on truth, especially in their earlier iterations, is an insight gleaned by his otherwise intimate relationship with art and

6. For another insightful discussion of how the "psychological" merges with the "historical" in Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism see Nishitani Keiji *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism* (State University of New York Press, 1990) esp. Chapter 3 "Friedrich Nietzsche: The First Consummate Nihilist." Nishitani argues that approaching values from a psychological standpoint reveals the "nihility" at their ground, consummating the historical movement of nihilism in the self, and thereby enabling "critical reflection" upon those values that generates the possibility of value creation.

creativity. He knows what it is to turn feeling into music, and he sees in this activity an expression of significance. Through tone, rhythm, and melody, music articulates investment. Now, by applying this framework to the "teachers of the purpose of existence," we can understand how Nietzsche positions philosophy with regard to truth and nihilism. Philosophy, too, is a kind of composition of significance, inflected into pursuing knowledge of the truth. Insofar as it abides the sense of truth as unchanging, eternal, and transcendental, it avails itself of a moral belief—a prejudice of faith. Put differently, philosophy is a moral, nihilistic practice.[7] In Book 1 of *Beyond Good and Evil,* "On the Prejudices of Philosophers," for example, Nietzsche charges philosophers with harboring a "faith in opposite values," a faith grounded in a moral interpretation of value: "good" is the opposite of "evil." Importantly, it is commitment to a Christian-Platonic sense of truth that accounts for the movement from the moral to the conceptual. The concept as figure of knowability absent of error, sense, and becoming, belies philosophy's moral disposition. I take a closer look at this relationship in Chapter 3. For now, I only want to insist upon philosophy's proximity to morality and nihilism.

The point now is this: to understand nihilism, to assess whether and how it poses a risk for us today, we first have to consider how truth is an endeavor in meaning making that secures or preserves a particular way of life. I have thus far only cursorily explained that, at least for Nietzsche, truth is a function of an effort in preservation and advancement. But what, exactly, *is* truth? Or, perhaps better put—indeed, to ask a better question—*why* truth? Asking and

7. Philosophy, in the broad strokes I have thus far presented, indicates a turn toward and reflection upon the concept as a vehicle of truth. I take this to narrow Nietzsche's scope. In other words, while his broader project of critiquing morality extends (in his view) to wherever humans legislate laws of conduct, his critiques of Christian-Platonic morality and, derivatively, European philosophy, turn on what he considers specific to ascetic uses of the concept. I address this relationship in more detail in Chapter 3.

investigating these questions alongside Nietzsche will enable us to correctly determine the problem of nihilism.

II. The Art of Truth

The unpublished essay "On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense" is one of Nietzsche's earliest interrogations of truth.[8] A two-fold question drives the essay: why did humans come to value truth instead of untruth? And what is truth such that it acquires that value? Nietzsche insists that the preference *for* truth cannot assume the existence *of* truth. Indeed, quite the opposite. So, following the primacy of that preference, he interrogates what he calls a will to truth.

"On Truth and Lies" begins with a somewhat infamous image. Nietzsche describes a clever beast, the human beast, living out its ephemeral existence on a floating rock. It invents knowing and, charmed by the allure of its own power to ascertain, invests knowledge and thereby *itself* with universal, absolute value. By divine right of its own provincial intellect, the human becomes the center of the universe—and just like that, the universe exhales, the rock burns, and the beasts disappear. With sardonic pleasure Nietzsche muses that a gnat likely harbors a similarly naive and arrogant self-appraisal. Now, by virtue of what kind of power does the intellect charm the knower? With the intellect, those human beasts get a grip, so to speak. Knowing "detains" them a minute; it holds them up (in both the senses of 'slowing' and 'esteeming') by virtue of its principle power: dissimulation, "which is the means by which weaker, less robust individuals preserve themselves—since they have been denied the chance to wage the battle for existence with horns or with the sharp teeth of beasts of prey. This art of

8. Maudemarie Clark rightfully notes how the essay has all the markings of those Nietzsche had published, in contrast with the other writings found in the *Nachlass.*

dissimulation reaches its peak in man." (TL 80) Dissimulation is the fundamental capacity of the human intellect to produce stable images into which an ephemeral, arbitrary, and violent reality is made legible. Such images stabilize things, tying events together into histories and attributing purpose unto them. In an ironic twist of fate, humans author the very narratives by which they secure themselves as champions of history, as necessary beings whose majesty is guaranteed by divine providence.[9]

Dissimulation is the weaving of fiction. It is an art of difference in the sense that relationships of non-identity—metaphor, metonymy, simile, anthropomorphism—drive its activity. Regarding intelligibility, these literary devices are used to compare two non-identical things in order to glean similarities that render aspects of one, the other, or both, intelligible. Intelligibility accordingly accrues in terms of the kind and degree of similarity imposed.[10] Knowledge in thus "Nothing more than this: Something strange is to be reduced to something *familiar*." (GS 355) Truth is similarly a coagulation of dissimulations, figures of familiarity that coalesce into an image without error. This, it seems, is what Nietzsche has in mind when he states, "What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms...Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions." (TL 84) Human intellect fabricates identity across unlike things—why? *Because similarity secures human life*. It provides a matrix of calculability and predictability through which life can be arranged and managed, its threats pacified. The drive to fashion similarity is thus both existential and practical. But there is another key component: for the dissimulation to work, the purveyor of

9. Nietzsche writes, "even the proudest of men, the philosopher, supposes that he sees on all sides the eyes of the universe telescopically focused upon his action and thought." (TL)
10. The idea that intelligibility is at odds with difference heavily influences the French Nietzschean inheritance in figures like Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, etc.

truth has to efface its origins in human instinct and folly, or in life. Whatever is partial, instinct, and error must be expropriated from the scene of knowledge, which must arrange its content so as to take on the appearance of impartiality, objectivity, and immutability. Truth thus evinces an *artistry*: it is made up of wholly *aesthetic figures* that affirm whatever enables and secures a life characterized by fear of the unfamiliar and strange.[11] Put differently, truth is a certain kind of lie.

How exactly does Nietzsche arrive at this understanding of truth? "On Truth and Lies" dates back to 1873, one year after Nietzsche publishes *The Birth of Tragedy*. In the preface he adds 15 years later in 1886, he claims *The Birth of Tragedy's* fundamental task is "to look at science in the perspective of the artist, but at art in that of life." (BT *"*Preface" 2) Art is here understood as the ramification of instinctual life into figures of beauty; the artist, the medium of that ramification at the level of intentional act: creativity. Art in this sense functions at two levels: at the level of non-subjective, instinctual expressions, and at the level of particular apprehensions or experiences of meaning and truth. So, looking at science from the perspective of the artist, Nietzsche interrogates truth as knowability, truth as a function of epistemic certitude, in terms of aesthetic figures that ramify need into shared expressions of value. What does Attic tragedy disclose about the Ancient Greek experience of meaning, truth, and life?

Nietzsche sees in Attic tragedy a confluence of what he calls the "Dionysian" and the "Apollinian," two naturally occurring artistic energies that surge forth in musical and imagistic art, respectively. Dionysus is the god of wine, intoxication, regeneration, and subjective dissolution. The members of an Attic dithryambic chorus sing and dance to melodies that

11. Nietzsche continues in GS 355: "Look, isn't our need for knowledge precisely this need for the familiar, the will to uncover under everything strange, unusual, and questionable something that no longer disturbs us? Is it not the *instinct of fear* that bids us to know? And is the jubilation of those who attain knowledge not the jubilation over the restoration of a sense of security?"

augment their revelry and dissolve their individuality, their day-to-day selves. It enacts a reconciliation of human and nature, a repetition and return characterized by a "joy in self-forgetfulness and joy in union with other human beings and with the earth," as Ofelia Schutte puts it. (1984, 14) In Nietzsche's terms, "Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man." (BT 1) Now, Dionysian celebration conversely attends to a sense of suffering characterized by individuation. Dionysus, after all, was dismembered, such that from this "properly Dionysian *suffering*...we are therefore to regard the state of individuation as the orogin and primal cause of all suffering…" (BT 10) Dionysian, dissolutive unity is thus in a primal tension with the "*principium individuationis*," the principle of individuation: Apollo. "Sculptor god" of the "beautiful illusion," Apollo shapes figures of beauty out of nature's continuum. His brilliant images charm the beholder, such that "in the midst of a world of torments the individual human being sits quietly, supported by and trusting in the *principium individuationis*." (BT 1) Apollinian images, also considered vehicles of prophecy, are figures of meaning, significance, and worth. For the Ancient Greek they became the Olympians, gods who themselves lived human lives, reflecting back to their disciples in brilliant perfection their own aspirations, their own value.[12] Indeed, such illusory yet captivating figures attributed esteem and worth upon the lives they reflected.[13] If the Dionysian dance

12. John Sallis's *Crossings: The Space of Tragedy* (University of Chicago Press, 1991) presents a thorough and complex analysis of the semantics of "beautiful illusion," or in German, "*Scheinde*". Similar to what I describe above regarding the Apollinian, Sallis states, "In Apolloinian images the everyday originals, the things of the everyday, are perfected—that is, in the Apollinian state there is a gleam of perfection, of higher truth. It is a perfection, a truth, whose shining provides a certain release from the negativity of the everyday, a certain relief from that fragmentariness, a healing." (29)
13. Nietzsche states, "The same impulse which calls art into being, as the complement and consummation of existence, seducing one to a continuation of life, was also the cause of the Olympian world which the Hellenic 'will' made use of as a transfiguring mirror."

returned the Greeks to nature, Apollinian images punctuated that return, seducing them to yet continue and indeed *desire* to continue living their lives, like a beat that subtly compels a melody to carry on.

It is worth dwelling a moment on music.[14] Music is an art born of resonance. Layers of sound interact to form audible blocs of what we call music. A drumbeat, in 4/4 time; a bass line from the 1st to the 5th, and then the 4th; a vibrating guitar string becomes a single note, stretching across the measures. It climbs, peaks, and becomes a voice. What in isolation are simple sensations together constitute complex arrangements that articulate investments in the moment—meaning by way of melody. Something commands the beat, the bass line, and the guitar; passion works the letter, the word, and the phrase. A perspective of significance appears as tonal figure. It is not, of course, the drum or the wood calling for the song, but neither are the drum, steel, and wood unnecessary. Rather, the artistic event—whatever it is that unites the musician with the instrument, composing a kind of unity—renders each sonic element ineffable. They become compositionally *necessary*. It is from this sense of composition and necessity that Nietzsche gleans the following: *purposiveness is figural.* The artist re-arranges sensible experience according to matrices of intentionality just as the philosopher constructs their categories of reason, like a *poesis* of utility, predictability, and telos. Like Apollinian images that return to the Greek a perfected image of their own lives, figures of purposiveness *transfigure* reality into the image of something other than itself. This sense of transfiguration is essential for

14. Schutte argues Nietzsche's love for music also derives in part from his adoration of Schopenhauer (1984, 26). Additionally, Babette Babich describes Nietzsche's understanding of music to be in part a phenomenological point. See Babette Babich "The Spirit of Music in *The Birth of Tragedy*: Nietzsche's Phenomenological Investigations of Music and Word" in *The Hallelujah Effect: Music, Performance Practice, and Technology* (London: Routledge, 2016). While these readings have informed my own to some extent, I present my own brief phenomenological description in order to aesthetically, albeit anecdotally, supplement my argument that musical experience, for Nietzsche, generates purposiveness.

what follows (especially in Chapter 6). Now, recalling the teachers of the purpose of existence, Nietzsche sees similar efforts at work. Reality accrues value by being transfigured. What was ephemeral, finite, and visceral accrues purpose in the image of immutable eternity, like dying for a dream.

Dionysian and Apollinian energies "burst forth from nature herself, *without the mediation of the human artist*—energies in which nature's art impulses are satisfied in the most immediate and direct way—first in the image world of dreams...then as intoxicated reality…" (Ibid.) Dream images ramify impulse and instinct into Apollinian figures such that dreams are phenomena "in the creation of which every man is truly an artist," "not without that fleeting sensation of illusion." They are accordingly the "prerequisite of all plastic art." (Ibid.) Fundamentally, then, humans are always already caught up in their own artistry. When we become artists in the deliberate sense, we interpret and repeat that primordial artistry, further shaping what appears into figures that express our dispositions. Thus, while Apollo is at work in their dreams, it is in tragic poetry that the Greeks' disposition toward life *as they live it* appears. For Nietzsche, what is especially compelling about Greek tragedy is its affirmation of finitude, its open confrontation with mortality and the ephemerality of human endeavor. Through gods who themselves lived Greek lives, through tragic figures whose aspirations signal an excess of will that dooms them even as they reach beyond their individual lives—through Oedipus, for example, "who, in spite of his wisdom, is destined to error and misery but who eventually, through his tremendous suffering, spreads a magical power of blessing that remains effective even beyond his decease" (BT 9)—through such figures the *Greeks affirmed life on their own terms.* "Thus do the gods justify the life of man," Nietzsche explains, "they themselves live it—the only satisfactory

theodicy!" (BT 3) Unfortunately, with Euripedes, tragedy becomes a celebration of mediocrity —"the spectator is brought on stage" (BT 12)—as opposed to the affirmation of heroism, of bold action at the limits of human finitude. In a kind of perverse inflection the Apollinian tendency to measure and shape becomes with Euripedes the drive to impose extreme measure, pacifying Dionysus by placing them naked before the spectator, as it were. That is, it becomes aligned with what Nietzsche calls "*aesthetic Socratism,* whose supreme law reads roughly as follows, 'To be beautiful everything must be intelligible." (Ibid.) Tragic truth becomes truth as *knowability*—and it thereby dies in suicide. (BT 10-11)

Truth as knowability, as *intelligibility*, is truth conceived *rationally*. Like Euripedean tragedy, it emerges through a kind of self-harm. Only by way of masochism can it become dialectical, rational, or Platonic. Why? Because it has to violate its provenance in human instinct to appear as truth for everyone, measured precisely for access and common accrual. What was affirmation in finitude thus becomes a serenity of the similar. Rational truth is a form of intelligibility that is figured as similarities across different things. It is a truth separated from its origin as transfiguration, as dissimulation, into an image wholly free of error or bias. But it nevertheless remains partial, the referent of an instinct for security in the desire for familiarity. To the question "What, exactly, is truth?," Nietzsche's answer is thus: "truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions."[15] More specifically, we might now say that "Truth" is a masochistic species of illusion that aspires to immaculate conception. It effaces its actual genesis and feigns an impartial descent and universal access. Successful enactment of its disguise requires at the same time a repression of its particularity and illusory character. Truth hides the

15. I note here the shift from the singular to the plural. In response to the question "What *is* truth?," which supposes truth to be a single, unitary essence concept, Nietzsche multiplies: *truths* are...

questions “for whom? from whence?” just as, Sarah Kofman argues, the rational concept masks and forgets its function as facilitation of a specific way of life.

In *Nietzsche and Metaphor* (1993) Sarah Kofman argues that Nietzsche’s primordial artistry describes an unconscious metaphorical activity characteristic of all drives and desires. Introducing Freudian insight into Nietzsche’s analytic, she describes a process whereby basic impulses shape perceptions of objects according to their respective aims, like the wish-fulfillment in seeing every lover as an iteration of parental relationships. In Kofman’s terms, “Metaphorical activity is termed instinctive because it is unconscious, and because like all drives it seeks sole mastery of the world. It is not just a drive like any other; it could be called the general form of all drives.” (1993, 23-4) Think not only of how food appears to the hungry, or a warm fire to the cold: think of how sunset appears to the lonely, of how the blues sound to the sad—or, in a fatal sense, how the weak, marginalized, or subjugated appear to the cop, drunk on the power of monopolized violence. In each case, desire and instinct do not merely inform perception. They color it with *pathos*, which in turn charges what is perceived with significance, like a Dionysian smile calling for Apollo’s Olympians; like his tears becoming human. (BT 9) When we form concepts from such perspectives, and those concepts appear fixed, certain, and universal, we forget ourselves as artists.

Forgetting is not simply the fading of a memory with time. In contrast to a chronological account of forgetting, like the fading of a memory from long ago, Kofman argues that unconscious metaphorical activity exhibits a cyclical temporality in which forgetting is repetitious.[16] (1993, 25) In her terms, “Thus the forgetting of metaphor...is originary, the

16. Kofman states, “The metaphor of money becoming worn and losing its original effigy to express the effacement of metaphor conceals a forgetting which is more profound. It implies the belief in a linear historical time which Nietzsche shattered right from his earliest works.”

necessary correlate of metaphorical activity itself: man has always already forgotten that he is an 'artist from the beginning', and that he remains one in all his activities." (Ibid.) Each time originary artistry crosses over from instinct to perception, in each metaphorical articulation, the perceiver forgets themselves as the source of the significance of what they perceive. Indeed, at the symbolic level, forgetting is necessary to charge the symbol with belief, with significance. Now art, as Kofman articulates it, simply extends this otherwise automatic and unconscious process. Artistic creativity is like a repetition of an otherwise natural artistry, a return of *pathos* to itself in the creative act.

Now, whereas the symbol forgets the artist as a condition of belief, the concept does so in a much more dubious manner. Belief in the concept becomes *certainty.* In a sense, one doubles down on the repression.[17] The concept, Kofman claims, includes criteria that exclude art from its genesis and "allows a system of secondary rationalizations to be set up after the event, effacing the fact that metaphorical activity is originary, at the origin of all knowledge and all activity," (1993, 35). The concept conceals the artistry that accounts for its emergence. Thus, when Nietzsche calls truth an illusion, *what* it falsifies is not some pre-given "reality" or a "thing," but the very process of its genesis, its *becoming.* The concept hides the fact that it ever *became* truth, and that truth fundamentally expresses efforts in transfiguration. Kofman elaborates, "Thus it is at the level of the concept that metaphorical activity, because it is at its most concealed, for that reason becomes most dangerous: thanks to the concept, man arranges the whole universe into well-ordered logical categories without realizing that he is thus continuing the most archaic metaphorical activity." (Ibid.) Self-harm becomes self-forgetting; truth is only true on condition

17. In Deleuzian terms, this is "double negation."

it is at the same time a successful lie—but, if truth is a lie, does that not entail another truth it conceals?

In *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (1990) Maudemarie Clark argues that Nietzsche, particularly in "On Truth and Lies," advances a "falsification thesis" in the idea that truth is a falsification of reality (a "lie"). Her argument is threefold: first, the early Nietzsche proposes that truth is an illusion; second, this follows from claims about perception and reality, not from claims about language; and third, metaphysical problems generated by these claims compel Nietzsche to alter and develop his position. On the one hand, it is certainly the case that Nietzsche's views developed and changed over the course of his productive life. On the other, analyzing that development by reconstructing his early position in propositional terms misrepresents his argument that art teaches us what *kind* of illusion truth is.

Clark argues that the position that "all truth is an illusion" exemplifies a "radical interpretation" of Nietzsche's early works, notably advanced by Paul De Man. For De Man, Clark explains, the illusory character of truth derives from Nietzsche's position that all language if fundamentally metaphorical. Semiotic coherence and the explanatory power of words are not grounded in accurate descriptions of reality but linguistic figuration. Reference becomes unnecessary. Put differently, language gleans meaning *without* reference. Without reference, truth too is a function of semantic relationships made possible from within linguistic structure itself. If that structure is figural, if it elaborates or expresses some *aisthesis* and is thus primarily rhetorical, then truth is based upon "intralinguistic resources of figure" rather than any correspondence to extra-linguistic entities. (Clark 1990, 71) Accordingly, Clark argues that De Man, by *conflating* linguistic figuration with the impossibility of matching words to the world,

institutes a radical break with reality. If language use is cut from the world and subject only to rules immanent with figuration, then de Man et al are committed to the belief that we are incapable of conceiving the possibility of a linguistic assertion of truth. Language is *completely* cut off from the world.

Clark accordingly finds a kind of lunacy in the de Manian position. "But a denial of both reference and truth," she explains, "completely severs the connection between language and reality, confusing the human condition with one that exists only at the extreme limits of madness." (1990, 74) Madness, here, is like the psychotic's private language: their semiotic processes are premised on a break with reality, a severing of their investment in the external world, such that what meaning or sense they express relates only to a reality entirely their own.[18] The problem, for Clark, is that the only way to inhabit (or learn) such a language would be to assume a non-referential theory of truth in which metaphor mobilizes figural resources for language to glean intelligibility, or persuasive force, without drawing from reference. Figures of truth would be born of language itself—but, she claims, metaphor *requires* reference. Metaphor would not convey anything at all without a "literal," or non-metaphorical, use of language to which it implicitly refers. (Clark 1990, 70)[19] This is to say that metaphor actually requires and

18. Interestingly, this is why Freud was troubled by treating psychotic as opposed to neurotic disorders. He theorizes the former in terms of a psychic self-enclosure and introjection of the lost object, whereas the latter (the neurotic) repeats an originary cathexis in language, and still engages in object substitution. On the one hand, interpretation would need to decipher a foreign language, so to speak; on the other, language is still shared, and thus makes the patient's unconscious to an extent "available" for analysis.
19. Clark's example is as follows: "Suppose I say that someone was 'cutting through the argument with a rusty razor blade.' I have made an assertion, and a quite obviously false one, since arguments do not take up space. Why interpret my statement as metaphor? Because you know what it means to cut through something with a razor blade (i.e. the conditions under which it would be true to say that someone had done so), you know that my assertion cannot possibly be true, and that I cannot possibly believe it is true (short of insanity, or a quite different interpretation of assertion)."

intrinsically refers to intelligible content. For one's love to be a like a red, red rose, a rose must be red, red.

While Clark is right to argue that Nietzsche does not derive his arguments about truth from claims about language, she is wrong to claim that his early position is philosophically untenable because of it. Nietzsche articulates his insights about metaphor, language, and truth in aesthetic and moral-psychological terms. His account of perception and knowledge refers back to unconscious, instinctually creative processes. Truth both *falsifies* and *expresses* that process; what reality it references is always already cast and colored by an interplay of instinct and interest, which does not precede but results from primordial metaphorics. Therefore, when Nietzsche argues that truth is an illusion, reference is not severed but reinterpreted as creative composition. An object perceived is reciprocally conditioned by and conditions some interest, instinct, or need at work in the perceiver. While Clark is right to the extent that figure is not solely born of linguistic structure and sign, her analysis fails to account for how, even in the Nietzsche of "On Truth and Lies," figuration refers to instinct, which in turn expresses a relationship with reality that is not, however, predetermined as intelligible. In my language, reference is secondary to a kind of tenacity and tenability. Its rational guise is a figuration of (intel-)legibility that serves a particular way of life.[20] Consequently, while it is true that Nietzsche's claims do not derive from claims about language, neither do they require a metaphysics of reference. Rather, they compose an aesthetic portrait of linguistic figures as expressions of significance that glean specific types of existential tenacity.

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20. For this reason Nietzsche sometimes refers to these kinds of truths as "aesthetic anthropomorphisms," or artistic creations that transpose human needs and characteristics. In GS 109, titled "Let us Beware," Nietzsche admonishes his readers against transfiguring nature to reflect human needs, claiming, "The total character of the world, however, is in all eternity chaos—in the sense not of a lack of necessity but of a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms."

Clark goes on to address what she takes to be Nietzsche's Kantian inheritance (via Schopenhauer). She argues that Nietzsche accepts the existence of things that exist independently of human experience (e.g. the "thing-in-itself") and denies that humans can access them. The reason for this, she suggests, is that Nietzsche accepts Schopenhauer's position that all human perception is constituted by representations which are themselves divorced from the objects they reference. All we perceive are images we make up, and we can only know what we perceive. Consequently, all we can know are the little dream worlds we inhabit. Assuming truth requires correspondence not just to the reality we sense but to the "things themselves," it must be construed as an illusion. Nietzsche's claim that "truth is an illusion therefore presupposes the "metaphysical correspondence theory of truth" in which, "[Nietzsche] concludes that truths are illusions because he assumes both that truth requires correspondence to things-in-themselves and that our truths do not exhibit such correspondence." (Clark 1990, 83) Is Nietzsche really committed to this? Is it true, as Clark argues, that Nietzsche believes truth must be divorced from human interest and utility in order to express its absolute *value?* (Clark 1990, 89)[21] If truth results from a psychology of preservation, for example, its value is limited to the human experience. For absolute value, criteria of truth cannot be delimited by that experience. It must correspond to a reality behind and beyond our own.

Curiously, the absolute value she claims Nietzsche attributes to truth is in fact *the moral estimation Nietzsche charges truth with harboring in bad faith*, namely that it only has value if it is impartial, dis-invested in the human, and necessary (not simply practical). It makes sense that Clark attributes this to Nietzsche, since she insists on a metaphysical reconstruction of his early

21. Clark states, "Thus, Nietzsche accepts the metaphysical correspondence theory because he believes that only 'universal validity apart from human beings' can confer on beliefs the unlimited value he associates with truth."

views—repeating, as it were, the Socratic/Platonic gesture Nietzsche vehemently criticizes. If Nietzsche's early method was to "refer the concept to metaphor," as Kofman argues, Clark's amounts to the opposite: she refers metaphor back to the concept. Now, the problem is not so much that Clark gets the early Nietzsche "wrong," but rather that her reconstruction of Nietzsche's development as a sequence of logical movements misses the point and loses touch with Nietzsche's insight into artistry and the kind of psychology it expresses. One is, as Ofelia Schutte says, "back to the alienated Socratic standpoint of trying to make the world intelligible exclusively through logic." If we start from this position, we are incapable of assessing truth as a matter of willing and, consequently, of determining nihilism as a problem of the will to truth, both as threat and promise. The point is consequently not whether Nietzsche is caught between a metaphysics of truth and falsification, but rather *how* he evaluates the convergence of truth and falsification from moral psychological, aesthetic perspectives.

III. Remembering What We've Forgotten

Nihilism is the shadow cast upon an imperfect world by the light of an "image without error." It is for this reason I have worked through Nietzsche's artistic perspective on truth. Art reveals truths to be figures of *interpretation,* of evaluation and empowerment, like the Olympians. And at this rather early stage of his thinking, Nietzsche works out that truth conceived of as universal, impartial, and objective, designates an effort in transfiguring reality to give value to it. The turn toward intelligibility as the general form of beauty and value is, as I have presented it, a masochistic effort. What is nihilism if not prolonged self-harm? Recall how Nietzsche describes dissimulation as a means of survival. It is for those ill-equipped to wage the "battle for existence." By dissimulating similarities, they shape a world in which experiences

recur and objects fit into certain categories. With these categories they can measure, calculate, and predict. Truth is the *absolute* measure, a perfect calculation, and ultimately, a deliverance from a finite and fluxional existence weak, slavish creatures cannot otherwise master. It is *a highest value* that responds to "the demand for a support, a prop, in short, that *instinct of weakness* which, to be sure, does not create religious, metaphysical systems, and convictions of all kinds but—conserves them." (GS 347) This is the crux of the matter: by disinvesting its own artistry, and ultimately appealing to divine sanction, rational truth reifies experiences and marks a *hostility to life* characteristic of those who struggle in vain to act within it. But if perfection is the purchase, nihilism is the cost.

Nihilism is in this sense a reckoning with what Kofman calls primordial forgetting—the return of the repressed, so to speak, but with the caveat that what returns does so not because it is repressed, as Freud would have it, but because repression has lost its touch. We have grown weary of the act, of constantly negating. Intelligibility accrues to such an extent that truth is all it wants, and because of that, it becomes unable to confront the fact that it is yet they, those all too human beasts surfing a floating rock through the abyss, who have created it. This is what art teaches us about what is at stake in Christian-Platonic accounts of truth: its figuration of a negative relationship to existence, what I call above its constitutive masochism, expresses a hostility to *conditions of life*, which paradoxically include illusory figures of value. Such hostility *drives* nihilism. So, this is where Nietzsche's early approach to truth via art leaves us: in a confrontation that requires interrogating the problem of the value of truth, and thus nihilism, in terms of drive and will. To excavate and set forth those terms I turn to Nietzsche's philosophical psychological work and, more specifically, to his "will to power."

Chapter Two: The Problem(s) of Willing

Truth's figural matrix of intelligibility takes on a rational, immaculate guise in service to a demand for security and certainty. Interrogating this need is itself a result of seeking truth which distinctly, and somewhat paradoxically, renders truth itself suspect. The *one who wills truth e*ncounters all-too-human origins that profane universality, immutability, neutrality, etc. They confront a fatal question, that of truth's value. In following this question we are, in Nietzsche's footsteps, retracing them, so to speak—repeating them. Nietzsche goes on to consider truth's moral psychology, its ontology and expression of a wholly partial, visceral need, one which he thinks has become endemic to human social life. Thus when he asks "Why truth rather than untruth?" he takes himself to be radically challenging a taken for granted premise of human endeavor that, unsettled, shakes people to their core. For, as we will see, truth as intelligibility is hostile to its own instinctual, visceral, vital grounds. The will to truth is a project of self-harm. Put differently, it *devalues* the world the truth-seeker lives in, such that willing truth is, in other words, the catalyst of nihilistic *devaluation*. The problem, consequently, is not *that* truth is illusory, or simulacral, false, or ephemeral, but rather *why* the illusion is cast, on what grounds, for what purpose, and to what effect. To set forth the precise coordinates of this problem it is necessary to trace Nietzsche's moral psychological analysis, which in turn leads to questioning and analyzing *types of willing*. Getting a better sense of what willing is, of what

makes up the phenomena we call "willing," and how we can conduct a typological assessment thereof, will allow me to clarify the stakes and possibilities of the problem of nihilism.

In Section I I turn to Nietzsche's psychology of drives and instinct in order to articulate willing in terms of types. Willing, on Nietzsche's reading, is power: the capability to *do:* to *act in, integrate, and shape,* and power is moreover indexed with drive [*Trieb*], in the physiological sense. Different drives, and different organizations thereof, comprise particular ways of doing, of thinking and feeling. Then, in Section II, I transpose Gilles Deleuze's ontology of problems into Christa Acampora's "agonist" reading of Nietzsche to illumine the role contest can play in valuation and typological development. This allows me to propose that certain types of problems accord with certain types of overcoming. In other words, I argue that the way problems are posed solicit particular kinds of solutions, and that this is crucial for correctly determining the problem of nihilism. Lastly, in Section III I recapitulate in broad strokes my arguments to set up what follows in Chapter 3.

I. Types of Power

Figures of truth impose a *logos* of appearance—a phenomenology. Phenomena appear purposive and calculable through interpretive schemas that convey veracity as an image without error. *A*s the prerogative of a particular will the phenomenology of truth functions in service of what Nietzsche calls in *The Gay Science* a psychology of the "preservation of the species." Now, such phrasing belies itself. While "preservation" foregrounds the role of a certain instinctual opposition to becoming and genesis, Nietzsche does not mean to reduce his account to a kind of vulgar biological imperative. Rather, in linking preservation to the dispositions of a *specific* form of life (e.g. the human), Nietzsche understands species *typologically*. Different organizations of

instinct, different human socio-psychological types, ramify the basic instinct to preserve human life, such that "Even the most harmful man may really be the most useful when it comes to the preservation of the species…" (GS 1) Now, it is no accident that Nietzsche begins *The Gay Science* with an aphorism on how economies of instinct differentiate and develop a basic drive to preserve, nor that he goes on to consider what is "noble and common" (GS 3), how "evil" is a relative designation and likely does as much to "advance" human life as "good," (GS 4), the subtle and "unconscious" workings of virtues (GS 8), etc. In each case, he accounts for human phenomena in terms of physio-psychological drives, each indexed with what suits the species: a desire to preserve.

These early sections culminate in GS 13, "On the doctrine of the feeling of power," which is his first published account of what would become his concept of "will to power." In what is a crucial development of his methodological framework Nietzsche submits human categories of value and "Truth" to philosophical psychological interpretation:

> Whether benefiting or hurting others involves sacrifices for us does not affect the ultimate value of our actions. Even if we offer our lives, as martyrs do for their church, this is a sacrifice that is offered for *our* desire for power or for the purpose of preserving our feeling of power. Those who feel ' I possess Truth'—how many possessions would they not abandon in order to save this feeling! What would they not throw overboard to stay 'on top'—which means, *above* the others who lack 'the Truth'!

Truth, here, is couched in a desire for power—more specifically, a desire for preserving *our* feeling of power. What in TL Nietzsche describes as a desire for security is here resignified as a desire not just for "power" as such, but the *feeling* of power characteristic of specific type of life

(in this case, his example is the martyr's). What is noble, common, base, high, vulgar, refined, etc.—all, on Nietzsche's account, can be interpreted according to specific economies of instinct and drive whose developmental logic is expressed through sensations of feelings of power. "Will to power" thus becomes a philosophical psychological principle of typological assessment. And because nihilism, as we will see, is a problem of particular types of willing, it is a problem of will to power.

"Will to power" [*dur Wille zur Macht*] is a liminally philosophical concept.[22] It proposes to interpret phenomena as effects of drives, indexed with an instinctual artistry. In developing it Nietzsche fuses psychological and artistic insight which, when transposed into philosophical reflection, refers concepts back to the genesis and ramification of need. Phenomena appear *for* particular instincts, or drives; these latter seek them out, to integrate, consume, act upon. It is no mistake that will to power evokes senses of hierarchy: order, discipline, command, obedience, etc., but it would be a mistake to make of this the claim that tyranny, slavery, and cruelty are somehow "more natural" and therefore justified than their presumably virtuous counterparts. Will to power rather signifies that economies of instinct are always at work within different socio-historical, cultural, and political developments. In these latter different types contest each other, waging war, so to speak, while nevertheless all exemplifying will to power.[23] Will to

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22. By this I mean will to power is not wholly, nor simply, philosophical. I take this in part to follow from what I argue above: that to reconstruct Nietzsche's thought as strictly philosophical misses the point and disfigures the ideas. They become empty; they lose touch.
23. It is neither the case that Nietzsche reduces politics or history to a kind of psychological idealism, as if, contra Marx, for example, what matters is less "class struggle" and rather a "struggle for feelings of power." Rather his emphasis that drives are fundamentally visceral, that they speak to the unity of human life with nature, and that socio-cultural developments are in general linked to pscyho-physiological economies and "rank orders" ought to be read as supplement to and resonant with materialist portraits. Nevertheless, for a thorough, insightful, and critical reading of the relationship between Nietzsche and Marx in this regard—whose affinity is often taken for granted by contemporary critical theorists –see Nancy Love, *Nietzsche, Marx, and Modernity* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986)

power against will to power—while this may seem contradictory at a glance, it can be rendered consistent, and exactly *how* it is is important for what becomes nihilism. But for now I insist: will to power is principally about *drives,* and Nietzsche views drives agonistically: they contest each other for dominance. Some ally, some are fundamentally opposed, and some remain neutral.

What does Nietzsche mean by "drive?" Drive [*Trieb*] designates a basic unit of force distinguished qualitatively by type: the sex drive, hunger, as well as more abstract drives like a drive to truth, to punish, etc.[24] Each and every drive aspires to expand upon itself, to dominate. Sometimes seeking power through external objects, at others targetting other drives, in each case drives bear upon sets of drives and/or sets of objects. In seeking power, as we have seen regarding truth, drives trace a legibility unto the world, other drives, and themselves: figurative efforts more or less grounded in opportunities for instinctual enactment and growth. In conjunction with *Trieb*, "*Macht"* designates capability, of being able to do something; *dur Wille zur Macht*, accordingly, means willing as capability. So, when Nietzsche hypothesizes that each and every drive, or "will," follows the basic form of will to power, (GS 13; BGE 36) he means to insist that a drive's essential activity involves shaping the world so as to *be able to* act and grow and *continue* acting and growing within it. For example, in *Dawn* Section 119, titled "Experience

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24. *Trieb* is also the term Freud uses to describe the sex-drive [*Sexualtrieb*]. Its semantics are more dynamic than any reductive biological sense of satisfaction in, say, eating food to quell hunger. *Trieb* is more like a build-up, release, and expansive repetition. Freud argues accordingly that the sex-drive is logically prior to the object-choice through which it cathects, meaning it is characterized by a cyclical amplification and expansion, moving from one object to another that substitutes for the original. I take Nietzsche to be after something similar, specifically in the sense that willing, and drives, are logically prior to the figures, truths, and actions through which they are expressed. Much as Freud avoids a reductive biologism, Nietzsche complicates simplified readings of drive and instinct. Cf. Sigmund Freud ed. James Strachey, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII (1901-1905): A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Words (1905)* See Strachey's Note at the beginning.

and make-believe," Nietzsche proposes that different experiences "nourish" different drives, or conversely, that drives quite literally feed on different facets of everyday experiences. The intentionality by which experiences become legible is grounded in and traced by the perspectives of the drives that seek to consume them. Musing that waking life is akin to the *poesis* of dreams Nietzsche asks, "...but do I have to explain that when we are awake, our drives, likewise, do nothing but interpret nerve impulses and ascribe causes' to them according to our drives' own needs?"(D 119) Apollo, god of the dream image, resonates in these statements: experience is akin to make-believe, wherein dream-like images shine like beautiful illusions within which one will only ever find what's deposited by drives.

If there are similar experiences—similar actions, similar things, similar behaviors—it is because a specific relation of drives recurs. In TL Nietzsche already insists that sameness is the principle of the metaphorics of intelligibility. Here, it is no different: he asserts that whenever we have an experience twice, whenever an action or event recurs, it is as a recurrence of relations between drives, between quite visceral forces. It is in this sense that he praises physics in *The Gay Science* as a type of thinking that seeks to learn everything lawful or necessary about the universe. (GS 335) In fact, he adopts the language of physics to incorporate a sense of necessity into his concept of will to power: a drive is a quantum of force, a force which *only and always* expresses itself in its full capacity. (WP 632) Gravity doesn't choose to return an object to earth; it *is* the act of return. It would be absurd to *demand* that it yield. Another force, like compulsion, could only ever overpower it. So too, for Nietzsche: "To demand of strength that it *not* express itself as strength...is just as absurd as demanding of weakness, that it express itself as strength." (GM I.13). For Nietzsche, the lawfulness or necessity of drives admits no degree of choice. One

does not obey, one simply does, one *is* what one does; deeds admit of no doers.[25] *Das Thun ist Alles.*

Section 36 of *Beyond Good and Evil* elaborates upon several aspects of what will to power entails. In it, Nietzsche proceeds by a series of assumptions. First, he says "Supposing nothing were 'given' as real besides our world of desires and passions, that we could go down or up to no other 'reality' than simply the reality of our drives—since thinking is only a relation of these drives to one another…" To suppose as "given" the world of desires and passions is to prioritize the artistry Kofman associates with metaphor, that is, the world in which drives pursue their enactment. He continues: the "conscience of method" demands that the following hypothesis be ventured: "will" can only affect "will" and not, as it were, "matter." The "conscience of method" commands one restrict oneself to as few kinds of causality as explanation requires. Finally, Nietzsche explains, if this attempt is successful, and will to power is *capable* of serving as the basic form of all willing (and hence all drives and organic functions) then, or so Section 36 culminates, we have before us a perspective on life whose truth is, precisely, will to power. In Nietzsche's words, "The world seen from the inside, the world determined and characterized on the basis of its 'intelligible character'—it would be precisely 'will to power' and nothing else.—" A series of hypotheses gleaned by the imperatives of scientific method culminate in the perspective that the world is will to power.

Let me pause here a moment. Why, one might ask, ought we to consider Nietzsche's perspective at all, aside from whether or not it is his view? "Suppose," Nietzsche says—why? Acampora and Keith Ansell-Pearson argue that BGE 36 exemplifies Nietzsche's practice of "intellectual conscience" (GS 2), testing and pursuing a hypothesis or an "attempt" [*Versuch*]

25. I return to this below.

against the demands of truth-seeking, which include criteria for restricting causal accounts to what is necessary ("the conscience of *method"*). His attempt "is a practice of seeking that maintains its commitment to truth even if it undermines other cherished beliefs, or the foundations of the inquiry itself." (Acampora and Ansell-Pearson 2011, 74) Why does he do so? On their account, it is to strengthen his capacity for command—that is, to lessen his "*need* for the unconditional" by affirming and pursuing an experimental line of thought. In transposing truth-seeking into philosophical experimentation, Nietzsche initiates a self-overcoming in the thought such that the question is less whether or not it is always and everywhere the case—that is, whether "will to power" is really *in* each and every thing—but rather what kind of thinking the hypothesis enables, how expansive it can become, how much it can incorporate.[26] Nietzsche's hypothetical, his "Suppose," in other words, is a philosophical attempt to trace out thresholds for willing truth wherein the criteria of truth-seeking themselves admit of or open onto transformative possibilities. At its limit—in view of "the world seen from the inside," according to its "intelligible character"—the *ascesis* of intelligibility attains to an ontological perspectivism that submits intelligibility itself to the question of value, of what perspectives of value it augments and/or attenuates. In doing so Nietzsche recovers the possibility of *reinterpretation*, and he does so in a manner that harnesses the *ascesis* of truth for experimental philosophical work.

Now, I want to emphasize two related aspects of BGE 36. First, what we might call the 'immanence of forces.'[27] Drives fundamentally relate to and *only affect* other drives; these

26. It should be noted too that Section 36 is contained within Book II of *Beyond Good and Evil,* titled "The Free Spirit." Therein, Nietzsche experiments with ideas that carry his thinking "beyond" the moral biases he diagnoses in Book I, "The Prejudices of Philosophers."
27. Ofelia Schutte analyzes models of existential continuity in Chapter 2 of *Beyond Nihilism*. For her, Nietzsche carries from his original conception of the Dionysian a sense of existence as immanent only to itself and wholly interconnected. This will be important for Deleuze, whose work can be understood as in large part leveraging

relations comprise the conditions of a drive's power [*Macht*]. Affects, on this reading, tarry alongside drives: affects of distance, of union, of compulsion and repulsion, of command and obedience, are psychosomatic expressions of drives' resistance toward and affinity with each other. (GM I:13) Importantly, this extends beyond the individuated subject. What coalesces in "the subject" expresses relationships that exceed self-identity. Rather, in willing, in *the one who wills,* Nietzsche sees conflicts and convergences of different forces. No love without hate, no sympathy without repulsion. The point is that drives co-constitute both each other and particular phenomena, without reference to extra-worldly origin. And if thinking is itself "a relation between drives," then thought too is an expression of immanence, of forces on forces. No consciousness without unconsciousness, no "Truth" without error. Put otherwise, thought, consciousness, and indeed the subject itself only *express* relations of force and drive.

This leads to the second aspect: if the "intelligible character" of the world is will to power, and will to power designates drives in variegated, agonistic relations that trace perspectives of need and enactment, then 'the world' is itself irreducibly *interpretive.* By conjoining 'force' to 'drives', and deriving thinking from relations between them, will to power supplements what Nietzsche takes to be right about the physical or scientific concept of force with a philosophical component: specific relations of drives manifest specific *perspectives* in thought. (WP 636) Indeed, in WP 636, after he argues that the "atom" injects the figure of the subject into the "world-picture" of physics, he states that they conversely have left out "precisely this necessary perspectivism by virtue of which every center of force—and not only man—construes all the rest of the world from its own viewpoint, i.e., measures, feels, forms, according

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his own (fairly idiosyncratic) conception of immanence against "transcendental judgment," which he understands to be akin to the moral judgment Nietzsche opposes.

to its own force—" "Man," too, is merely a center of force, whose figurations—measures of opposition, resemblance, analogy, etc.—express the prerogative of a perspective, only a perspective. Consequently, any given account in thought of the, or a, world, because of its ground in willing, will be ineffably partial, shaped by the order of drives at work in its articulation and, most importantly, will *be born of the world itself*.

John Richardson and Acampora helpfully elaborate these ideas. For Richardson, drives describe behavioral trajectories of growth. A drive is *pattern* of behavior, a disposition toward particular behaviors, that seeks to perpetuate itself and expand upon the set of events it can enact itself in.[28] (Richardson 1996, 26) Importantly, to will power is not to will some achievable state or end-goal. Rather, it is to will passage into higher states. It is primarily a *becoming*. In Richardson's terms, "As will to power, a drive's essential end is movement beyond what it now is or does...If we think of the ends distinguishing drives as states of achievement, then will to power's object will be the passage toward and into these states and not their occupation." (Richardson 1996, 24)[29] Richardson's definition sits well with the semantics of *Trieb* I outline above. Drives always prioritize their movements, their development; their activity, expansion, and reach are not, as it were, in any telic relation to states of satisfaction more or less represented to the agent of desire. It is rather, for Richardson, a kind of morphology of movements.

These movements enter into complex arrangements with each other. They call upon, complement, resist, and enter into hierarchies, such that "[with] all willing we are dealing simply with commanding and obeying, on the foundation...of a social structure of many 'souls'...".

28. Richardson argues, "So a drive wills power by trying to develop its activity pattern. And its effort is properly here, because (for Nietzsche) this activity is just what the drive is. We mustn't imagine it as an agent or source of that activity, as what causes or engages in it...So the world consists of behavior patterns, each striving to enhance itself, to extend its own scope of activity."
29. Richardson's attribution to Nietzsche of a unique type of teleology lies in his understanding of ends as pattern specific movements or "passages" to higher states of activity.

(BGE 36) Nietzsche also calls that structure an "order of rank." (BGE 19) What is at stake, as Acampora explains, is "the *processes of organization* of an entity: what it senses as significant, its orientation, and the structure of ordering it achieves." (Acampora 2013, 162) In this sense, then, it is not only the drives that characterize individuals "but also *how* those drives are ordered and how their organization develops and is maintained." When Nietzsche considers individuals, he looks at the harmonies, dissonances, and political relationships of the drives that make up their specific psychological organization, and he judges them in terms of what movements they commit to and make possible, like strings resonating to produce tonal figures of sound and melody: *types of willing*.[30]

Understanding thinking as a relationship between drives is important for comprehending nihilism, for if thinking expresses a kind of psychological politics, then truth, conceived as intelligibility, can become a figure of imperial control. Recall that Nietzsche considers truth to be interpretive, a function of empowerment for particular ways of life. In this basic sense it is fundamentally an *organon*, a tool or figure that aids certain drives in their efforts to master the world. Nevertheless a figure of valuation, the important moment is when truth develops from being a "truth for" to being "truth in itself"—intelligibility for intelligibility's sake.[31] In whom does this tyrannical impulse emerge? Nietzsche's earlier answer, as we saw, is those who cannot wage the battle for existence. The texts we have been reviewing suggest a development of this position: it is the *type* characterized by impotence, by a dissonant organization of drives whose relationships are unstable and thus incapable of enactment. Like an anxious and indecisive

30. It should be understood that "individual" does not necessarily refer to an individuated subject. It can indicate collective perspectives as well. Richardson does well to investigate the analogy between individual subjects and societies in this respect.
31. In Richardson's terms, "This way in which thinking is already a mastering can help to suit it for the independence it now gradually achieves...This new activity increasingly wills to continue and develop itself, and so emerges as a drive in its own right." (Richardson 1996, 239)

paralysis. To muster the strength to act, such types *need* guarantee, need something *unconditional* to augment their capabilities. When truth becomes a matter of intelligibility, calculability, predictability, and immutability, Nietzsche sees a radical expression of that need, which itself corresponds to a typological organization that has come to define human socio-cultural life. Consequently, the hegemony of a particular type of truth is due not to the progressive determination of the Idea or the life of the Concept but, as it were, because a specific type has come to dominate thinking by defining it in the light of an image without error. Philosophy, insofar as it submits the act of thinking to the measure of "Truth," must therefore be subject to Nietzsche's typology. Is it impotence or strength that charges figures of philosophical thought?

We can thus approach philosophical problems typologically. Consider, for example, the following statement from BGE 9: "Accordingly I do not believe that a 'drive for knowledge' is the father of philosophy, but that a different drive, here as elsewhere, has merely used knowledge (and misjudgment!) as a tool." (BGE 6) In articulating a sense of the world in terms of what is knowable or intelligible, *philosophical thoughts express perspectives of value*. Put otherwise, they harbor the preference of a type, and so too the moralities they help shape, (BGE 8) such that, "Whenever we encounter a morality, we also encounter valuations and an order of rank of human impulses and actions. These...are always expressions of the needs of a community and herd…" (GS 116)[32] Philosophical and moral problems admit of and express the same typology of wills, or in the words of BGE 36, the same "causality:" they *interpretively evaluate* existence. In the "unconditional drive for truth" this process reaches its limit. Hence, for example, Nietzsche

32. So too in BGE 8 Nietzsche states, "In every philosophy there is a point where the "conviction" of the philosopher steps onto the stage, or to put it in the words of an ancient mystery: *adventavit asinus, pulcher et fortissimus*."

explains in *The Gay Science* that the will "to not be deceived" and the will "to not deceive" express qualitatively distinct convictions. The former, he argues, cannot ground an *unconditional* will to truth because untruths (in the sense outlined above) often prove to be as useful (if not more so!) than truths. Therefore, he goes on, "will to truth does *not* mean 'I will not allow myself to be deceived' but—there is no alternative—'I will not deceive, not even myself;' *and with that we stand on moral ground*." (GS 344) Nietzsche's point in this crucial section is that scientific truth rests upon a "*metaphysical faith*," which itself belies *moral* conviction.

To summarize, understanding Nietzsche's position on truth from the perspective of art shows how he considers truth to be a figural composition that refers back to natural impulse and instinct. Traversing his psycho-physiological typology demonstrates how that same revelrous, instinctual artistry also refers to how drives [*Triebe*] trace perspectives of value. Drives are the natural-born artists. Interpretations unfold in terms of opportunities for growth and development, which in turn frame perspectives of value. *Valuation expresses the inherence of perspectival evaluation in any given interpretation of existence,* which is accordingly fundamental to human life and not, as it were, a function of consciousness, ideality, or the concept. We're not always aware of the values we experience life (and ourselves!) in terms of, nor of how they are attributed to this or that entity, experience, or event. Now, to understand *nihilism* as a result of a *devaluation*, we have to account for not just *what* valuation is, but also *how* it grows, how it proliferates and amplifies certain patterns of behavior. For this, I will work through Nietzsche's agonism, his insistence on contest, resistance, and overcoming as fundamental to typological development. While I note above that drives "nourish themselves on experience," that they aspire to shape experience like the Apollinian artist such that it appears as a scene of

opportunities for growth—set for the feast, so to speak—there is more to the story.[33] Experience is not simply offered up as content for psycho-physiological nourishment. In fact, built into the scene of experience are obstacles, or what I will call (following Deleuze) problems that provoke drives to their enactment, to their struggle and striving, and thereby to creative growth. For interpretation is a search for what resists in efforts to appropriate and incorporate—a test of strength for the type. This is how power *grows*.

II. Agonistic Problems

Resistances, obstacles, and challenges within the scene of experience express problems for different perspectives of value. Psycho-physiological responses to those problems shape and express the rank orders of drives whose coalescence composes the phenomena of willing. Sensing a problem is thus like tapping into those *real movements of willing*, entering states of intensity that directly express actual, material processes one more or less shares in. What becomes, or appears as, a problem is thus reciprocally conditioned by the type of willing perceiving it, and the *way* in which a problem appears, or the manner in which one relates to a problem, marks the capacity for growth it is indexed with. That is to say that both the significance and measure of risk in a given problem relates to the ruling order of drives encountering it. Now, this is important for nihilism because, as Nietzsche tells it, the relationship one has with a problem evinces their capacity for *overcoming* it. Posing a problem badly means one does not overcome it but rather submits to it, or is determined by it, so to speak. Instead of overcoming nihilism one rather wallows in its advance.

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33. I take "scene" in two ways, each sharing in the other: as a "visual scene," in the sense that Apollo was the sculptor god (a visual art) and the God of prophetic vision; and, as a dramatic scene, a framing such that different layers of meaning are arranged in terms of their significance, in this case according to the order of drives that characterizes the typological perspective.

a. Personal Problems

In Section 345 of *The Gay Science*, titled "Morality as Problem," Nietzsche describes two different relationships one can have with a problem. He says, "It makes the most telling difference whether a thinker has a personal relationship to his problems and finds in them his destiny, his distress, and his greatest happiness, or an 'impersonal' one, meaning that he can do no better than to touch them and grasp them with the antennae of cold, curious thought." (GS 345) "A telling difference," he says, as if it were a mark of esteem to bear a personal relationship to a problem. One aspires to be worthy. But how can a problem be a "destiny?" How *can* one be *worthy* of a problem? On the one hand, a problem is a destiny insofar as the opportunities for growth it expresses compose conditions for certain typological developments. Like Apollo's symbolic vision, problems appear like plot devices that introduce challenges, confrontations, and opportunities for specific psycho-social, physiological developments. To see *destiny* in a problem means one relates to it as a provocation of one's own growth—perhaps one's "*ownmost"* growth, a transformation that stakes their whole character on the line.[34] Because this happens at the level of willing the relation to a problem can only be assessed at the level of investment, what Nietzsche describes in terms of "a personal relationship." In other words, the problem has to have *real stakes* that correspond to and express the *real movements* one is caught up in and responding to—the movements that make *one what they are.* Similarly, and on the other hand, to be *worthy* of a problem refers not just to one's personal investment, but to their relative capacity for overcoming it, which can be assessed in the way the problem is posed. For example, an *insurmountable* problem signals incapacity. If the world *as such* appears fallen, or

34. Here I am of course thinking of Hediegger's analysis of "being-toward-death," specifically in how the confrontation with finitude activates, in a sense, the possibility of authenticity, of taking a kind of ownership over one's ownmost possibilities.

exhausted by the evil enemy, so to speak, then defeat is predetermined, for one cannot destroy the world without destroying themselves along with it. The only possible solution would be hope for deliverance.[35] Conversely, just as being worthy of a challenge means grasping the conditions for successfully overcoming it, to be worthy of a problem means posing it in terms that at the same time present conditions of its overcoming—seeking in it what resists in order to surpass it. A personal relationship to a problem one is worthy of consequently generates the possibility of *self-overcoming.*

In this regard consider, as Acampora does, Nietzsche's call to "Become what you are!"[36] What we are, as has been discussed, are organizations of drives, orders of rank and rule, such that "*becoming what one is,* is realized through an interactive process in which the constitutive rank ordering of drives is achieved by virtue of a form of ruling expressed in engaging others." (Acampora 2013, 186)[37] Between drives, and ultimately between types, lie refractory experiences that strengthen some, weaken others, and perhaps simply do not matter for the rest. Now, in *Contesting Nietzsche* Acampora elaborates Nietzsche's "agonism," for which he draws inspiration from the Ancient Greek *agon*, or organized contest. She explains that agonistic contest possesses two essential properties: an openness to challenge, and criteria such that a competitor wins by excelling their opponent.[38] Excellence is linked to shared values; individual

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35. This will be important for my analysis of the possibilities of critique, and its risk of nihilism, in Chapters 4 and 5.
36. The formulation first appears in GS 270: "*What does your conscience say?* 'You shall become the person you are.'" Later, Nietzsche subtitles *Ecce Homo* with "How One Becomes what One Is."
37. In addition, consider Acampora's description from a bit later on page 195: "In sum, we *are* amid a whole host of attachments, some of which can change, expand, or wither. But the *we* here should be regarded as shorthand for *the order of drives that constitutes us as agents and the ruling order that abides therein.*"
38. Acampora states, "The agon's sustenance requires, first, the preservation of the viability of challenge and, secondly, flexibility sufficient to generate decisions about excellence that are both relative to past performances and in accordance with new standards that are derived through subjecting the prevailing standards of measure to contest." (2013, 25)

competitors win by achieving a higher standard, a standard that, importantly, is affirmed by the community in which—*for* which—the competition takes place.[39] Contest is thus a particular scene of valuation that fosters greater and greater achievement. Winning raises the bar; victory exemplifies the value. This is in contrast to winning by "diminishing the capacities of one's opponent, thereby undercutting his excellence and overcoming by diminishing one's opposition. An effect of the latter is to lower the bar for what stands as the best." (Acampora 2013, 19) Agonistic contest is thus distinguished by its capacity to generate further pursuits of excellence and creative valuation.[40] By tracing agonistic enactments throughout Nietzsche's philosophical works, Acampora shows how crucial developmental moments unfold more or less in terms of staged contests (e.g. his critique of Christianity in the figure of St. Paul). If Nietzsche overcomes his opponents, it is his higher values that prevail.

Nietzsche's polemical writing reflects his agonism in philosophical thought. Acampora extrapolates a model for polemic in the first book of *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am So Wise," as a methodology of agonistic problem posing.[41] Nietzsche begins Section 7 therein noting his own "warlike nature," and argues that the sign of every strong nature is to "*look for* what resists: the *aggressive* pathos belongs just as necessarily to strength as vengefulness and rancor belong to

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39. Acampora also emphasizes the fragility of agonistic contest, that is, that the conditions are hard to maintain. She considers the "ostracism" Nietzsche discusses in "Homer's Contest" as a method of sustaining the contest. Standards set too high, examples impossible to follow, diminish those who would become them. This raises the importance of a normative framework that facilitates and sustains the possibilty of healthy contest. I return to this in Chapter 7. (2013, 17)
40. Acampora is careful, both here and elsewhere, to distinguish agonistic contests from other types of struggle, and admonishes against conflating these senses. Cf. Christa Davis Acampora "Nietzsche's Agonal Wisdom" in *International Studies in Philosophy* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2003) Pages 205-225 where, for example, she argues "Both dialectic and Christian agony are struggles, perhaps even contests, but they are not *agones* of the sort Nietzsche admires." These types of struggle produce effects Nietzsche disdains, e.g. the internalized struggle of the "bad conscience" in the second essay of his *Genealogy*.
41. I am reminded of Zarathustra's aphorism that begins Essay III of *On the Genealogy of Morality*: "Heedless, mocking violent—that's how wisdom wants *us*: she is a woman and only ever loves a warrior."

weakness." (EH "Wise" 7) Aggression, in this sense, expresses a desire for growth.[42] "Every growth," he goes on, "is indicated by the search for a mighty opponent—or problem; for a warlike philosopher challenges *problems*, too, to single combat." (Ibid; my emphasis) Following Nietzsche on this point allows us to venture the following: *philosophical problems are sites for the philosopher's becoming*. Acampora states, "Each of [Nietzsche's] agones attest to how it is the case that, challenging 'problems [...] to single combat [*fordert auch Probleme zum Zweikampf heraus*]," Nietzsche became the philosopher he was and had the thoughts he did." (2013, 188) Recalling the sense or worthiness above one might ask: how we can assess if a philosopher is worthy of a problem? Similarly, and more broadly, what *kind* of enemy does a *strong* nature seek? "The task," Nietzsche says, "is *not* simply to master what happens to resist, but what requires us to stake all our strength, suppleness, and fighting skill—opponents that are our equals." (EH "Wise" 7) For a problem to be our equal requires that it constitute a great *risk*. Facing it without diminishment expresses the courage of a warrior, a mark of strength in character and thought—that is, in type.[43] Philosophically speaking, good problems present opportunities for philosophical thinking to creatively excel. Additionally, as Acampora describes how agonistic contests bond the competitors with their communities, she also explains how "Nietzsche's philosophical martial art aims to incorporate his opposition and not simply to destroy or incapacitate it." (2013, 189) Much like a ruling order of rank's strength is exhibited by its capacity to incorporate new experiences, overcoming one's opponents incorporates their perspectives, thereby rendering their initial position superfluous.

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42. If force cannot help but enact itself in its full capacity (see "gravity" discussion above), and strength is *necessarily* aggressive, then certain drives and organizations of drives—certain types—to the extent they are strong are also aggressive.
43. Note here the inverse relationship between courage and diminishment. If diminishing an opponent is required to effectively contest it, the fight is cowardly, and the competitor is, typologically speaking, weak.

Nietzsche's "philosophical martial art" thus expresses what Acampora calls his "*Kriegs-Praxis*," or a practice of war. He presents 4 principles: (1) he only attacks causes that are victorious; (2) he attacks that against which he finds no allies and so only compromises himself; (3) he attacks causes and not persons, utilizing the latter only as indications or concentrations of more general tendencies, and; (4) that he attacks *without* contempt, without "personal contempt" or a "background of bad experiences." (EH "Wise" 7) I want to lean into how (3) and (4) indicate how to conceive of and take a problem personally and to be worthy of it. On the one hand, challenging causes, and persons only *as* causes, effectively prioritizes the type over the individual.[44] The cause signals a type, and the type expresses values. On the other hand, Nietzsche takes on problems alone, and disavows challenging them from the perspective of bad experiences and contempt. Contempt harbors a taste for vengeance, the likes of which resonate with the *ressentiment* he sees at work in Christian moral valuation. It is important to insist on this point, especially when considering how affirmation comes from the problem of nihilism. One of Nietzsche's central concerns, one he is at pains to describe, lies with how he considers morality to have made humans into timid creatures scared of healthy contest and striving, and consequently incapable of healthy modes of valuation. In the perspective traced by that incapability, problems become insurmountable objects of contempt, like the ineffably fallen world from which the Christian seeks salvation in the hereafter. Now, if problems are the conditions of becoming, then contempt for the problematic object, so to speak, marks a *hatred of becoming*. It is *this* hatred that Nietzsche detects in the ascetic projects that cultivate nihilistic devaluation. How, then, does one approach a problem without contempt? *With love*, with

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44. Nietzsche says, "Third: I never attack persons; I merely avail myself of the person as of a strong magnifying glass that allows one to make visible a general but creeping and elusive calamity."

gratitude for the chance to bear a standard of excellence for one's community and type.[45] Indeed, to see in problems the kind of *personal* destiny Nietzsche describes in *The Gay Science* is to seek what resists as an opportunity for becoming, for creative excellence, and for a great happiness—*for life, in* "the feeling that power is *growing*, that resistance is overcome," (AC 2) Great resistance is at the same time the possibility of great joy—and so, returning to *The Gay Science, "*great problems demand great love." (GS 345)[46] *A warrior's gaiety is immanent gratitude.* Affirmation holds dear a love of the fight.

b. Differential Problems

Now that we have worked out a sense of how a problem can be personal, how one can be worthy of it, and how this can provoke typological growth, it is important to get a stricter ontological sense of the modes of becoming problems can generate. This is important because, as we have begun to see, the issue is not just overcoming this or that problem once and for all, but is rather a matter of cultivating an *ethos* or disposition toward greater problems and further becomings. Deleuze, for whom problems and becoming are intimately linked, is crucial in this regard.

Deleuze approaches problems in precisely the manner described: as sites of creative, transformative thinking. Indeed, he reads Nietzsche *as* a *problem*, as the expression of a

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45. Acampora explains that an oft-overlooked component of agonistic contest is a kind of love and responsibility. She states, "A basic orientation toward gratitude, rather than guilt, is found in the agonistic model, and it entails a different sense of responsibility." She goes on to show how that responsibility is geared toward the community as well as maintaining the possibility of challenge, both as necessary aspects of agonism's potential for creative excellence. Thus, on the following page (33), "Individuals distinguished themselves by virtue of *bearing* and *sharing* the fruits of this potency, not simply by besting their competition."

46. Interestingly, if Nietzsche alone, by way of (2), is the first to raise a particular problem, and he does so with a warrior's gratitude (4), he becomes like the artists he sees as being the first to mark new appraisals, and new values. And indeed, for Nietzsche to excel his opponents, which are causes themselves (1), would be for him to exemplify a standard by which humans can *appear* to themselves as worthy of a higher excellence. Such would be the gratitude we owe a philosophical artist (Cf. *The Gay Science* Section 107, "Our ultimate gratitude to art.)

difference he aspires to repeat. Now, that is not to say that Deleuze reads Nietzsche as an opportunity to succeed where Nietzsche did not, as if it were a matter of picking up where he left off and going further, or solving problems Nietzsche failed to comprehend. On the contrary, as Jay Conway explains, for Deleuze "The reactivation or repetition of a philosophical system has a precise relation to the original texts. The new actualization is the original text's doppelganger, portrait, or bastard child: maximum fidelity, maximum divergence." (Conway 2010, 145) Both extreme attention and violation, both close reading and critical appropriation—Deleuze (re-)arranges Nietzsche's concepts, figures, and ideas to produce a difference in a "double" that harbors and repeats Nietzsche's own expression of difference, such that a new experiment is conducted, or a new problem is determined.[47] True, both Nietzsche and Deleuze may be responding to the same nihilistic tendencies, the same history of devaluation, but the ways in which they each do so signal *responses* that constitute different determinations of the problem for which their acts of philosophical creativity present different cases of solution, resonant though they surely are. In what follows, I read Deleuze back through Nietzsche, so to speak, transposing his ontological account of problems into Nietzsche's agonism in order to anchor them to a sense of concrete contest and confrontation.

For Deleuze "will to power" is the formal principle of drives' fundamentally differential patterns.[48] (Deleuze 2006, 50) As drives develop, they differentiate; the passage into higher states

47. It is perhaps for this reason there is a seemingly endless amount of commentary on whether, and to what extent, Deleuze is simply presenting "Nietzsche's views" or "his own." The answer is both and neither: counter-actualization is impersonal to the extent it expresses a problem that exceeds the bounds of the self and explores states of intensity both individual and collective, such that one cannot rightly claim possession over them. Put differently, the question of whose thought is whose is a badly posed one.

48. Deleuze states, "This is what the will to power is; the genealogical element of force, both differential and genetic." Deleuze's account of will to power and differentiation resonates with what I have set forth of Richardson's account, namely that power designates differentiated processes each of which aspire to pass (or differentiate) into higher states of activity. Indeed, Richardson affirms a Deleuzian influence in his exposition of what he calls Nietzsche's "power ontology." See Richardson *Nietzsche's System* Page 39, Footnote 45, and Page

is a *transformative* growth. The perspectivism Nietzsche adds to the physical concept of force marks for Deleuze the revelation that the genesis of specific relations between forces—their potential for synthesis and recurrence—unfolds in terms of both quantitative and qualitative differences.[49] (Deleuze 2006, 51) He thus argues that Nietzsche doubles the sense in which drives relate to each other. They do not "simply" dominate or obey by virtue of a greater quantum of force, but do so in conjunction with irreducible differences of their quality.[50] It is a matter of both force *and disposition*.

Problems constitute the ontologically differential substance, if you will, by way of which drives differentiate, or becoming unfolds. Thinking occurs, for Deleuze, in terms of "questions" that express what he calls "encounters." (Deleuze 1994, 139)[51] In an encounter, one senses something that doesn't quite fit a given perspective or *logos*; something that "forces us to think." In response, one repeats the encountered difference in thought. It's like the moments in which we're suddenly compelled to exclaim, "What the fuck was that!?"—we're struck. While the object of thought, or whatever it is we confront, does not itself change, its repetition "does change something in the mind which contemplates it."[52] We are provoked into thinking about it, and the differences we confront call upon us to *conduct* ourselves, like the approach of a

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41, Footnote 47.

49. The latter Deleuze calls the "absolute genesis of their respective qualities."
50. Deleuze in this respect distinguishes "active" from "reactive" forces, a distinction I return to below.
51. Deleuze says, "Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter.* What is encountered may be Socrates, a temple or a demon. It may be grasped in a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering. In whichever tone, its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition." In opposing encounters to recognition, Deleuze argues that what catalyzes thinking, what begins the path to "knowledge," so to speak, is not itself a part of, guaranteed by, or primed, as it were, for knowledge and recognition. It comes from outside of it. So does he say immediately before describing encounters, "Thought is primarily trespass and violence, the enemy, and nothing presupposes philosophy: everything begins with misosophy."
52. This *should* sound Kantian, for in Chapter 2 of *Difference and Repetition*, "Repetition for Itself," Deleuze reworks the syntheses of the A-Edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* in order to describe his own theory of the conduct of repetition.

stranger.[53] In thought, the stranger's approach becomes a *question* that compels thinking, such that the imperative to think is inseparable from an element of surprise or unpredictability—a moment wherein thought is somewhat aporetically at odds with its own capacity for producing figures of intelligibility, familiarity, or similarity.[54] Deleuze accordingly calls questions "pure thoughts of the *cogitanda,"* like ideal thresholds or limits that compel thought even as they exceed its capacities ("that which cannot be thought and which must be thought"). In this sense, questions are immanent thresholds that delimit specific acts of thinking in terms of the encounters which provoke them.

If we recall Nietzsche's warrior-like agonism at this juncture, we can venture the following image of thought: thinking expresses sensing, repeating, and incorporating differences such that, in cases of sufficient strength, it is not premised on destroying or diminishing them.[55] Cases of insufficient strength would, on the other hand, correspond to a "dogmatic image of thought" wherein thinking is supplemented by figures of certainty—*unquestioned* figures of "Truth"—that domesticate the differences it responds to. Deleuze's critiques in both *Difference and Repetition* and *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (specifically the final section, "A New Image of Thought," in Chapter 3, "Critique") can be understood as attacks on a model of thinking premised on reducing or diminishing difference. His targets are similar to Nietzsche's: dogma is the conviction of concepts and categories that ramify a need for the unconditional, and whose truth effaces the particularity of their referents—the hegemony of self-identity in an image of

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53. It is worth mentioning that Deleuze does not think all problems pass into thought. Conversely, not all conduct is enacted in thought.
54. Discussing the relationship between problems and decision, Deleuze states that problems, understood ontologically, confront the "fractured I," or the I absent complete comprehension, with "imperatives of pure thought." He says, "Imperatives do indeed form the *cogitanda* of pure thought, the differentials of thought, at once that which cannot be thought and that which must be thought and can be thought only from the point of view of the transcendent exercise. Questions are these pure thoughts of the *cogitanda*."
55. Deleuze calls this "learning" as opposed to "knowledge." I revisit this in Chapter 6.

truth that violates and represses its genetic element, its *aisthesis*. Accordingly, the way questions are asked express the way one encounters a problem and characterizes the type of thinking being done.[56]

Deleuze sees problems as "immanent with their cases of solution," such that the answers we arrive at are in large part determined by the terms we set forth in the question. In other words, posing a problem is already an act of interpretation; resistance is immanent with the drive that seeks to overcome it. Now, for Deleuze, the possibility of *freedom* lies with posing problems such that new ways of perceiving, new ways of thinking and feeling, new *interpretations* are activated. Doing so affirms difference inasmuch as it corresponds to viewing problems as sites for becoming, or for transformative growth—passage into higher states. Deleuze calls this "counter-actualization," and links it to a moment of volitional transmutation.[57] Responding to a problem in a worthy manner activates a transformation in the one who wills such that "It wills now not exactly what occurs, but something *in* that which occurs, something yet to come which would be consistent with what occurs…" (Deleuze 1990, 149) We can understand this in the following manner: if the way in which a problem is posed expresses a type of thinking on the part of the one who asks, posing a problem one is both personally invested in and *worthy* of determines the problem as a site of *self-overcoming,* one through which the thinker*,* the one who asks the true question (or, in Deleuze's terms, the one who wills the Event), is *radically*

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56. Hence Deleuze insists that repetition is a *conduct*. We conduct ourselves to and with difference. Because conduct is the mode of confrontation, encounters are also a matter for ethics.
57. In the "Twenty-First Series of the Event" in *Logic of Sense* Deleuze elaborates his understanding of counter-actualization in terms of affirmation and *ressentiment*. He argues that counter-actualization resonates with *Amor Fati* insofar as willing the Event corresponds to willing the difference it carries, such that one shifts into a disposition toward becomings. In Deleuze's words, "Nothing more can be said, and no more has ever been said: to become worthy of what happens to us, and thus to will and release the event, to become the offspring of one's own events, and thereby to be reborn, to have one more birth, and to break with one's carnal birth—to become the offspring of one's events and not of one's actions, for the action is itself produced by the offspring of the event" (149-150)

transformed. Doing so takes up an encountered difference and incorporates it *without diminishing it*, activating its transformative potential without thereby being undone. If it is impotence that, in Nietzsche's terms, construes a problem with contempt, it is that same impotence that, for Deleuze, marks an incapability of sensing, feeling, encountering, and conducting oneself toward difference, such that the problem is glossed over and never truly ventured. The one who asks, the one who wills, remains the same.

In *Bergsonism* (1991) Deleuze argues there are "true" problems and "false" problems, transposing the relationship of truth and falsity from solutions to problems. False problems present what he calls a "badly analyzed composite," or a grouping together of different phenomena such that they appear to be different only by degree, more or less the same, and not in kind.[58] For example, the problem of "nonbeing" only emerges after grouping together different ways of living into one representation: "Being." By virtue of its absolute homogeneity, Being could only ever relate to nothingness, to nonbeing. (Deleuze 1991, 20)[59] Perhaps more appropriately, if one asks "what is truth?", as if truth is by definition universal, as if it more or less meant the same thing in every case, as if truth were ultimately the same for all people, in all places, for all time—doing so would be to pose a false problem. Interrogating truth in these terms inevitably leads to poor solutions. We only ever return to metaphysics, never arriving at new senses of truth. The true problem requires a differentiated account of truth. For that, specific truths must be linked to their genesis in types of willing such that the metaphysical version (e.g.

58. See the first chapter on "Intuition as Method." Deleuze begins by distinguishing two types of false problems, however, he eventually recognizes that the first type, a confusion of "more" and "less," rests upon the second, which I describe above. Note as well that the distinction between true and false problems also rests upon incorporating or denying qualitative differences. In NP he argues that force, without will to power (and the qualitative perspectivism it enacts), falls back into mechanism. Here it is the same.
59. Deleuze states, "The idea of nonbeing appears when, instead of grasping the different realities that are indefinitely substituted for one another, we muddle them together in the homogeneity of a Being in general, which can only be opposed to nothingness, be related to nothingness."

the badly posed problem above) can be comprehended in its specificity—incorporated, as it were, and determined as an iteration of the problem of truth in relation to singular concrete coordinates (e.g. its situatedness in particular geographico-historical contexts). The true problem leverages the immanence of the origin, the primordial artistry that repeats in each case of solution, each figuration, or each behavior (in terms of drives). And of course, at the origin, there is typological evaluation, which means the true problems, for Deleuze along with Nietzsche, are *problems of value*.

Deleuze argues that problems of value render philosophical thinking *critical*. (2006, 1)[60] Values "presuppose evaluations, 'perspectives of appraisal', from which their own value is derived." (Ibid.) Insofar as poorly posed problems represent differences as badly analyzed composites, they express an *evaluation of difference* that reduces it to figures of sameness. That reduction is the prerogative of a type of willing, such that the answers one comes to repeat the same evaluation. Hence, Deleuze states, "This is why we always have the beliefs, feelings and thoughts we deserve given our way of being or our style of life." (Ibid.) A bit later on, he repeats: "We always have the truths we deserve as a function of the sense of what we conceive, of the value of what we believe." (2006, 104) Finally, back in *Bergsonism*: "...it is the solution that counts, but *the problem always has the solution it deserves, in terms of the way in which it is stated* (i.e., the conditions under which it is determined as a problem)..." (1991, 16) Because a problem is determined under *typological* conditions, one can assess the *value* of a given philosophical problem by evaluating the degree to which it facilitates typological transformation. Put differently, *perspectives of value* delimit the creative capacities of specific philosophical

60. Deleuze states, "But, with Nietzsche, we must begin from the fact that the philosophy of values as envisaged and established by him is the true realisation of critique and the only way in which a total critique may be realised, the only way to 'philosophise with a hammer.'"

problems, such that philosophical thought is made critical in the same way the *ascesis* of intelligibility becomes transformative. One no longer pursues intelligibility for its own sake, as if to determine "once and for all" the nature of a given phenomena, but rather to harness and activate differences, or "lines of flight" in the language Deleuze and Guattari eventually adopt, that provoke opporunities for creative philosophical transformation and growth.

On Deleuze's account this is how Nietzsche renders philosophy critical: by posing philosophical problems as matters of type and willing. "Metaphysics," he says, "formulated the question of essence in the form: 'what is…?'" (Deleuze 2006, 75) The question "what is…?" presupposes a particular way of thinking, one Deleuze goes on to identify with Plato and Socrates. Is the question badly posed? For one, it presupposes a badly analyzed composite. The answer is always, according to Deleuze, "*the one that* is beautiful," or just, or true—necessarily, in its being and essence. But the selection is in bad faith. It is partial, and yet, it selects a single truth to stand in for the rest—one truth to rule them all. So, rather than abiding the question of essence in the form "what is…?" Nietzsche, Deleuze claims, asks "which one?" (2006, 76-77) No pun intended: what's the difference? "Which one?" asks: for whom? *For what perspective*? It recognizes that essence is perspectival, that "it depend[s], in each case, on an affinity of phenomena and forces, on a coordination of force and will." (Ibid.) Force and will converge in will to power; truth expresses the affirmation of a particular convergence, a particular affinity of force and will—a particular will to power. "Which one?" endeavors a typology of truths. Different types articulate interpretative evaluations of existence that nourish and cultivate them.

This is the crucial moment. Problems insist in solutions like an indeterminate potential we conduct ourselves toward. The way in which we pose philosophical problems directly bears

upon the kind of solutions we generate. Just as the repetition of an encounter with difference is a matter of conduct, so too is our approach to the problem. It is thus entirely a matter of *ethos*: an *ethics of problem posing*. While false problems hedge their bets against the problem's agonistic potential for creative excellence by figuring it in terms of sameness—domesticating it, curtailing its possibilities—true problems follow the differences they convey, elaborating their ramifications to activate *new ways of life*. *The one who wills the question becomes otherwise.* Worthwhile problems transform the competitor by pushing them toward a new standard of philosophical excellence. What is at stake in the problem of nihilism is consequently the possibility of *transfiguring philosophical thinking*, making it affirmative and light, rather than grave and full of contempt—and making us affirmative and light in turn. It is a matter of transfiguring *the one who wants truth into one who wants more life.* How Nietzsche poses the problem of morality thus implicates him in a most personal possibility—not a death, but an *overcoming,* for it is *the one that wants truth at the expense of life* that devaluates existence and, by extension, cultivates the approach of nihilism. Posing the problem of nihilism correctly provokes a transformation of the type in revaluating truth to be a function of loving life. Before turning explicitly to nihilism, though, a word on struggle.

Deleuze makes a strange remark about Nietzsche and will to power. He states, "One cannot over emphasize *the extent to which the notions of struggle, war, rivalry or even comparison are foreign to Nietzsche and to his conception of the will to power*. It is not that he denies the existence of struggle: but he does not see it as in any way creative of values." (2006, 82) In light of what I have presented, this surely seems odd. Deleuze cites *Ecce Homo,* specifically Section 9 of "Why I Am So Clever." Therein, Nietzsche states, "I cannot remember

that I ever tried hard—no trace of *struggle* can be demonstrated in my life; I am the opposite of a heroic nature." (EH "Clever" 9) Knowing what we do of Nietzsche's life—the near-constant sickness, his lack of readership, his loneliness—we might dismiss these comments as defensive, almost pathological misrepresentations of a life he was ashamed of. But he goes on to say, "At this very moment I still look upon my future—my *ample* future!—as upon calm seas...I do not want in the least that anything should become different than it is; I myself do not want to become different." What's going on?

While I address Nietzsche's conception of "*amor fati*" at length in Chapter 6 it's worth turning to it here—now, for this moment. Efforts to construe different phenomena in terms of their similarities constitute, for both Nietzsche and Deleuze, efforts in life-denial. They wish for the world to *be* different, for it to fit the needs of their incapacity. *Wanting the world to be different* is characteristic of those ill-suited for thriving in it. In contrast, creative, affirmative types, *do not* want anything to be different than it is. *Amor Fati* is the *ethos* of being disposed toward encountering the world with gratitude, such that one invites the problems one confronts in a manner that activates transformative potentials. Nietzsche expresses this as follows: "I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who *make things beautiful*." (GS 276; my emphasis) This is *crucial* for the problem of nihilism, for if the problem is posed incorrectly—if one's own way of life is not staked on it, if its risk is aggrandized or under-determined, if it is simply denied—then its transformative potential is missed. "Making beautiful" indicates a positive evaluation of what is, or an affirmative valuation of life disposed toward healthy types of overcoming. *We have to pose the problem of nihilism in terms that elevate the possibility of overcoming it, which in turn elevates*

our capacities for becoming otherwise. Without doing so, we only remain disposed toward staying just as ensnared in nihilism as we are now.

Now, with regard to struggle: a strong disposition delights in its problems; a weaker, or more "slavish" (as I set forth below), reacts, but does not overcome them. Contra Deleuze, then, I take Nietzsche to be rhetorically positioning himself against that *reactive* sense of struggle, one in which the victim affirms life only to the extent that their struggle is great, like a beast of burden. This is the sense of struggle Deleuze argues is foreign to Nietzsche. He is right to the extent Nietzsche considers that particular sense of struggle to correspond to moral *ascesis*, to a desire for what is to be different. However, to turn this into a categorical claim about will to power is wrong. If we do so, it is at the expense of losing something vital to will to power, namely the fact that healthy contest, and indeed, conflict, strife, and perhaps even war, *can* generate value, and that an important aspect of affirmation involves celebrating this fact rather than casting it in disdain.[61]

III. Posing Problems

Nietzschean agonism registers an *ethos of problem posing, or problematization*. When we pose problems, while taking care to pose them correctly (e.g. identifying the affinity of forces in contest at the genesis of the central concepts, understanding them historically, setting forth their typological valuations), we also ought to *take them personally*, to be implicated and stake

61. While I generally find Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche to be rigorous and inspiring, much like his own philosophy of difference, I take Nietzsche's agonistic sense of will to power to inflect Deleuze at the crucial moment where 'difference' can become something ineffectual, absolved of struggle, as if it unfolds of itself without conflict. Deleuze himself, for what it's worth (and this is why there is in fact room to maneuver with him on this point), cursorily addresses this concern in *Difference and Repetition*, specifically on page 207, where he states, "Clearly, at this point the philosophy of difference must be wary of turning into the discourse of beautiful souls: differences, nothing but differences, in a peaceful coexistence in the Idea of social places and functions...but the name of Marx is sufficient to save it from this danger." I would add Nietzsche's name next to Marx's.

ourselves in them. We too are expressions of a type, and so too must we risk ourselves—because the possibility of "becoming what we are" is elevated by our courage to confront the problems or questions we encounter. And importantly, like the warrior-spirit, our courage ought to express gratitude rather than contempt. *This is the way in which affirmation emerges from the problem of nihilism.* By posing the problem of nihilism correctly, Nietzsche believes we can change how we view the world, or *change what rules in us*, thereby changing our disposition toward life and living—*toward truth as the* o*nes who will it*. Think differently to feel differently.[62] And if it doesn't matter now, then it never really did.[63]

62. In D 103 Nietzsche presents the principle of his philosophical work: "We must *learn to think differently*—in order finally, perhaps very late, to achieve even more: *to feel differently*."
63. Against Me! "The Politics of Starving" on *Reinventing Axl Rose* (Gainesville, FL: No Idea Records). It goes on, "And without this, we might as well be dead."

Chapter Three: The Problem(s) of Nihilism

Nihilism results from movements of devaluation. It follows from evaluations of existence tied particular types of willing that cannot endure change or suffering, or at least cannot thrive thereby. Now, as I have shown, willing designates types of life, rank orders of drives, or patterns of investment and activity that all strive to enact, repeat, and amplify themselves. To do so, they look for and seize upon resistances to overcome and grow by—problems to solve, as it were. The crucial distinction is qualitative: what dispositions to life, to struggle and becoming, do particular types express? If willing truth abides the imperative of a type disposed against life, nihilism corresponds to its proliferation—a radical development of truth's fundamental masochism. Nihilism, in other words, is a grave problem for the *one that wants truth*.

Below I articulate in detail how these issues converge in nihilistic devaluation. Nihilistic types find meaning in opposition to this world, to this existence. Who wants deliverance? For whom is existence a problem? These questions shape my account of devaluation as an effort on behalf of "slavish" types of willing. In Section I, I articulate the problem of nihilism in broad strokes. In Section II, I present an analysis of nihilistic devaluation as the expression of a particular type of willing. I turn to Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* to set forth how he understands slavish willing in II.a. Then, in II.b, I articulate how willing nothingness nevertheless secures tenacity by turning away from and opposing life. Nietzsche's psychological analysis of the ascetic priest demonstrates a creative *ressentiment* that figures that reactive tenacity. After discussing this, I conclude by outlining nihilistic types as psycho-social patterns of willing that disinvest becoming and singular conditions of growth. One nihilistic type, however, with which Nietzsche himself identifies, contrasts with the others: the perfect

[*vollendeter*] nihilist. I argue that perfecting, or *completing*, nihilism means transmuting willing truth into the creation of new values. This is how interrogating the problem of nihilism generates the possibility of affirmative valuation.

I. The Problem of Nihilism

Let us return to *The Gay Science.* Nietzsche continues in Section 345 to ask why he is the only one to have posed the problem of morality. Nobody has ventured "...for once to *question* it. Well, then, precisely this is our task.—" He continues in Section 346, titled "*Our question mark.,*" to describe how it came upon him (and those who *sense* the problem along with him; he writes in the first-person plural for this reason)[64] that the beliefs according to which humans have created a world above and beyond the actual, and have juxtaposed themselves with and/or against *this* world, are nothing but expressions of the values by which they endure both existence *and themselves*. Those beliefs, and their corresponding truth, are but a means of preservation and proliferation. As artifices for securing and facilitating a particular way of life, they are backwards attempts at reconstituting a unity with life in terms of gods and essences divorced from it. Vulgar, reactionary artistry. Nietzsche arrives at *the* question, *the* problem: "'Either abolish your reverences or—*yourselves!*' The latter would be nihilism; but would not the former also be—nihilism?—This is *our* question mark." Abolishing ourselves would be nihilistic in a straightforward sense, like suicidal ideation. But how is the abolition of belief nihilist? This is the question.

Questioning the value of truth calls for interrogating how *untruth* nevertheless serves as a condition of life. Untruth makes humans capable of enduring life, suffering, and importantly,

64. This could perhaps indicate a 'community of excellence' with which Nietzsche hopes to share his values, in the sense Acampora describes.

themselves. For example, the Olympians, as Nietzsche tells it in *The Birth of Tragedy,* affirmed the Greek way of life. He says, "Thus do the gods justify the lives of man: they themselves live it —the only satisfactory theodicy! Existence under the bright sunshine of such gods is regarded as desirable in itself…" (BT 3) More specifically, they expressed an estimation of life that celebrated, and did not deny, wordly finitude. Uniting the Greek with the world in which they lived, and indeed in terms that valorized instinct and natural life—that affirmed *the body*—the Olympians returned to the Greek an evaluation of life that amplified their self-esteem, their feeling of power in self-regard, so to speak, and thus their capacity for healthy willing. Now, in European modernity, Nietzsche perceives the opposite: namely, beliefs that *separate* people from the world and, it follows, from their capacities for healthy engagement and overcoming. Mocking "the juxtaposition of man *and* world" in GS 346, he nevertheless goes on to admonish his readers: "But look, when we laugh like that, have we not simply carried the contempt for man one step further?" What does this mean?

One laughs at those who believed the lie, but the laughter, too, unfolds as a development of the will to truth, continuous with the willing that had initially created worlds removed from this one. Hence, Nietzsche suspects a more subtle, existential opposition "between the world in which we were at home up to now with our reverences that perhaps made it possible for us to *endure* life, and another world *that consists of us…*" (GS 346) The world of reverence and the world without it in which we nevertheless live—this opposition reveals a "deepest suspicion about ourselves," namely that we might *need* the truths we now mock. Can we live without them? Again: "'Either abolish your reverences or—*yourselves!*'" *The abolition of belief is the*

project of one who opposes the conditions for human flourishing, such that it, too, is nihilism. This insight is at the heart of Nietzsche's concerns. Indeed, it constitutes "*our* question mark."

And yet, one might ask, *who* poses the problem? "Which one" senses it, which one asks the question? Nietzsche speaks in the first-person plural because the question only properly emerges for a specific type of human, namely *the one who wills truth*: the philosopher becomes the nihilist. Recall that questions are the *cogitanda* of thought, the substance of creative potential. The coordinates of Nietzsche's question signal sites of tension between a need for belief, for the unconditional, and the untenability of truth. Encountering that tension provokes possibilities of transmuting philosophical thinking into more than a praxis of moral condemnation, and of transfiguring the philosopher into more than a nihilistic agent of punishment. That is to say that because nihilism is a problem that follows from a *moral interpretation of existence*, and from its attendant hyper-development of willing truth, it, perhaps ironically, invites the potential for moving "beyond good and evil"—*beyond nihilism.*

II. The Untenability of Morality

Nihilism follows from morality, or more specifically, from what Nietzsche calls slave-morality, exemplified in a Christian-Platonic worldview. It arrives when "the highest values *devaluate* themselves." If I have so far given an account of truth in terms of valuation, and valuation in terms of willing, it has primarily been to account for nihilistic *devaluation*. Devaluation follows from values that generate *reactive tenacity.* It is indexed with values that oppose or negate existence, like salvation through ascetic abnegation. Nevertheless ways of life —even ascetic untruth is a condition of life—the issue is that Christian-Platonic values are premised on life denial. *The slave-moralist cannot say "Yes" without first saying "No".* And

eventually, when willing truth turns upon its own claims to absolute exclusive value, the rigor of that reactive tenacity transgresses itself. Its moral premises become untenable. Consequently the one who wills truth is at odds with themselves, since it is precisely the unconditional *value of truth* that had lead them to pursue and to ultimately confront the falsity of its metaphysics, the illegitimacy of its appeals to transcendentality, immutability, and universality. Put differently, truth, like tragedy, dies by suicide. Now, by clarifying and problematizing the devaluative patterns of behavior that culminate in nihilism, we can tease out—that is, in Deleuze's language, we can sense and follow—possibilities of its typological transmutation, of turning devaluation into affirmative transvaluation.

a. Slavish Willing

If existence *as such* appears as something without value, or without purpose, it is so for a specific type cannot, or can no longer, ascribe to it a goal, cannot "say Yes" to it. In the first essay of the *Genealogy* Nietzsche describes master-moralists who symbolize a natural and spontaneous "yes" to life and to their own specific conditions of growth (including, notably, the battles they wage). Master-moralists evince a type that enjoys a firm, meaningful grip on life; their rank order of drives is stable, and their experiences reflect their mastery. Like the warrior-spirit who invites whatever struggles they face, their tenacity is positive. Their 'Yes' comes with ease. *Immanent gratitude*. Indeed, these higher types are for Nietzsche those in whom drives are well-disposed toward conduct that amplifies and preserves their rule. Conversely, in which type is this relationship disrupted? Nietzsche's answer: the one who *cannot* react, and who thus *cannot overcome*. It is the slavish, weak, and oppressed who "are denied 'true reaction, that of the deed,' (GM I:10) and who make up for that denial through imaginary revenge," or so

Nietzsche describes slavish *ressentiment* in GM I:9. The slavish type is thus defined by a thirst for revenge—but why? What is "true reaction?" For Nietzsche, true reaction is active and spontaneous. It meets whatever resistance or threat provokes it in kind. "For the *ressentiment* of the noble human being, when it does appear in him, consumes and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction, and it therefore does not *poison*…," as he goes on to state in GM I:10. It is a fairly straightforward point: without a second thought the noble type fights back, as quickly as it can say "yes." Conversely, the slavish type *does not fight back*, at least not in reality, whether due to external restraint or simply not being able to. Instead, it projects a disfigured image of what keeps it down into the imagination, where it can burn in effigy.

In its clamoring for revenge the slavish type indicates a will to power gone wrong, for only a type ill-equipped to thrive in the world finds its condition of growth in imaginary conflict (nevertheless a will to power!). From this ill-fitting circumstance emerges the premise of slave-morality: "'No!' to an 'outside,' to a 'different,' to a 'non-self,' and *this* No is its creative deed." (GM I:10) A negative relationship to the external world, to that which differs (and therefore threatens), indeed to all that contributes to the suffering the slavish type cannot overcome—to *all of existence*—such negation is the foundational gesture of slavish valuation. In Nietzsche's words, "Its action is reaction from the ground up." (Ibid.) Thus, in Christian-Platonic morality, Nietzsche sees a projection of *ressentiment* into the imagination that *gives birth to values* by creating fictions that invert and are ultimately hostile to conditions of life, of growth, and of becoming. For this, the same figurative elements we have seen at work in Nietzsche's early deconstruction of truth are mobilized. For example, slavish values leverage "the seduction of language" that posits a subject for every object when they affirm the notion that there is an agent

or "doer" behind every deed who *chooses* to act. (GM I.13) Thus do they fashion, as he goes on in the second essay, a subject of accountability, responsibility and *guilt* [*Schuld*], which is one of many slavish fictions that overturn and deny the conditions of noble valuation. Capacities for life affirmation are *revaluated* as conditions of sin and, conversely, conditions of life denial become those of righteous virtue. The master-moralists become figures of evil, and as evil, are negated or denied by the "good," the slavish, the 'one who is not evil.' Nietzsche states, "...and precisely here is his deed, his creation: he has conceived of 'the evil enemy,' '*the evil one*,' and this in fact as a basic concept out of which he then thinks up a 'good one' as an afterimage and counterpart —himself!" (GM I:10) Deriving from an inability to overcome, to say "Yes" to life, a perversely creative *ressentiment* disfigures the strong and healthy, along with the whole world that suits them, to negatively determine themselves as the "good."

There are two ideas I want to emphasize. First, noble valuation expresses a kind of basic affirmation. "The 'well-born' *simply felt* themselves to be the 'happy,'" Nietzsche states. Beasts of prey express an almost brutish affirmation of life; they "come like fate" and act out their instincts "without grounds, reason, consideration, pretext." (GM II:17) Their "Yes" to life is but a fact of their existence. Importantly, their affirmation is also *singular*, their own, without regard for "the Other."[65] Figures of slave-morality, on the other hand, adopt the guise of universality so as to *deny* noble singularity. What we have otherwise described as a "need for the unconditional" here expresses a need for universality in a tyrannical worldview "that allows no other interpretation, no other goal to stand, it rejects, denies, affirms and confirms only in the sense of *its* interpretation." (GM III.23) *Everyone* is a subject; *all* are equally worthy of respect and

65. Nietzsche states in GM II:17, "...what does he care about contracts!" And further down: "They do not know what guilt, what responsibility, what consideration are…"

regard. All-encompassing, the slave's is a standard for everyone. Accordingly, in the terms I have set forth, universality is a figurative dissimulation that gleans existential tenacity for the slavish and suffering by idealizing a negation of and revenge upon singular valuation. Nietzschean criticisms of ideals of universal equality, of cosmopolitanism and secular humanism, turn on revealing them to be revenge in bad faith.

Consider, for example, Nietzsche's attacks on compassion [*Mitleid*]. He considers compassion to follow from empathetic habits that are otherwise fundamental components of human interaction. Empathy [*Mitempfindung*], which translates to "feeling with," describes the emulation of a stranger to "reproduce [their] feeling in ourselves" so as to assess them. (D 142)[66] Now, compassion [*Mitleid*] is the emulation and reproduction of suffering. *Mitleid* translates literally to "suffering with."[67] Suffering, in this basic sense, thus indicates a "loss of strength," a weakening or decomposition. (AC 7) When we feel compassion, then, we are emulating and taking on an other's suffering. Nevertheless, our reproduction is unfaithful; *our* compassion is invariably an *interpretation* of the other's suffering. We seize upon it, and indeed, Nietzsche laments the vanity hidden in ideals of compassionate selflessness.[68] But the problem is this: when compassion is idealized in "moralities of compassion" (e.g. Christian-Platonic morality, or

66. Note as well the resonance with Deleuze's notion of the conduct of repetition in encountering a difference.
67. In D 134, titled "The extent to which one must guard against compassion [*Mitleid*]." Nietzsche proposes the same argument: "Compassion [*Mitleid*], insofar as it really creates suffering—and this is our only viewpoint here—is, like every loss of self to an *injurious* affect, a weakness. It *increases* the amount of suffering in the world…" Nietzsche conceives of empathy [*Mitempfindung*], which literally translates to "feeling-with" or "perceiving-with," as a human dissimulation of others' affective states enacted in order to acquire practical knowledge of them (i.e. to anticipate their actions/reactions, to sense them, so to speak). From this it is clear that Nietzsche takes compassion—*Mitleid*, suffering-with—to quite literally spread suffering from one to another. One who practices pity more or less dissimulates and takes upon themselves another person's suffering.
68. This is at least the understanding of compassion Nietzsche sees in Schopenhauer and, more broadly, in moralities of compassion. In D 133, however, he claims this already misconstrues things. Compassion designates a range of possible experiences. When it appears *as if* it is the taking on of another person's suffering, and moreover when it appears it is possible to *faithfully reproduce* that suffering, Nietzsche sees the mendacity of slave-morality's deceptive artistry. Another badly analyzed composite, in Deleuzian terms: what is *your's* in your suffering, becomes mine, and difference is effaced.

Schopenhauerian pessimism, likely Nietzsche's main target here), it "makes suffering contagious." (Ibid.) We are *commanded* to surrender to it and, under the hegemony of slave-morals, to valorize those who suffer. With a masochism that recalls the self-harm I describe in Chapter 1 regarding truth, suffering becomes the condition of life affirmation. Consequently the issue is not only that ideals of compassion thereby "increases the amount of suffering in the world," but moreover that they "[cross] the law of development" and "[preserve] what is ripe for destruction."[69] (Ibid.)

Now, this is of course one of Nietzsche's more controversial claims. But if we look at it in terms I have presented we can reformulate it as a provocation. If values express typological conditions of growth, and moralities of compassion preserve the endlessly suffering, we might ask *who*, exactly, are those that endlessly suffer. We have seen how Nietzsche considers the need for purpose, for belief, and for the unconditional to have become fundamental to human willing. On the other hand, we have also seen that suffering in itself is not the issue, for willing more or less thrives on or grows through resistance. Indeed, Nietzsche thinks humans are in fact capable of great suffering and perseverance—provided they have a reason.[70] What slavish fictions

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69. Christopher Janaway does well to interrogate Nietzsche's position(s) on suffering, in both its early and later iterations, in the context of contemporary scholarship in his "On the Very Idea of 'Justifying Suffering'" (*Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2017). Bernard Reginster, for his part, dwells at length on the problem of suffering, however he reads it through Schopenhauer's understanding of pleasure as "desire satisfaction." Accordingly, he sees "suffering" as dissatisfaction in pursuit of some determinate end. What I have set forth contests this view. In terms of power, a drive's enactment does not necessarily presuppose an end. In Freudian terms, similarly, the *Sexualtrieb* does not presuppose the object, but rather, is logically prior to its choice. Interestingly, Reginster addresses a possible problem in a note: "However, Nietzsche's view remains peculiar in one respect: unlike Schopenhauer, he argues that pleasure consists not in the removal of displeasure but in the feeling of one's power in successfully removing displeasure. This claim is of course contentious, but my use of the doctrine of the will to power does not ride on it." It seems to me there is a marked difference between the ontologically positive sense of feeling power in overcoming an obstacle, and in *inviting the problem*, and feeling pleasure *at its having been* overcome, a pleasure contingent on resistance in the past tense. The former is a dynamic and agonistic sense of power; the latter, if you scratch beneath the surface, resonates with the kind of resignation Nietzsche disdains in Schopenhauer.

70. In *Twilight of the Idols,* "Maxims and Arrows," #12 Nietzsche states, "If we possess our *why* of life we can put up with almost any *how*. - Man does not strive after happiness; only the Englishman does that."

respond to, then, is not simply suffering but suffering *needlessly,* suffering for no reason, like lambs slaughtered and forgotten. Moreover, because they emerge from the *ressentiment* of those who cannot act, slave-morals deny singular conditions of growth in appeals to universality and equality, such that with the victorious slave-revolt, the herd-like requirement for the *unconditional* becomes a need endemic to "human" life.[71] Put differently, "humanity" is a fictive figure of universal moral subjectivity; it is premised on the notion that suffering in this world cannot be overcome. Rather the world itself, along with the problems and events we suffer therein, ought to be denied: hence, "man *and* world." What is "ripe for destruction," then, is not certain people, or certain races, classes, etc., but *"*humanity*"* itself.[72] For it is in inverse proportion to a *felt impotence* in the face of suffering that compassion is universalized and idealized in the image of humanity—why? Because the contagion diminishes the threats, the singular problems which are the conditions of life itself.[73]

Nietzsche expresses his concerns accordingly: "Suppose [compassion] reigned for even a *single* day: humanity would immediately be destroyed by it." (D 134) If all surrender to compassion, *all will perish*—either perpetual peace, or equality in the graveyard, equally reified

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71. See, for example, *BGE* 199, wherein while describing the emergence of human herds Nietzsche states, "...hence in light of the fact that among human beings obedience has so far been practiced and cultivated best and longest, it is fair to assume that the need for obedience is now innate in the average person as a kind if *formal conscience* that commands: "'Thou shalt unconditionally do something, and unconditionally not do something,' in short, 'thou shalt.'" To substantiate the problem he goes on: "If we imagine this instinct ever advancing to its ultimate excesses, then in the end the commanders and those who are independent are the very ones who will be lacking; or they will suffer inwardly from bad conscience and first need to deceive themselves in order to command, that is, by pretending as if they too were merely obeying."
72. Foucault will go on to analyze in detail how the figure of "man" emerged via certain historical junctures in *The Order of Things,* his seminal text which very notably ends as follows: "If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility...were to cause them to crumble...then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea." See Michel Foucault *The Order of Things* (1994, 387)
73. Nietzsche says as much about Schopenhauer: he was hostile to life, and so compassion became a virtue for him.

images removed from conditions of life and becoming.[74] Compassion, or "pity," is thus *"*the practice of nihilism," (AC 7) while the "values in which mankind [*sic*] now sums up its supreme desiderata are *decadence-values*" which are "symptomatic of decline" and therefore *"nihilistic* values." (AC 6)[75] Why? Because, with *ressentiment* as the cogitandum of their moral image of thought, Christian-Platonic values, for example, proliferate by *denying* possibilities of overcoming. They revenge themselves on actual conditions of growth by way of fictions whose homogeneity, like a "badly analyzed composite," inversely disinvests *singular* possibilities of overcoming. It is in terms of those fictions that valuation becomes unhinged from specific types of growth and, therefore, from tangible value. This, of course, invites nihilism, with which the *untenability* of universal values renders suffering meaningless. Fuck it, it's pointless to try. Nihilistic values in this sense *predetermine defeat* at the same time as they embolden the praxis of nihilistic types: pursuits of total oblivion.

This brings me to the second point I would like to insist upon, leading into Deleuze. The slave's "No" nevertheless generates existential tenacity. Nietzsche emphasizes this point. He recognizes within the slavish "No!" the prerequisite that for base or lower types existence must be falsified in order for them to endure it, in order for them to say "yes." In contrast to the well-born who feel themselves free, he states, the slavish "artificially construct their happiness by looking at their enemies, or in some cases talking themselves, *lying themselves into it…"* (GM I:10) So if the universality of slave-morality inverts noble valuation, and indicates a

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74. Here, of course, I am thinking of the very first words in Kant's "Toward Perpetual Peace," in which he states, "It may be left undecided whether this satirical inscription on a certain Dutch innkeeper's signboard picturing a graveyard was to hold for human beings in general, or for heads of state in particular, who can never get enough of war, or only for philosophers, who dream that sweet dream." The text reads "Towards Perpetual Peace," under the image of a graveyard, and for Nietzsche, is not as satirical as Kant may have hoped.
75. As Deleuze says, "Values superior to life are inseparable from their effect: the depreciation of life, the negation of this world." (Deleuze 2006, 147)

dissimulation whereby what is different, outside, healthy and "non-self" is disfigured into aberrant premises whose negations structure all value and meaning, then its tenacity is life draining, vampiric. It is contingent on a negative relationship with existence—*reactive revenge is what rules in the slavish type,* which Nietzsche calls "hostility to life." Lower types *cannot say Yes to life without first negating it*. Their "grip" is a stranglehold.

b. Willing Nothingness

Deleuze elaborates Nietzsche's senses of reaction and revenge. He describes *ressentiment* as a type in which "reactive" forces predominate over "active" ones. For Deleuze, active and reactive forces are at the heart of Nietzsche's typology of willing. Active forces dominate and take their own differentiation, their own "passage into higher states," as the object of affirmation. They reflect what the master-moralists symbolize: singular valuation. In terms of drives, active forces refer to those well-disposed toward their growth and the struggles that may incite it. Reactive forces, on the other hand, are dominated. They name those forces denied "true reaction" that pine for imaginary revenge. Deleuze states, "*Ressentiment* designates a type in which reactive forces prevail over active forces. But they can only prevail in one way: by ceasing to be acted." (Deleuze 2006, 111) *Ressentiment*, then, is the affect of an organization in which weak or impotent drives dominate, and which grow only by way of acts of revenge which are themselves imaginary.

Now, if *ressentiment* is a type wherein reactive forces rule, one may rightly ask: how could the dominated forces dominate? Would they not then be 'dominant?' And furthermore, how does the type grow? Deleuze has already provided the clue: paradoxically, reactive forces prevail by ceasing to be acted. More specifically, he says, "[Reactive forces]...decompose; *they*

*separate active force from what it can do...*In this way they make active forces join them and become reactive in a new sense." (Deleuze 2006, 57) Reactive forces dominate without ceasing to be reactive. This is a crucial point, one Deleuze elaborates on well. Within slave-morality lies a commitment to *remain a slave,* to preserve itself as a type and, indeed, to proliferate by converting active forces into reactive ones. (Deleuze 2006, 58)[76] Such is its revenge: when active forces are "separated from what they can do," they *become reactive.* What is the "new sense" of reactive Deleuze suggests? If what active forces can do is *act*—and here we should recall the semantics of *Macht* as a capacity for deeds, an "able to"—then, in a tangible and concrete sense, redirecting their capability into imaginary deeds enacts a conversion: they *turn inward*. This is how Nietzsche understands guilt, bad conscience, and the whole scene of subjective interiority. Subjective interiority is wholly constituted by drives turned inward and away from external discharge.[77] Active forces are decomposed, or poisoned, such that what was aggressive pathos becomes self-denial and the relentless neuroses of guilt—neuroses that nevertheless make humanity clever and interesting.[78]

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76. Deleuze says, "This is where Nietzsche's use of the words 'vile,' 'ignoble' and 'slave' comes from—these words designate the state of reactive forces that place themselves on high and entice active force into a trap, replacing masters with slaves who do not stop being slaves." One might also consider this an early sign of Deleuze and Guattari's later work wherein they repeat Wilhelm Reich's question, "How did the masses desire fascism?"
77. In GM II:16, Nietzsche states, "The whole inner world, originally thin as if stretched between two membranes, spread out and opened up, gained depth, breadth and height to the same extent that the external discharging of human beings became *obstructed*."
78. It is hardly a forgotten point, but it is one worth repeating: Nietzsche thinks the forcing inward of active drives generates the possibility of more sophisticated and "clever" ramifications of their discharge. To the extent he considers humans to have become "interesting" thereby, we cannot attribute to him a blanket endorsement of "master-moralists" against the slavish. Similarly, the Freudian sense of "sublimation" designates a process whereby the *Sexualtrieb* is desexualized and channeled into socially valuable outlets: "The instinct is said to be sublimated in so far as it is diverted towards a new, non-sexual aim and in so far as its objects are socially valued ones." (Laplanche, J., Pontalis, J.B. trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith *The Language of Psycho-Analysis (*London: The Hogarth Press, 1973) See entry on "Sublimation") Ultimately, in the same way Nietzsche considers this process to have initiated what ultimately becomes figures of human culture and meaning, Freud considers sublimation to indicate the process whereby basic sexual impulses are diverted into meaningful human relationships.

How does the conversion take place? How do reactive forces, characterized by commitments to preservation and remaining the same, nevertheless enact a "conversion" of active ones? Deleuze tells us that reactive forces prevail by way of decomposing active forces, which thereby become reactive, but there is more to it. He goes on to state that reactive forces needed to ally with a "will to nothingness." What he means is that in order to prevail reactive forces required a kind of strength and nobility, twisted though it may be. That is, they needed a type "capable of profiting from the opportunity and of directing the projection, conducting the prosecution and carrying out the reversal." (Deleuze 2006, 125) Who arrives to *creatively figure* the slave's reactive tenacity? We have already met them: the teachers of the purpose of existence, who appear in the *Genealogy* as ascetic priests. Ascetic priests are the ethical teachers whose ideals are primarily opposed to becoming, change, and growth—slavish fictions that valorize denial and *punish* the sinful. Castigating her, the priest tells the sinner, "It's all your fault."[79] This is how active forces are poisoned. And in fact, Nietzsche sees in the ascetic priestly will a "*ressentiment* without equal, that of an insatiable instinct and power-will that wants to be master not over something relating to life, but over life itself, over its deepest, strongest, most primitive conditions,"—*because the conditions of life are precisely what the type could not master otherwise.* So does the ascetic priest cast judgment upon and sentence existence, punishing those who might otherwise thrive. By teaching that "misery is an election and selection by God, that people beat the dogs they love most…," (GM I:14) they are the agent of *a will to nothingness*, a socio-psychological type that thrives by refashioning conditions of life and

79. Nietzsche states in GM III:15, "'I suffer: someone must be to blame for this'--thus thinks every diseased sheep. But its shepherd, the ascetic priest, says to it: 'Right you are, my sheep! Someone must be to blame for it: but you yourself are this someone, you alone are to blame—*you alone are to blame for yourself!*'...that is bold enough, false enough: but at least one thing is achieved with it, like I said, the direction of *ressentiment* is—*changed*."

becoming into "evil enemies," suffering into virtue, health into vice—in the final sense, meaning into an exit. They exemplify *ressentiment* become creative in this "their boldest, subtlest, most ingenious, most mendacious artistic stroke…" (GM I:14) by which they refract willing into sinful interiority. Proliferating reactive forces, the one who wills nothingness *decomposes* the will to enact revenge upon and punish a self and world fashioned and figured to be, to *need* to be, punished.[80]

Now, under the hegemony of slave-moral values, what becomes of the agon? Acampora shows that what Nietzsche finds compelling about the Ancient Greek Homeric agon is its facilitation of creative excellence and production of tangible, concrete effects. (2013, 114)[81] Competitors win by excelling, not by diminishing, those they contest; excellence characterizes a disposition *toward* life, toward struggle, becoming, and growth.[82] On the other hand, part of what Nietzsche finds so disdainful about Christian morality lies with how it substitutes the possibility of creative (and tangible) excellence with an idealized contest whose stakes are spiritual and whose effects, nevertheless real, are mediated by spiritual reference and thereby devaluative.[83] (Acampora 2013, 11) It is Paul, we are told, who creates "God on the Cross," a figure through which the ideal of a blessed life *without* guilt, which Christ's *actual* life and teaching exemplify, is transfigured into that of a fallen life from which we might achieve personal salvation in the hereafter.[84] (AC 42) In other words, Paul fashions an image of Christ that valorizes hostility to

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80. There are still those who are committed to castigating the world for its failings. To them, the world remains "fallen."
81. Acampora states, "Moreover, values derived agonistically, [Nietzsche] thinks, have a particularly significant immediacy or tangibility: whatever comes to be valued in agonistic exchange emerges as worthy only on the condition that it is actually *manifest*."
82. Acampora states, "'What does a life of fighting and victory want?' is '*More life*.'"
83. Acampora states, "With Christianity, [Nietzsche] claims, spiritualized contest becomes a means of *self*-destructing its enemies and even its adherents."
84. Nietzsche states, "Paul simply transposed the center of gravity of that whole existence [of the Redeemer] *after* this existence—in the *lie* of the 'resurrected' Jesus."

life, such that "life is considered to be a bridge for that other existence." (GM III:11) Life, becoming, change, growth, all become subordinate to the eternal salvation of the individual soul.

What does this mean? If life is the means for the individual's eternal salvation it is radical narcissism in the guise of humility, or as Nietzsche tells it, "The 'salvation of the soul'—in plain language: 'the world revolves around *me*." (AC 43) In Acampora's terms, and in contrast to the "*More life"* of the Homeric disposition, the Paulinian-Christian agon signifies that "'*Everything'*—the weight of all existence hangs in the balance—but his path to pursuing his end puts human beings in the position of being able to *earn* nothing, and *everything* is worthless unless miracles (e.g. the resurrection) are possible." (2013, 121) This is crucial. The Christian agon positions the individual subject in a transcendental relationship to life, such that the latter is worthwhile only as content for self-denials that lead toward the impossible: immortality in the afterlife. Christianity thus "*overdetermines* the significance of individual human lives." (Ibid.) It *corrupts* the agon; its manner of valuation is *devaluative*. By making impossible *"any* form of nobility: it obliterates distinction, difference, and the very basis of genuine respect." (Ibid.) Value is no longer earned, so to speak, but attributed by definition. It becomes the prerogative of everyone, endowed with an immortal soul; the center of gravity is transposed from the earth to the heavens—that is, into *nothingness*.[85] (AC 43) Once again, *moral subjectivity opposes noble singularity*. It flattens and disfigures it. Meaning becomes a matter of choice, and everyone is entitled to it, since everyone possesses an immortal soul. Tangible distinction and differentiation, the basis of respect in this world (recognition and affirmation of difference and distance from another), is deposed by the reign of the moral individual, equal to all, unto death.

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85. Nietzsche states, "When one places life's center of gravity not in life but in the 'beyond'—*in nothingness*—one deprives life of its center of gravity altogether."

Hostility to life is mobilized by the will to nothingness of moral preachers who teach that the purpose of existence, of *all* existence, is opposition to and deliverance from it. Equality and universality are their primary dissimulations; all existent things are equally complicit, fallen into sin. Value is tied to *universal* deliverance (read: annihilation). The one who wills nothingness decomposes, or diminishes conditions of growth, "separating active force from what it can do" in figures of sameness. The reactive tenacity of the one who wills truth is gleaned through projecting badly analyzed composites into the imagination that enact spiritualized revenge upon noble distinction, difference, and singularity. Thought is thereby determined in terms of badly posed problems that issue unities through and against which the moral agent can position themselves as superior. Revenging themselves on what they (mis)construe as "false" or "evil"—on what is outside, different, or partial, they take up a position against difference, against becoming itself, and indeed against *their own transformative possibilities* by separating valuation from concrete, tangible projects. Instead, value is deferred to the otherworldly, divested of worldly reference except as negation.[86]

It is in terms of a need for unconditionality and reactive revenge that Nietzsche locates the "moral ground" of the will to truth, which is in turn the root of nihilism. For when such reactive tenacity becomes an endemic need, we become subjects wholly at odds with ourselves—souls in corrupted bodies of sin. Indeed, the slavish, ascetic image of truth is such that it cultivates a willing which sacrifices all in its struggle against deception: against change, becoming, and falsity. But its *own* falsity, its *own* transfiguration of the world into figures of sameness is ultimately not excepted. The unconditional will to truth thus belies a moral ground, a

86. Hence, Nietzsche says in WP 20, "The nihilistic question 'for what' is rooted in the old habit of supposing that the goal must be put up, given, demanded *from outside*—but some *superhuman authority*."

wager on the value of untruth in its assertion that truth at any cost is worth more than the lie. By encountering their own deception, the lie by which they've lived, the one who wills truth confronts the impossibility of truth *on its own terms*. Put otherwise, *truth devaluates itself*; *morality becomes untenable by way of a self-confrontation*. Now, importantly, because it is philosophy wherein the will to truth has been most thoroughly cultivated—because the philosopher, as the one who wills truth, "still has theologian's blood in their veins," so too is philosophical inquiry uniquely positioned to determine the problem of nihilism in its proper terms.

c. Philosophical Devaluation

Nietzsche historicizes philosophy as an inheritance of moral prejudices and a practice of moral valuation. The turn to the concept is each time an iteration of the Platonic turn away from actuality, from the senses and embodied, physical reality, toward an imaginary order in which life appears disfigured, fixed in Forms that invert change into immutability, finitude into eternity, inequality into equality, and singularity into universality. Put differently, it is in the name of a moral, spiritualized sense of truth that one turns to the concept, and that moral sense expresses the will to nothingness. Thus does philosophy descend in spiritual garb. It carries the conviction of truth and the practice of figuring ideals from its roots in ascetic, priestly willing into the creation of concepts and categories of reason. Rationality transposes moral "equality" into conceptual identity; it disfigures phenomenal differences into aberrations of form. What was equality under God in Judeo-Christian doctrine becomes self-identity in the Concept. Now, because nihilism results from the (over)development of the will to truth, and because philosophy

interrogates and constructs conditions of truth, the problem of nihilism can be determined in philosophical terms.

In WP 12, where Nietzsche addresses the "Decline of Cosmological Values," he presents three perspectives that result from philosophy posing what we might call in Deleuzean terms "badly analyzed composites." He begins by stating that: "Nihilism as a psychological state will have to be reached, *first,* when we have sought a 'meaning' in all events that is not there: so the seeker eventually becomes discouraged."[87] The issue is teleological. Interpreting a meaning behind *all* events requires the conviction that all becoming must have a single goal, even if it is "universal annihilation."[88] Absent that end, the believer is disappointed. Second, Nietzsche argues that nihilism results after humans can no longer understand themselves with reference to a totality, a complete systematization of existence, such that everything has its place.[89] In these cases the value of individuals and particular phenomena are indexed to the whole. When the latter fades, so too does the former's worth. Third, and lastly, Nietzsche claims that nihilism follows when the "true world" created beyond this one is no longer tenable. As we have seen, this occurs through the realization that divine orders and pantheons are mere projections of all-too-human desperation—"man-made and madness, like all gods!" as Zarathustra tells it. (TSZ

87. What is immediately striking about this particular passage is how Nietzsche derives "nihilism as a psychological state" from belief in the "categories of reason." In his view, because philosophy develops through an ascetic relationship to truth and life, so too do its figures refer to moral types of will to power and their effects on willing. He considers the Enlightenment, at least in its European (specifically its French) iteration(s), to follow from the practice of seeking the truth characteristic of the Christian imperative to deny false gods. Christian morality cultivates a skepticism, a suspicion when confronting other gods: they are *not* the true God, not the One. Such inquisition is akin to the movement of negation in the search for philosophical truth. Eventually, he sees that same skeptical attitude to extend to God itself, enacting, as it were, Reason's deicidal advance, after which it can only set upon itself. The effects of this speak precisely to the kind of masochism he thinks leads willing truth to nihilism.
88. Again, recall Kant's Dutch innkeeper—or, to quote Boston hardcore band Toxic Narcotic, "Don't believe the lie that there can be any peace or unity / Humanity must die before there will finally be equality."
89. Nietzsche states, "Some sort of unity, some form of 'monism:' this faith suffices to give man a deep feeling of standing in the context of, and being dependent on, some who that is infinitely superior to him, and he sees himself as a mode of the deity."

"On the Afterworldly") The problem, now, is that they recognize they have no right to a beyond "but *cannot endure this world though one does not want to deny it*." The issue in this last regard is one of endurance, or in my language, tenacity and tenability.[90] Without "the categories 'aim,' 'unity,' [and] 'being' which we used to project some value into the world...the world looks *valueless*." Nietzsche concludes: "The faith in the categories of reason is the cause of nihilism. We have measured the value of the world according to categories *that refer to a purely fictitious world*." Categories of reason are like domains in the kingdom of truth. For *the one who wills it*, individuals are granted purpose, organized in relation to each other, and ascertained with reference to a moral-rational order. The concept is king of man; with nihilism, the despot loses their head.

Philosophy's art of the rational concept marks it as a particularly hypertrophic endeavor of devaluation. How? Because its *ascesis* develops out of ascetic self-contradiction, out of "life against life," by articulating values into concepts and categories that position the one who wills truth, from the believer to the metaphysician, against this world, against life. (GM III.11) The *self-devaluation of the highest values* thus expresses how slavish (read: Christian, Platonic, transcendental) moral *ascesis* preserves a disaggregated type of willing—a type in which one's

90. In this, I agree with Kaitlyn Creasy who, following Ken Gemes and Richardson, and contra Reginster, argues that nihilism must be addressed as a "feeling-based phenomenon: as that which Gemes and Richardson and I call 'affective nihilism.'" (See Kaitlyn Creasy "On the Problem of Affective Nihilism" in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 1, Spring 2018, pgs. 31-51). Creasy does well to describe the negative affects that emerge alongside nihilism, particularly in the first-person. She puts it rather aptly as follows: "Nietzsche's affective nihilist is characterized by exhaustion and disgust; she experiences feelings of weariness or fatigue, disappointment with herself, and a great nausea with humanity." (p. 44) I find Creasy's analysis compelling, especially in her efforts to distinguish drive from affect and then deploy that distinction to understand Nietzsche's position. I am not however as convinced by her conclusion that overcoming affective nihilism can be a project of the self. For example, "The person who overcomes affective nihilism will first reestablish goals toward which she is directed by somehow stimulating the activity of her drives; then she must move toward those goals in action in order to become an effectual agent." (p. 45) By way of will to power, the "cognitive" is ineffably tied to the affective and the psychological—but not merely in the subjective arena. These are broad cultural and historical movements, and I take part of Nietzsche's project of existentially reintegrating humanity into the world to involve breaking the turn to toward the subject, a turn he locates in ascetic sermon and rite.

moral agency is at odds with the world in which they nevertheless live, and indeed with their own life in that world—such that the type turns on itself, as one final falsity to castigate and condemn. It is in philosophy that Nietzsche sees this castigation at work. Now, what this means for philosophy is significant, for as I discuss above, the will to nothingness does exemplify a kind of strength. Willing truth, willing moral values, is *nevertheless a willing.* Indeed, just as Nietzsche reckons with how untruth and belief nevertheless serve life in GS 345, and just as he ends GM III dwelling with how ascetic ideals, almost in spite of themselves, nevertheless *saved the will* by giving it a goal, the possibility for philosophy to become more than an art of slandering life and castigating the false requires one *harness* its will to truth and transfigure its efforts into endeavors of value creation. Not opposition, but transfiguration. When the problem of nihilism is correctly determined it presents conditions that indicate the possibility of exceeding and moving beyond it, such as the work of philosophy transforming from a labor of the concept in service of "former value-*positings* and value-creations that have become dominant and are called 'truth' for a time" into a creative endeavor through which the philosopher "reaches with creative hands for the future," in which "their will to truth is—*will to power*."[91] (BGE 211) Put differently, *the one who wills truth becomes the one who wills power*, wherein power is active, transformative, and creative. To assess this possibility, we have to submit *philosophical problems to a typology of nihilistic willing*.

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91. In BGE 211 Nietzsche gives an account of how, in order to become more than a mere "critic," or more than a philosophical laborer, the philosopher of the future nevertheless must work through and harness the will to truth. He says, "It may be necessary for the education of the genuine philosopher that he himself has once stood on all these steps where his servants, the scientific laborers of philosophy, remain standing—*must* remain standing: he himself will have to have been a critic and skeptic and dogmatist and historian..."

III. Nihilistic Types

Nihilistic types designate patterns of conduct that correspond to specific modes of willing nothingness. In what follows I follow Nietzsche's proposal that there are (at least) two essential types: active and passive. I then present a brief portrait of what Nietzsche takes to be his own type: the perfect/complete [*vollendeter*] nihilist. Each is positioned in the historical moment when, following the Christian-moral cultivation of belief in and the need for a "true" world, humans confront the untenability of the deities, rules, and transcendental categories that had thus far secured their purpose.[92]

Nietzsche equates passive nihilism with "decline and recession of the power of the spirit," as "the weary nihilism that no longer attacks." (WP 23) An atrophic movement, passive nihilism is a collapse or a dissolution of willing. It is, in the final sense, the self-consumption of the "last man," or perhaps the compulsive consumer of late-stage capitalism. In the midst of this decay, "whatever refreshes, heals, calms, [and] numbs emerges into the foreground in various disguises, religious or moral, or political, or aesthetic, etc." (Ibid.) For Nietzsche, intoxications console the dis-aggregated will. We've been punished for so long, and indeed, we have *punished* for so long ("weary nihilism that no longer attacks"), that we're tired of it. We reach for what numbs like an exit. Subdued, we wither.[93]

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92. Alan White, in his "Nietzschean Nihilism: A Typology," argues that among the plethora of types and adjectives Nietzsche predicates of nihilism generally speaking, most designate movements within a nihilism become conscious. In other words, most concern what White calls, following Nietzsche, "radical nihilism," as opposed to "religious nihilism." The former designates the nihilism of the believer who rejects that their belief is in nothingness. I do not, however, agree that "radical nihilism," which White argues follows "religious," is a nihilism become conscious.
93. There is a sense in which passive nihilism has become commonplace. So many of us barely care enough to engage, and when we do, we do so in bad faith, pretending to hold dear the convictions we emulate. While Nietzsche castigates this position, I suspect he does so from a sense of familiarity. He knows well the temptation to turn away. Or, at least I do. And in fact, if the 21st Century is characterized by anything, it is by the plethora of intoxicating commodities we have at our disposal for whenever the dread of mundane, pointless struggle creeps into our thoughts and holds us from the slumber of ignorant bliss. Giving our lives meaning has become, has

On the other hand, "Active nihilism" expresses willing nothingness as an "increased power of spirit." Recall that ascetic ideals nevertheless secure and save the will: the active nihilist is one who harnesses the strength cultivated thereby, one premised on and enacted through negation. They accordingly enact negation like a "violent force of destruction," much like Zarathustra's lion-spirit's resounding "No!". A will to nothingness that *embraces* negation; a wholly iconoclastic passion for tenacity through the abolition of reverence. The active nihilist punishes, but their punishment is moral in bad faith, for it castigates the lie. Indeed, the actively nihilistic abolition of reverence and belief still indexes value with a moral sense of truth. For it is only amongst the shadows of a world of lies in which the sun has forever set that all deserves to be destroyed, that destruction attains to its spiritual limit.

In a sense, active nihilism is negation become sovereign. The active nihilist lashes out at values and beliefs that hold her back just as, again, Zarathustra's lion-spirit roars its "No!" In fact, Zarathustra describes the lion-spirit as follows: "the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert...for ultimate victory he wants to fight with the great dragon…'Thou shalt' is the name of the great dragon." (TSZ "On the Three Metamorphoses") To become sovereign in the desert is to become thirst absolute, *unconditional*, for only thirst truly rules in the desert. The active nihilist attains to precisely that sovereignty; its primary mode of activity is the negation of any and indeed all "thou shalts," all norms or obligations. It can therefore be understood as the impulse to punish turned upon on the punisher. The active nihilist is the atheist that mocks God, the philosopher who disavows "Truth," and the critic who critiques *all* ideals (without, of course, proposing their own).[94] Nietzsche recognizes

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always been, *our own* project—who has the energy for it?

94. "No Future" crust punks are nihilists. They feign a disregard for the future and themselves; they embrace a meaninglessness that can only follow from disenchantment. This contrasts well with The Clash, for whom the

an increase of strength because he sees in active nihilism this sense of negation coming into its own. Nothingness is actively willed, with passion, and it is that passion, that *will to punish*, that holds the drives together (hence, an "increased power of spirit").

Regarding philosophical inquiry, and especially critique, we can diagnose which type prevails by looking at how questions are asked, which in turn reflects the sense of the concepts proposed. For example, the passive nihilist is persuaded to meaninglessness by way of tarrying too long with suffering that cannot, by definition, be overcome. That is what maintains the slave *as* slave. Consequently, it relates to future possibilities via the "I cannot." Overcoming is considered *impossible*. The passive nihilist, wearied by and wallowing in the absence of their idols, conceptualizes a lack *that cannot be filled*. In view of that lack they appeal to compassion, to passive deliverance, or to other values with sedative effects. The active nihilist enacts critique as destruction. The world is not a stage, but an arena—it is a symbol of *increased* strength of spirit—however, the active nihilist is still vitriolic. "All one has left," as Nietzsche explains in *The Will to Power*, "are values that pass judgment—nothing else." (WP 37) The active nihilist in this regard still wills punishment. Consequently, actively nihilistic critique is indexed with concepts of irreparable accountability and scenes of irretrievable justice which serve as vehicles of punishment and revenge. In Chapter 4 I trace these relationships in relation to what Foucault calls a "critical ethos."

IV. Perfect Nihilism—A Way Out?

Before that, though, and anticipating what follows in Chapters 6 and 7, Nietzsche offers a clue for a way out of nihilism. In WP 3 he states, "he that speaks here, conversely, has done

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future always remained unwritten.

nothing so far but reflect: a philosopher and solitary by instinct...as the first perfect [*vollendeter*] nihilist of Europe who, however, has even now lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end, leaving it behind, outside himself." If Nietzsche considers himself a nihilist, it is in this sense of perfection. But what does he mean by "perfect" or "complete?" *Vollendeter* designates a kind of organic growth, the perfection of a determinate evolutionary trajectory. It has teleological connotations, and overall seems rather awkwardly attributed to something like nihilism. Now, Nietzsche certainly considers himself to *have been* a nihilist. In a note from 1887 he admits that he has "hitherto been a thorough-going nihilist," and that "the energy and radicalism with which I advanced as a nihilist deceived me about this basic fact." (Ibid.) Perhaps, if he begins by identifying himself as "a philosopher and solitary by instinct," he means that nihilism, like the morality it follows from, is delimited by the ambitions of a particular rank order of drives. But supposing Nietzsche is speaking as a *type* ("he that speaks here"), how could he *alone* have lived through nihilism, which is certainly more expansive than a single individual? Equally striking is Nietzsche's assertion that all he has done so far is "reflect." Is reflection enough to lead out of nihilism? Or, is reflection merely another iteration of Christianity's spiritualization of contest? As if we could overcome the quite visceral effects of devaluation by simply changing our minds. That is, is reflection, or contemplative musing, enough to generate affirmation?

I take Nietzsche's point here to return to both his insistence on being personally invested in a problem and demonstrating one's worth by overcoming it. Nihilism, as I have maintained, is a crisis for the one who wills truth. Its central possibility lies with whether or not one can transfigure the work of truth into the creation of new values. If Nietzsche considers himself to have lived through and beyond nihilism, it can only be insofar as he himself as become an

"attempter" (BGE 211), one who *experimentally transvaluates*. That he has *comprehended* the termination of nihilism in the possibility of affirmation therefore does not in and of itself accomplish the overcoming. Rather, that comprehension shapes a new image of thought that returns truth to the earth (in Zarathustra's language)—indeed, that makes of truth itself a project of this world. In what Deleuze calls a "counter-actualization," Nietzsche's perfection of nihilism is a response to his own participation in the event as *one who has willed truth,* such that his concepts, ideas, and philosophically creative figures express ways of thinking, feeling, and living that refigure commitments to truth into a will to *more life*, which corresponds to a healthier mode of valuation for which new values are created. Thus, one could presumably live through nihilism without completing it. One can hold onto categories of truth and value that generate relentless condemnations of this world (for this, see Chapter 5), only to eventually leave it. But *completing* it requires tapping into the transfigurative element of willing in the one who wills truth and redirecting it toward an affirmation of life, the life it has otherwise sought to master the conditions of. And if it is the ascetic priest that aspired to master the conditions of life, it is the philosopher of the future that deploys that mastery to dispose us toward *more life*: "revaluation of all values."

To overcome nihilism is to transfigure devaluation into transvaluation. Nietzsche calls it "a transitional stage" for this reason and, in line with his ideas that destruction and creation are intimately linked, considers nihilism to be the condition for a great shift in disposition, a tremendous growth of spirit. He states, "...every fruitful and powerful movement of humanity has also created at the same time a nihilistic movement...It could be the sign of a crucial and most essential growth...that the most extreme form of pessimism, genuine *nihilism*, would come into

the world. *This I have comprehended*." (WP 112) To comprehend this is to sense it as a problem; to pose the problem correctly is to indicate ways beyond it. Identifying nihilistic types and posing them as problems is at the same time to sense the conditions of growth beyond the confines of moral untenability, beyond the grip of nihilism—or, in Nietzsche's terms, beyond good and evil.

Chapter Four: Nihilism, Critique, Freedom

As a matter of existential devaluation, nihilism is not a strictly philosophical problem. Rather, it problematizes philosophy's relationships: how concepts dispose or motivate us, the types of tenacity they express and generate, the effects of power produced and relayed through their discursive arrangements. Undertaking to overcome nihilism, to *move through it*, thus requires relating philosophy to what is outside of it, neither as judge nor jury, neither priest nor politician, but as accomplice. "A concept is a brick," Brian Massumi famously writes in his foreward to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, *"*It can be used to build a courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window." (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, xii) In what follows I argue that, absent formative transvaluation, philosophical critique remains trapped in its own courthouse, spiraling in the orbit of a nihilistic devaluation of freedom. I begin, following my analysis of nihilistic types in Chapter 3, by clarifying an issue regarding Nietzsche's nihilism. Through examining relevant passages from *The Will to Power* I argue, contrary to some, that he is not an active nihilist. Nihilism, for Nietzsche, either terminates in transvaluation or it remains incomplete. His "complete" or "perfect" nihilism is a transmutation of devaluation into transvaluative philosophical experimentation. In Section II, I turn to Michel Foucault. I excavate his genealogy of a "critical attitude," and his corresponding understanding of historico-philosophical critique, to interrogate critique as an *ethos* of freedom. Critique designates a way of posing problems of power that unsettles its stratifications and opens possibilities for freedom. I then bring these accounts together in order to diagnose the risk of critique failing to revaluate freedom and thus reproducing nihilistic patterns of valuation.

I. Absolution

It was there from the start. We have to sift through each element, separating them into discernible parts, to grasp the thought: *critique risks nihilism*. I have articulated a Nietzschean framework for understanding meaning in terms of willing and tenacity, and I have begun to show how the abolition of reverence is a nihilistic gesture at the heart of his most pressing, most dangerous question. What does it mean for the abolition of reverence to be nihilistic? What does this mean for overcoming nihilism? What can this tell us about critique, freedom, and politics? An answer begins to take shape in a few figures: the lion that becomes a child, the perfection of the nihilist, the rebirth of the dismembered Dionysus—destruction that begets creation. In each case the image, the thought, is transformative. Is the desert a circle? How is philosophy tied to this question of abolition? *Where does the will to nothingness hide, today?*

Philosophy, as I describe briefly at the end of the previous chapter, is tied to movements of devaluation by virtue of ascetic commitments to truth. Ascetic ideals are principally opposed to becoming, to the senses, perspective, and singularity. It is a mark of their hostility to life that they deny the bias and creativity at their inception, negating their origins in the actual world in appeals to transcendental universality—not created, but bequeathed. In philosophical language, the concept is deduced; it is grounded in reason, not in creative figuration. Put otherwise, concepts function as ascetic figures in opposing becoming, reifying or "mummifying" their objects, and thereby enacting a vengeance upon life. "They kill, they stuff, when they worship, these conceptual idolaters—they become a mortal danger to everything when they worship," as Nietzsche tells it. (TI "Reason" 1) But, what's the threat? Because becoming is the substance of growth and power, and because the concept presents its object in terms of what is unchanging,

immutable, or permanent, the concept enacts opposition to conditions of growth, power, becoming and, in a word, to *life*. Concepts so construed consequently attain to the reactive tenacity of ascetic ideals. Being otherwise ill-disposed to change and growth, one opposes life for the sake of the hold or grasp they provide.

Active nihilism expresses this ascetic tenacity unhinged. In Chapter 3, I call it "negation become sovereign." Why "sovereign?" Nietzsche proposes that drives are organized hierarchically. Different organizations correspond to different types of willing. What characterizes a given type are the relations that *rule* and, accordingly, the drive or set of drives that subordinate the rest. In the active nihilist the *impulse to punish reigns supreme in enactments of absolute negation*. The development is as follows: within moral *ascesis* negation functions to ascertain unconditional truths, guaranteed by reference to transcendental figures and categories. But this is not yet nihilism. Ascetic negation becomes nihilistic when it loses transcendental purchase—when categories like "aim" "unity" and "being" are no longer authorized—and so, in freefall so to speak, the nihilist confronts the world less concerned with the *promise* of truth than with castigating of the false. In Nietzsche's language, "Finally: one discovers of what material one has built the 'true world': and now all one has left is the repudiated world … At this point nihilism is reached: all one has left are the values that pass judgment—and nothing else." (WP 37) Unbound from moral projects, the ascetic self-contradiction of "life against life" achieves absolution in willing nothingness, nothing but nothingness. In cases of sufficient strength it becomes "a violent force of destruction." That is to say that, at their limit, the one who wills

nothingness becomes the active nihilist who still *condemns the whole world*. Indeed, all they can do is condemn.[95]

At this juncture it is important to clarify an ambiguity: was Nietzsche a nihilist? Perhaps, in light of my brief discussion of his "perfect" nihilism, the question would be better stated as: *how* was Nietzsche a nihilist? Nihilism is a matter of morality's "self-overcoming," but nothing guarantees this moment.[96] The possibility of self-overcoming requires submitting values to critique such that they return transfigured. Nietzsche calls this "transvaluation." Now, the terms of his world-historical sense of nihilism as a crisis of European thought are nevertheless those of interpretation, meaning, and, in my language, tenacity. He foregrounds that morality and nihilism correspond to human perspectives themselves indexed to particular places, times, and types.[97] His own is no different. Nihilism is a problem he can *personally* confront because he himself has shared in moral perspectives: in the decadent, the slavish, and the ascetic. So too, inasmuch as we are philosophers, can it become a problem for us. That is to say that, inasmuch as we leverage

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95. In his *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance,* Simon Critchley remarks that al-Qaeda ought to be considered active nihilists. "The legitimating logic of al-Qaeda is that the modern world, the world of capitalism, liberal democracy and secular humanism, is meaningless and that the only way to remake meaning is through acts of spectacular destruction..." (5) The first problem with this analogy is that it flattens the distinction between morality and nihilism. Nietzsche diagnoses morality as a nihilistic project, true, but nihilism only arrives *as* nihilism through self-confrontation in the will to truth, which is at the same time the opportunity for morality's self-overcoming. This distinction is lost if al-Qaeda are active nihilists. The second, and a more egregious error at that, is what Critchley says next, when he explains that one ought to consider al-Qaeda alongside the Red Army Faction, Lenin, Mao, and other communist revolutionaries. Similar to the conflation set forth above, this leads him to state that "... the logic of Jihadism is an active nihilist revolutionary vanguardism which is far more deeply committed to martyrdom and the rewards of the hereafter than the establishment of any positive social programme." (6) Aside from misrepresenting (or just misunderstanding) communist vanguardism, which ought to be assessed properly with reference to specific socio-historical cases of class composition, this presents another analogy that, rather than making active nihilism intelligible, obscures it in residually moral gloss. Cf. Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (New York: Verso, 2007)

96. Hence, Nietzsche adopts language of "in cases," "in conditions," etc. For example, in WP*,* he describes how nihilism assumes different shapes in different socio-cultural contexts.

97. This, of course, does not commit Nietzsche to a relativism. *That* different evaluative perspectives correspond to different peoples, places, and times, does not determine the how, the why—the conflicts, the *agons*, and the tensions that determine their types of tenacity. Health, strength, nobility, singularity: these are Nietzsche's categories of assessment.

philosophical accounts of truth against falsity, or articulate narratives of its absence or provincialism to contest otherwise sacredly held dogmas, we repeat the problem Nietzsche poses. In each case, we express a *will to truth in self-confrontation,* in encounters with its own history and perspective. Self-overcoming, then, is a self-critique, wherein one transposes truth into singular, perspectival terms in order to activate the possibility of its transvaluation—a most dangerous rendezvous of questions and question marks.

In any event, these are the terms in which Nietzsche's own nihilism is often invoked. He is a destroyer of all known and knowable values, one who relentlessly submits morals to critical vivisection, (BGE 218) and one who undermines the values of European modernity. In his role as a destroyer he is called "active nihilist." Yet, as I have begun to explain, Nietzsche considers his own nihilism to be "perfect," or "complete" [*vollendeter].* He has "lived through the *whole of nihilism*, to the end, leaving it behind, outside himself,"—he has comprehended it in its entirety and enacted experimental, transvaluative work. (my emphasis) It is strange, then, that some consider Nietzsche to be an "active nihilist," or consider active nihilism to lie at the heart of his project.[98] In my view, that proximity only corresponds to the degree to which Nietzsche

98. Dan Conway considers Nietzsche to be an active nihilist insofar as his critical relationship with his own age expresses a destructive task, a harnessing of decadence and a squandering of the strength it has cultivated. Conway's analysis is nuanced, and the image of Nietzsche as active nihilist he presents is powerful. And yet, it is contoured by the idea that destruction is nevertheless the beginning of something else, that it begets creation. In other words, destruction is Dionysian. This, however, does not account for the movement I describe above: namely, that nihilism is "completed" in revaluations. This makes sense of how Nietzsche sees himself to have lived through and beyond it. Nor, on my reading, do we get a clear enough sense of how he considers the nihilism(s) of his age to be inadequate or incomplete. Cf. Dan Conway, *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game: Philosophy in the Twilight of the Idols* (Cambridge University Press, 1997) Pgs. 110-117. Robert Pippin makes similar remarks in *Modernism as Philosophical Problem*, wherein he claims Nietzsche is looking for "an 'active nihilism' that would finally realize the modern, secular goal of autonomy..." (Pippin 1999, 91) This, he claims, follows from Nietzsche's sense that modernity is ambiguous, that it constitutes a problem, and that active nihilism might signal a strength to be harnessed from its terrain. Lastly, and similarly, anarchist literature often praises Nietzsche's active nihilism as a disruption of reality whose radicality can beget a new world. My position is, tempting though they may be, these positions miss what is essential about a Nietzschean self-critique of decadence, specifically in how transvaluative efforts complete movements of decay.

harnesses *ascesis* to submit ideals he is contemporary with to critique: Christian-moral ideals of equality and compassion; secular ideals of the rational, responsible, cosmopolitan subject; images of truth as an immutable, transcendental essence. Negating those ideals can certainly institute a break with one's present. But as a matter of morality's *self-overcoming*, and typologically speaking, the *ascesis* Nietzsche sees in the active nihilist's break with Christian moral values is fundamentally continuous with willing nothingness, albeit having entered into self-critique. If affirmation is inseparable from the problem of nihilism, it is in part because this self-critical moment opens onto the possibility of revaluation. True, it is only possible after taking ownership over the death of God. Destruction, however, is not the end, and Nietzsche is not content to remain lion-like.

In WP 28 Nietzsche notes that his age is one of "incomplete nihilism." He says, "Incomplete nihilism; its forms; we live in the midst of it. Attempts to escape nihilism without revaluating our values so far: they produce the opposite, make the problem more acute." It is worth dwelling on these thoughts. What is the opposite of revaluation? Remaining under the hegemony of slavish values—and ultimately, as Deleuze expresses, remaining slaves. Attempts to escape nihilism without revaluation are inadequate, incomplete. They render the self-contradiction acute: a small, but strong, even painful site of differentiation. One remains bound to patterns of willing hostile to life, proliferating and preserving types incapable of transformative growth. If the problem of nihilism generates the possibility of affirmation, and affirmation describes transfiguring reactive *ascesis*, then incomplete nihilism describes a condition in which the reactive type, though detached from traditional figures of truth, nevertheless still opposes life and, consequently, remains caught in a slavish agon, incapable of

overcoming because they are *incapable of becoming anything else.* In a word, attempts to escape nihilism without venturing new values only make it worse.

Both passive and active nihilism describe inadequate attempts at escape, and they must not be confused with Nietzsche's own position. Whereas passive nihilism reflects a self-destructive weariness, and with it the escapist's need for intoxicating remedies (e.g. consumer spiritualism), active nihilism is the destructive tendency expressed by types strong enough to sustain a will, to *act* with a goal in mind. What goal unites these types? In both cases the end is destruction, whether as self-decay and escape or an iconoclastic, furious squandering. In Nietzsche's terms, "… the will to destruction as the will of a still deeper instinct, the instinct of self-destruction, the will for nothingness." (WP 55) Willing destruction signals the rule of the will to nothingness. If the will to nothingness now rules in projects of almost spectacular destruction, it is because ascetic patterns of willing are unhinged and unbound from their otherwise moral ground. For it was ascetic ideals that made nothingness the goal and task of human life, and "humanity would rather will *nothingness* than not will…" (GM III.28) Nietzsche continues on in WP 55: "Nihilism as a symptom that the underprivileged have no comfort left; *that they destroy in order to be destroyed* … This is the European form of Buddhism—*doing* No after all existence has lost its 'meaning.'" (my emphasis) Destroying in order to be destroyed is only absolution for the ineffably fallen. If the passive nihilist's will to nothingness turns inward (e.g. self-destruction), the active nihilist's taste for destruction is a will to nothingness with nothing but a repudiated world to relentlessly negate. Thus, whether by grunt of the weary camel or roar of the defiant lion, the will to nothingness speaks a eulogy.

And yet. Just as the lion-spirit must become a child, so too must nihilism give way to revaluation. Perfecting nihilism describes the completion of the devaluative movement in transvaluative self-critique. *Negation becomes transfigurative; the one who wills truth becomes otherwise*. Here, I recall Zarathustra's dialogue with his dwarf, personification of the spirit of gravity, in "On the Vision and the Riddle" (a section to which I return in Chapter 6 when I engage at length with Nietzsche's figures of affirmation and eternal return). Sardonically, the dwarf whispers defeatist truths into Zarathustra's ears: what is thrown, what rises high, must surely fall; "'All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle." "'Sentenced to yourself and to your own stoning—," he says, "O Zarathustra, far indeed have you thrown the stone, but it will fall back on yourself.'" Zarathustra is dismayed for a moment; *he is at odds with himself*, caught in the revelation that his ambitions are futile, his projects vain, and, perhaps, that "All is false!" (TSZ "On the Way of the Creator") Caught in *ascesis* without recourse, he nevertheless persists. Zarathustra's courage emerges to redirect it, compelling him to stand resolute to those parts of himself that would otherwise succumb in horror to the vanity of human life, to the meaninglessness of its abundant suffering. As courage overcomes temptation, he stands still and speaks, "'Dwarf! It is you or I!" You or I—*a decisive moment*: a death, for courage is a killer. "[It] slays even pity," Zarathustra says, "But pity is the deepest abyss: as deeply as man sees into life, he also sees into suffering." In the terms I have articulated, courage catalyzes the completion of self-critique, overcoming the reactive tenacity of the unhinged ascetic. Striving against both the drive to drown in pity and the impulse to punish the courageous, one ventures a decisive choice that initiates a new evaluation: eternal return, and the desire for *more life*. The moment described here is the same as that Nietzsche diagnoses in incomplete nihilism. Without passing

into new values, one remains seduced by the dwarf. If we dwell all too long with Nietzsche's critical moments at the expense of the creative, transvaluative gestures, we are radically missing the point. In other words, we enter the desert only to drown. To conflate active nihilism, a sign of strength though it may be, with *completing nihilism in affirmation*, is to misconstrue this most crucial, pivotal, and vitally self-critical moment.

Philosophical critique tarries in the liminal space between nihilism and transvaluation. To the extent they maintain appeals to transcendental terms, and to the extent those terms express condemnatory evaluations of *the world*, the critical philosopher refines a slave-moral interpretation of existence. Elevating a will to nothingness, they generate reactive tenacity through figures and concepts that favor types resistant to or incapable of change and growth.[99] This, again, is what Nietzsche diagnoses in appeals to the rational concept: values hostile to life. Indeed, this is precisely what he charges Plato with originating in crafting a moral world opposed to the one humans exist in, that they sense, feel, and act in.[100] Figuring ascetic revaluation, he invented and affirmed a world of values premised on the radical negation of *this* one. Such imputation of negative value and valence to existence repeats in each philosophical refinement of its moral interpretation. In Nietzsche's language, "Philosophers have never hesitated to affirm a world provided it contradicted this world and furnished them with a pretext for speaking ill of this world. It has been hitherto the grand school of slander …" (WP 253) When we ask where the will to nothingness hides, today, we thus look for the one who slanders the world, and who thus expresses a punitive impulse enabled by moral values. For moral values steer thought toward

99. Along these lines Nietzsche says "For every drive is bent on ruling: and as *such* it attempts to philosophize." (*BGE* 6)

100. *WTP* 438. Nietzsche says, "Not the 'moral corruption' of antiquity, but precisely its *moralization* is the prerequisite through which alone Christianity could become master of it. Moral fanaticism (in short: Plato) destroyed paganism, by revaluing its values and poisoning its innocence … Christianity has grown out of psychological decay, could only take root in decayed soil."

figures of universality, and it is primarily the philosopher who transmutes those figures into its practices and concepts. If we remain tied to devaluation, it is by way of our commitments to this rather punitive project, to reproducing ascetic concepts, which so often become apologia for the State.[101] But if we take Nietzsche at his word, then this is what philosophy has always been: an art of slander and control. Where does the will to nothingness hide? *It was there from the start.*

I can accordingly frame my concerns with contemporary critique by considering how Nietzsche's own concerns about nihilism were there from the start, too—specifically, for example, in his *Untimely Meditations*. In "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life" Nietzsche presents a kind of historiographical typology—three different narrative moods, if you will, according to which historiographical frameworks serve different types of life.: "monumental," "antiquarian," and "critical" history. The one who practices "monumental history" turns toward past figures of great deeds and actions to learn "that greatness that once existed was in any event once *possible* and may thus be possible again." (HL 2; 69) It is an effort on the part of those "who act and strive," and who thus scour historical emblems of action and striving for inspiration, if not guidance. Next, the "being who preserves and reveres" practices "antiquarian history," or history with such great attention to detail that nothing is lost, that all is memorialized. Antiquarian history is an art in preservation that resonates with moral *ascesis*. The antiquarian historian "wants to preserve for those who shall come into existence after him the conditions

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101. Here I recall the following comments by Antonio Negri concerning the role and significance of philosophy: "There is no doubt that any form of knowledge [*conoscenza*] needs to go through an epistemological phase, during which it produces and defines its own concepts so as to formalize and transmit knowledge. But why should all this be called philosophy? Call it conceptual activity. Call it practice of thought. Call it anything else you like. Possibly the most damning and baneful aspect of the history of philosophy is that whenever this conceptual activity or practice of thought has been given the name of philosophy, it has been turned immediately into a function of Power and domination." See Antonio Negri and Cesare Cesarino, "Vicissitudes of Constituent Thought" in *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) pg. 187

under which he himself came into existence—and thus he serves life." (HL 3; 73) Recall, at this juncture, that ascetic ideals too serve life, albeit in a degenerative mode. So too is the threat of antiquarian history a service to life that "knows only how to *preserve* life, not how to engender it." (Ibid.) Lastly, "critical history" serves to "break up and dissolve a part of the past." How? By confronting reverence with its all-too-human origins, for when "one takes the knife to its roots, then one cruelly tramples over every kind of piety." (Ibid.) The critical historian thus unsettles belief in a given institution by unearthing the injustice at its inception.

In each of these modes Nietzsche sees a kind of cruel artistry. Each does a procrustean violence unto history, shaping it in response to a need. They serve life, in his language, because they articulate that need, whether it is to strive, to preserve, or to destroy and deliver. Now, turning to European modernity, Nietzsche thinks, much as with tragedy, that historical work has become self-destructive, namely "*by the demand that it become a science*." (HL 4) *Knowing* history no longer serves specific types of life but is rather taken as an end in itself and, consequently, unbound, so to speak. This "historical sense," as Nietzsche calls it here and elsewhere, (BGE 224) is like *ascesis* in freefall: a willing of truth about history unbound from a sense of purpose.[102] Like so many "indigestible stones of knowledge" (HL 5) one accumulates historical events—for what? Nietzsche's concern with the "oversaturation of an age with history" (HL 6) is framed accordingly:

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102. In BGE 224 Nietzsche likens the historical sense to a "semi-barbarism" in which he detects a "sense and instinct for everything, the taste and tongue for everything: whereby it immediately proves to be an *ignoble* sense." What he means is that, absent a unified sense of purpose or goal, the historical sense remains a "plebeian curiosity" that can only nourish itself on *other* cultures, orders of valuation, historical moments, and styles of life. It indicates a turning away from one's own conditions of growth to marvel at others. Thus, he says, "Perhaps our great virtue of the historical sense is necessarily opposed to *good* taste, at least to the very best taste, and we are able to reproduce in ourselves only poorly, only haltingly, only by force these small, brief and highest serendipities and transfigurations of human life, as they light up occasionally here and there...

> When the historical sense reigns *without restraint*, and all its consequences are realized, it uproots the future because it destroys illusions and robs the things that exist of the atmosphere in which alone they can live...If the historical drive does not also contain a drive to construct, if the purpose of destroying and clearing is not to allow a future already alive in anticipation to raise its house on the ground thus liberated, if justice alone prevails, then the instinct for creation will be enfeebled and discouraged. (HL 7)

The historical sense, or the historical drive, enacts a critical function (it "destroys illusions") by confronting illusory figures with their origins in all-too-human power and partiality. Here, Nietzsche anticipates his later claim in *The Gay Science* that abolishing reverence can be nihilistic. The unhinged or unbound pursuit of knowledge, in its historical mode, becomes a relentlessly destructive tendency in which one can only judge, or destroy, and one's capacity for creativity is potentially weakened.

Nietzsche goes on to say that the reason the historical drive is nihilistic is because "it always brings to light so much that is false, crude, inhuman, absurd, violent that the mood of pious illusion *in which alone anything that wants to live can live* necessarily crumbles away; for it is only in love, only when shaded by the illusion produced by love, that is to say in the unconditional faith in right and perfection, that man is creative." (HL 7; my emphasis) History, in a sense, profanes love. It degrades it; truth, as unmasking or unveiling, kills the lie, and along with it our love of the drama, like Dionysus appearing on stage. How might we reinvigorate the work? Historical work ought to be put back in service of life, which through nihilism, suggests it must augment transvaluative efforts.[103] This, some have argued, is part of why Nietzsche

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103. As Nietzsche tells it in HL 10, "And yet I trust in the inspirational force which, in the absence of genius, powers my vessel, I trust that *youth* has led me aright when it now *compels me to protest at the historical education of modern man* and when I demand that man should above all learn to live and should employ history only in *the*

ultimately adopts the genealogical method, updating central insights from "critical history," namely that every "first nature was once a second nature and that every victorious second nature will become a first," and adapting it to creative, transvaluative work.[104] Genealogy construes history as an arena of conflicts, of forces acting on forces—of will to powers—and traces out types of willing that might be reactivated in the present toward new futures. Insofar as it develops from a critical perspective, genealogical interrogations of different social, political, and economic problems are subject to my concerns about a risk of nihilism. If the nihilist who attacks remains inadequate absent efforts for articulating new values, then critical work, including genealogical inquiry, is incomplete without efforts to articulate new forms of ethical and political life—or, at the very least, without an *ethos* to augment those efforts.

To transition into thoughts on contemporary critique as a praxis of freedom let us then consider the following: Zarathustra mockingly condemns negative senses of freedom. In "On the Way of the Creator" he speaks to the relationship between freedom and creation, akin to how the lion-spirit becomes childlike through courage that slays. "You call yourself free?," he says, "Your dominant thought I want to hear, and not that you have escaped from a yoke … Free *from* what? As if that mattered to Zarathustra! But your eyes should tell me brightly: free *for* what?" "Free from" is a slavish articulation, enthralled by negations of servitude. It masks an impulse to punish and, *in bad faith of its ruling thought*, calls its revenge "freedom." As such, it is inadequate for overcoming. Indeed, it is much the opposite: it renders the problem more acute. Freedom becomes a slavish fiction. "Free for," on the contrary, expresses an honesty, an

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service of the life he has learned to live."

104. Alexander Nehamas suggests as much in his essay "The Genealogy of Genealogy: Interpretation in Nietzsche's Second *Untimely Meditation* and in *On the Genealogy of Morals*" in *Nietzsche's* On the Genealogy of Morals: *Critical Essays* (New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006) pgs. 57-65

encounter *with our ruling impulse* in the form of a certain question: are we free to punish or free to create? Akin to the courage that slays, risking the question disposes us toward typological self-assessment and self-critical transvaluation. Only by perfecting that movement can we create values that complete the abolition of servitude instead of simply repeating its promise.

II. Critique and Freedom

The self-overcoming of morality and nihilism speaks directly to the status of philosophical critique insofar as it enacts an ethos of *freedom*. To address this I turn to Foucault, who is useful for posing the problem of nihilistic critique. I focus on both his 1978 "What is Critique?" lecture as well as his later 1984 essay "What is Enlightenment?" First, I show how he traces what he calls the "critical attitude" in commitments to truth that generate questions of refusal. Second, I describe how he aligns critique with the possibility of our "becoming otherwise." That possibility emerges, on Foucault's reading, when critique's fundamental question ("how not to be governed like that," or "quite so much") activates a transformation. In such questions he sees the *cogitandum* of a *will to become otherwise*—otherwise than what one is, here, now. Becoming otherwise, in his view, is a *conduct of freedom*. Critique, by delimiting régimes of truth, forms of knowledge, and technologies of power, thus recovers contingencies to activate and experimentally engage in what Foucault calls the "undefined work of freedom." (Foucault 1996, 316) Now, by juxtaposing this account with the problem of nihilism, I aim to extend and complicate the story. I argue that critique articulates a self-confrontation of freedom which explicitly recalls the question of the value of truth, as if freedom were but another of God's lingering shadows. The conduct of freedom in critique is thus implicated in the problem of nihilism I have extrapolated from Nietzsche. Put differently, ethico-political critique risks moral

relapse—that is, it risks returning to a devaluative patterns of behavior that lead freedom that back into, rather than *through*, nihilism. And in fact, in the final sense, that risk of nihilism risk also harbors the possibility of affirmative transvaluation.

a. Critical Virtue

In his lecture "What is Critique?" Foucault genealogically interrogates the history what he calls a "critical attitude," in which he notices something like virtue. The critical attitude emerges in response to a problem, namely "how to govern." The problem of governance, on Foucault's reading, derives from 15th and 16th Century European pastoral conceptions of salvation. In a word, if souls were to be saved, they had to be directed—shepherded, coordinated, and regulated in each and every detail of their lives. That direction involved various relationships to truth: the truth of Christian dogma, the truth of the individual being governed, and the truth of the method or practice employed to accord the two. These relationships converged in guiding souls to eternal salvation. Now, Foucault says, with the expansion of civil society, this "art of governing men" expands to a range of areas outside the explicitly religious or monastic. (2007, 43-4) All governmental institutions "in the wider sense the term government had at the time" indicated responses to the problem of governing humans and, conversely, invited particular, negative reactions: "how not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them." (Foucault 2007, 44) Specific arts of governance, in other words, are both related to particular *régimes of truth* and subject to specific questions of refusal. It is through those questions that Foucault sees the "critical attitude" taking shape. If he notices something therein akin to virtue, it is in the insistence on a perpetual right to ask them.

What is a régime of truth? For Foucault, truth and power are intimately linked. In his 1979 interview "Truth and Power" he explains that truth is produced by sets of discursive practices that govern "the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements." (1980, 133) Truth is thus a function of specific historical realities, of specific places and times with specific practices and procedures of its production. As Daniele Lorenzini explains, truth is "always *produced* in relation to a specific reality, and this production generates a series of *effects* that Foucault is interested in exploring..." (2016, 66) Certain sets of practices, or what Foucault otherwise calls "multiple forms of constraint," thus govern the production of truth which thereafter generates certain effects. On both sides then Foucault sees workings of power: in how discourses on truth are produced and sustained through systems of power, and in the effects on power they induce and which expand their purview: hence, a 'régime' of truth. Now, the particular effects Foucault sees in critique are located in questions of refusal articulated from within specific régimes of truth. He states, "I will say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and power on its discourses of truth … Critique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth." (2007, 32) So, if there is a commonality in each iteration of what he calls the "critical attitude," it lies in this double questioning: of truth and its effects, and of power and its figures of truth. And insofar as critique corresponds in each case to a practice of refusing governance, it generates *resistance*.[105] The

105. Lorenzini notes this as well, stating that "The possibility of refusal constitutes the first, necessary step of a practice of resistance—namely, a counter-conduct. In his 1978 lecture, 'What is Critique?', Foucault elaborates on these ideas and suggests that we should define critique as an ethico-political attitude based on 'the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at this price'" (2016 71)

"critical attitude" is thus *both ethical and political*, both a project of self-constitution (insofar as the subject "gives himself the right") and the activation of movements of resistance.

The language of right is significant. In Nietzsche's view, right is a matter of power; one has a right based upon their capacity to overcome obstacles. Recall GS 345: Nietzsche criticizes his contemporaries who take the problem of morality for granted, who leave moral precepts unchallenged or unquestioned. For him, they are unworthy. They have no *right* to the question. Proper determination of the question requires working through the historical development, or "descent" (in the sense of *Herkunft* that Foucault famously interrogates in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"), of the will to truth. Undertaking that determination moreover requires a the capacity to pose the problem without diminishing it. In a word, *capability grounds the right to question*. Lesser, incapable types might recast the problem in terms that diminish its impact, or derail it before the question of value, securing their type and safeguarding morality as "the hallowed place of peace where our thinkers took a rest even from themselves, took a deep breath, and felt revived." The point is this: if one has a right to a problem, it is because one harbors the power to confront it without diminishing it or recasting it in slavish terms, without spiritualizing or disfiguring its agon.

Foucault also indexes the right to ask the critical question with power. Indeed, by "giving himself the right," the subject enacts a project of self-constitution. Thus, following its pastoral context into and through Kant, the European Enlightenment, and modernity, Foucault sees critique articulating questions of autonomy, which are indexed with the truth of the knowable. To ascertain truth, Kantian critique delimits human reason so as to recognize and expel dogmatic transgressions of those limits. By determining what humans have a *right to know,* epistemic

veracity becomes the criteria for autonomy and consent; the use of reason *authorizes* any decision to which a knowing, reasonable subject submits. Reason, in other words, facilitates ethical relationships with governance. Submission without knowing, or to an illegitimate thought —the dogmas of the demagogue—would place one in a situation of heteronomy. Autonomy thus corresponds to submitting governmental command to epistemic criteria, distilling what it is possible to reasonably, or knowingly, obey. This indicates the cultivation of a type of power, for it is through their capacity to reason that the subject secures a reciprocity with power in which their submission is not "commanded" but "granted." In Foucault's terms, "… it is at this point, once one has gotten an adequate idea of one's own knowledge and its limits, that the principle of autonomy can be discovered. One will then no longer have to hear the *obey*; or rather, the *obey* will be found on autonomy itself." (2007, 49) If the critical attitude insures de-subjugation, Kantian critique does so by ascertaining criteria for legitimacy that activate the possibility of autonomy by relating power to the truth of the knowable, to truth as intelligibility. Note Foucault's tripartite framework: the truth of reason, guaranteed and accorded by (Kantian) critique, enables the subject's autonomy.

Foucault returns to this somewhat Kantian framework in his later lecture "What is *Aufklarung*?"[106] Dwelling with Kant's own text of the same name, which he finds situated "at the crossroads of critical reflection and reflection on history," he investigates *how* Kant questions enlightenment. Kant, he says, "is looking for a difference: What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?" (1997, 305) Today's difference harbors temporal velocity. It incites

106. It is worth noting that Foucault is performing a kind of Deleuzean "buggery" of his own with Kant. He admits as much when he claims that his insistence on a relationship between critique and Enlightenment is something Kant would likely never say, and one can see it in the way he rearranges Kantian concepts and themes to produce a difference that challenges, and exceeds, Kant's own philosophical categories.

the future. In other words, what is futural in the present, for Foucault (and in a very Deleuzean manner), is its *singularity*. Now, for his part, Kant considers enlightenment to facilitate human self-legislation, or autonomy, such that they escape their otherwise "self-incurred minority." (Kant 1996, 17; 8:35) Immaturity is self-imposed because it is humans who repress other humans' use of reason and, consequently, their exercise of autonomy. Hence, Kant claims, the moral standing of any age lies in its commitment to rational precepts (Foucault qualifies this: it is "reason for reasoning's sake," reasoning with no other end than itself), because advancing the pursuit of knowledge also advances the subject's capacity to question and consent.[107] Regardless, what is significant for Foucault is this: by conjoining the conduct of reasoning, the truth of the knowable, and the constitution of autonomous subjectivity, Kant determines the problem of enlightenment in terms of "a way out" of the present, of subjugation, "immaturity," and heteronomy. *Freedom is thus made possible through* what Foucault calls a "permanent critique of our historical era." (Foucault 1997, 310)

Permanent critique accordingly expresses a kind of historico-philosophical *ascesis.* By interrogating what we are, what we can know, and what we can become in terms of the passing present, we reckon with and confront our situatedness. Foucault claims this imperative of permanent self-critique thus expresses an "attitude of modernity," or a way of thinking, feeling, acting, and behaving—"No doubt," Foucault says, "a bit like what the Greeks called an *ethos*." (1997, 309) Now, conjoining the significance of philosophical inquiry to the "historical sense" characteristic of modernity, Foucault considers philosophical critique, through Kant, to enact a freeing up of the potential to become otherwise that corresponds to an *ethos of freedom.* Indeed,

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107. Hence, Kant says, "The touchstone for whatever can be decided upon as law for a people lies in the question: whether a people could impose such a law upon itself." (Kant 1996, 20; 8:39)

what Foucault finds compelling in Kant's text lies in his detection of what Laura Cremonesi calls "a process transforming the previous grid of authority, will and reason and in which philosophy should take a precise role."[108] (2016, 104) Authority, will and reason correspond to power, the subject, and truth—but the key word is 'transformation.' Philosophical critique takes up the work of freedom by *historicizing* the present and thereby opening its régimes of truth, along with the subjects they produce, to transformative modification. Note here the resonance with Nietzsche's view on critical history as "breaking up" of a piece of the past to unsettle faith in the institution. Permanent "historico-philosophical" critique joins "breaking up the past" to iterating questions of refusal. It is an *ethico-political* project that seeks to "give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom."

What makes this an attitude of "modernity?" Interestingly, Foucault turns to Baudelaire for an answer. Commenting on the painting of his contemporaries Baudelaire articulates how modern artists relate to the ephemeral, historically situated present, not in order to preserve it or slow its passing, but to *creatively, aesthetically transform it*, like an ode and homage to its finitude. He calls this "ironic heroization." Heroic in its investment, ironic in its aim, "Baudelairean modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it." (Foucault 1997, 311) Notice how Baudelaire connects the truth of what is real to a practice of freedom. Freedom is not the self-legislation of the autonomous subject; its truth is not ordained by reason.

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108. In her article "Philosophy, Critique, and the Present," Cremonesi presents a careful analysis of Foucault's understanding of philosophy's relationship to the present. In this regard she distinguishes, following Judith Revel, between two senses of the present which correspond, in Foucault's writing, to two French terms. '*Présent'* designates the "'historical-epistemic determination'" critique interrogates or unsettles, while *actualité,* or "contemporary reality," designates the movements of differentiation in the present—breaks, or lines of flight, that mark possibilities for transforming the relationship between truth, power, and the subject.

Rather, it is a *freedom of becoming and aisthesis*; its truth is *transfigurative*. Constantin Guys, to use Baudelaire's example, did not paint to capture reality, but rather to convey and express the difference it poses, violating and transfiguring it such that "'natural' things become 'more than natural,' 'beautiful' things become 'more than beautiful,' and individual objects appear 'endowed with an impulsive life like the soul of [their] creator.'" (ibid) Indeed, insofar as the "attitude of modernity" involves creative engagement with reality to recast it in a light that celebrates its finitude, it refers the truth of what is back to an aesthetic, transfigurative element, to its particularity and perspectivism. Indeed, Nietzschean terms can help distill the project: critical attention doesn't secure criteria for recognizing truth, but rather recovers contingencies in the passing present to *create new truths.* Autonomy is no long self-legislation but *self-invention*. Hence, Foucault says, "This modernity does not 'liberate man in his own being'; it compels him to face the task of producing himself." (1997, 312) As an *ethos*, then, the critical attitude expresses a *will to creative transfiguration*. Put differently, philosophical critique becomes the conduct of an *ethos of becoming otherwise*.

b. The Problem of Power

The question the European Enlightenment poses, that which in Foucault's view still remains for us to consider, lies with how critical work interrogates the present to activate a difference from what we are, or what we have been. And yet, as we have begun to see, our repetition of the question carries a difference: self-invention is a different type of freedom than Kantian autonomy. Perhaps better put: today, freedom is not bound by discourses of reason. It no longer transcendentally guaranteed. Indeed, the 20th Century has proven Reason to be an incompetent guarantor—complicit, as it were, in different iterations of oppression: capitalism,

genocide, fascism, and the like.[109] In spite of Kant, perhaps, determining "what we can know," instead of securing autonomy and freedom, has revealed the ways knowledge corresponds to control, domination, and *un*freedom. In Foucault's language, "For all the claim that our social and economic organization lacked rationality, we found ourselves facing I don't know if it's too much or too little reason, but in any case surely facing too much power." (Foucault 2007, 54) Critique, accordingly, poses a different problem.[110]

On his account, Foucault's own historico-philosophical practice repeats the question of enlightenment in terms of problems of power. Foucauldian critique, "genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method," interrogates how effects of power follow from the constitution of different forms of knowledge, and how different forms of knowledge correspond to and proliferate different technologies of power: again, *régime of truth*. (Foucault 2007, 315) The ways in which objects are spoken of and seen describe forms of knowledge; mechanisms of coercion, modes of behavior, and techniques of control correspond to technologies of power. The two domains reciprocally presuppose each other without either being reducible to the other. For example, when Foucault reworks the question of sexual liberation and challenges theories of repression, he does so in view of how discourses on the truth of sexuality reciprocate technologies of control. Knowledge of sexuality does not constitute an apparatus of repression so much as it discursively constitutes the repressed object: the sexualized subject, the masturbating child. Note the shift: intelligibility is no longer the medium of autonomy, it is a method of

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109. Thus, Foucault says of the 20th century, there were two awkwardly linked phenomena: National Socialism and Stalinism. While I do not claim that Stalinism is unworthy of critique and resistance, it is nevertheless curious that communist systems have achieved the same degree of notoriety as fascism. While I take Foucault's claims at their word above, here, below, it is worth registering a suspicion.

110. "It may take the *Aufklarung* as its way of gaining access, not to the problem of knowledge, but to that of power." (Foucault 2007, 59)

control. Foucauldian critique thus responds to a different arrangement of truth, power, and the subject, wherein knowledge is a mechanism for producing and controlling subjugated subjects.

Foucauldian genealogical critique thus undertakes to "grasp what constitutes the acceptability of a system, be it the mental health system, the penal system, delinquency, sexuality, etc." (Foucault 2007, 53) Acceptability is a term that relates knowledge to power in much the same way I have used "tenacity" to designate the relationship between meaning, value, and type. What is acceptable is not what is legitimated by reason but rather is what is tolerated, affirmed, held, or defended by virtue of the working grasp it provides. For Foucault this corresponds to socio-historically situated forms of knowledge, technologies of power, and modes of subjectivity. In this, one ought to hear echoes of Kant's three questions: What can I know? What can I do? What can I hope for? Forms of knowledge, technologies of power, and possibilities of subjectivity.[111] Acceptability poses a different problem than that of strictly political domination or heteronomy, much in the way "to accept" is different than "to submit." It broaches a completely different concept of power.

Indeed, much like Nietzsche, for Foucault power is not a possession of the strong or the weak; it is a relation. It follows not from the might of the subject nor the strength of the despot. Instead, it is multiple and diffuse, emerging through unequal forces differentially relating to each other (here one ought to recall Deleuze's typology of forces). In *The History of Sexuality Vol. I* Foucault describes it as follows: "...it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue

111. Echoes like differential repetitions. The "politics of truth" Foucault describes refers to his own tripartite analytical framework wherein effects of power, forms of knowledge, and subjectivities are like the angles of a prism in which the historical object is reflected but never wholly present, never fully determined. Thomas Flynn argues we thus ought to read Foucault "axially." He says, "That is, I am suggesting that we read the entire oeuvre, an expression [Foucault] disliked, along each of the three axes to which he referred in his late writings, namely, the respective axes of *knowledge* or truth, of *power* or governmentality, and of *subjectivation* or ethics." Cf. Thomas Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason, Volume Two: A Poststructuralist Mapping of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005) p. 144

of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable." (1978, 93) "Power relations" accordingly describes force relations that have become sites of contest, struggle, alliance, etc. Those sites are not limited to political or economic institutions, much as, in Nietzschean terms, power is not restricted to tyrants—rather, it is everywhere, in every moment where one action bears upon another.[112] Deleuze, expounding on Foucault, insists on this last point. He states that the specific kind of force-relation power is—if there is a distinction at all—designates "actions that are not exercised without being exercised upon eventual or real actions."[113] ("Foucault/10;" 1/14) Power is thus not total control of the object nor its violent objectification. Rather, it designates inciting, making more or less probable, to seducing, etc.[114] (Ibid) It is probabilistic, provocative, and generative. Put differently, it is *productive*. If forms of knowledge relay with mechanisms of power to shape and control their objects, it is by way of this expansive, generative sense of power that the latter are produced.[115]

Deleuze also claims that Foucault's conception of force and power relations more or less directly corresponds to his own typology of forces, as well as to Nietzsche's. Extrapolating from the claim that power is always action bearing upon other actions, he claims there are only two

112. In *History of Sexuality Volume I* Foucault states, "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere." (Foucault 1998, 93) Indeed, his famous debate with Noam Chomsky speaks precisely to this extension of power to unconventional domains, beyond the state.
113. Deleuze argues that this precludes collapsing power into violence, since violence bears directly upon the object, and not indirectly upon its set of actions/possible actions.
114. This resonates strongly with Nietzsche's experimental sense of will to power in *BGE* 36.
115. Deleuze argues Foucault's conception of knowledge and "the statement" necessarily open onto, without being wholly reducible to, the dimension of power, specifically by way of force. Here is his full statement: "How do we get from knowledge to power? We have our answer, at least. We move from knowledge to power insofar as the statement forms knowledge, is an integral, operates the integration of singularities, and it is only at the end that we realize that these singularities as such maintained power relations and force relations amongst one another. In other words, knowledge is the integration of force relations, in the most general sense, which is force relations between things, between people, between letters, between light, between shadow and light, between everything you can think of ... I would say that we are now able to distinguish between force relations that constitute power and the relations of form that constitute knowledge. Relations of form are the appearance of integral curves that actualize, and what do they actualize? They actualize singularities, the singularities that sustain force relations between them." Cf. Deleuze, trans. "Foucault/08: December 17, 1985" https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/seminars/foucault/lecture-08

possible scenarios: a force is acted upon, or it acts upon. In Nietzschean terms, a force either obeys or commands; in Deleuze's, a force is active or reactive. Therefore, if Foucault were to present a theory of "will," it would refer to a "complex strategic situation" that designates a multiplicity of forces whose agonistic relationships insist upon certain possible enactments. Willing would always refer to actions bearing upon other actions—that is, to power. "In other words," Deleuze claims, "the real subject is force. And that's where Foucault ends up being Nietzschean." ("Foucault/08;" 12/17)[116] Indeed, Deleuze argues throughout several of his lectures on Foucault that, on this point about forces and power, Foucault remains Nietzschean. But are Nietzsche and Foucault's concepts of power responding to the same problem? What can addressing this question tell us about critique and freedom?

c. The Problem of Will

In the discussion following his "What is Critique?" lecture Foucault answers a particular question in a rather striking manner. Jean-Louis Bruch asks him about a certain slippage he heard: he says that, at one point, Foucault describes a will to not be governed in relativistic or particular terms, always related to a particular institution or set of operations and coercive effects. Yet, towards the end of the lecture, he speaks of "the decision-making will not to be governed." Bruch interrogates this, and Foucault admits the latter formulation was a mistake—but what follows is more significant. Foucault goes on to describe how, historically speaking, religious attitudes and mysticism converged with attitudes of revolt, and how this convergence related individual and collective experience. He states that "... spiritual movements have very

116. Interestingly, Deleuze goes on to argue that it is a vulgar and complete misinterpretation to equate force with violence. He says, "And the only misinterpretation to translate is: there is violence everywhere. That is so little of Foucault's thought. Foucault absolutely separated force relations from the effects of violence." (Deleuze "Foucault/08") I might place this insistence alongside that of emphasizing that, for Nietzsche, power is not always domination, nor always violent, cruel, or harmful.

often been used as attire, vocabulary, but even more so as *ways of being,* and ways of supporting the hopes expressed by the struggle that we can define as economic, popular, and in Marxist terms as the struggle between the classes…" (2007, 76; my emphasis) In this context, "ways of being" denotes spiritual movements that link truth to specific ways of life, elevating *ethos* to enactment. Foucault sees in this something "quite fundamental," for if a shared sense of truth provokes both an individual and collective sense of *volition*, a power of both revelation and revolt, then, Foucault claims, "ways of being" ultimately refer to the *problem of will*.[117]

Willing accordingly concerns how individual and collective dispositions are activated through specific, historically situated ways of being. Spiritual movements are attire for the *one who wills freedom* to the extent their discourses and practices make possible submitting forms of power to questions of refusal, thereby cultivating in the type a capacity to "act upon" rather than be "acted upon." And indeed, those questions are *movements of willing:* "complex strategic situations" that insist upon *eventual* actions which can supplement economic, popular, and/or Marxist struggles (sticking with Foucault's example). Freedom, then, does not originate with its concept. It is not a function of the knowable, nor does it arrive from outside history, like a gift from God. Instead *it is activated and willed through wholly situated interplays of immanent possibilities*. Advancing its work requires latching onto and leveraging those possibilities *in medias res*. On the one hand this entails assessing and engaging concrete transformative possibilities in the present; on the other, this also means one cannot wholly predict the impact those possibilities will have in the future. Willing is an insistence, an incitement to eventual actions, just as types of power are indexed with specific places and times. Displaced from their

117. He says, "It is now necessary to pose the problem of will. In short … one cannot confront this problem, sticking closely to the theme of power without, of course, at some point, getting to the question of human will." (Foucault 2007 76)

initial locus, say as commitments to God in refusals of pastoral power, specific refusals can generate other possibilities and extend to different forms of critical freedom, like modern autonomy. It is in this precise sense that Foucault cautions against conceiving of "the decision-making will to not be governed" as an "originary aspiration," for that would presume a kind of view from nowhere, a sense of freedom untethered from historically specific modes of subjectivity and their respective régimes of truth. In other words, what Foucault calls a "fundamental anarchism" would express an idealized perspective in place of critical attention to the present. We will see how this can become a problem in Chapter 5.

Why *type of power*, then, does the will to freedom express? Consider the following: in GM III Nietzsche describes how the philosopher-type required the attire of "previously established types" to develop and grow into itself. "[*The*] *ascetic ideal,"* he says, "long served the philosopher as a form of appearance, as a precondition of existence…" (GM III:10) Now, for Nietzsche, when the will to truth confronts the untenability of its project, it loses transcendental reference and develops into nihilism. Nihilism is a transitional stage insofar as it harbors the possibility of affirmative transvaluation. Foucault presents something strikingly similar regarding freedom. His description of spiritual movements as forms of appearance for willing freedom and questioning governmental excess resonates with how philosophical contemplation descends through ascetic models inasmuch as it was in the name of God, scripture, or perhaps even the knowing, rational subject that the critical question was developed. Such figures sheltered critical refusals of governance. Those refusals activated the possibility of transfiguring, at the level of will, the subject who obeys into the subject who self-invents, from subjugation to what Foucault calls subjectivation. Now, if *untruth* is a condition of life, so too must we interrogate how it is

also a condition for *willing freedom*. Much as GM III ends with Nietzsche reflecting on how the ascetic ideal, almost in spite of itself, *saved* the will by giving it meaning and purpose, so too ought we to consider how the will to freedom is activated through *ways of being in relation to (un)truth*.

These considerations land critique squarely within the purview of the problem of nihilism. Accordingly, we must submit permanent critique to typological assessment. That is to say that we have to assess the *value of freedom* by evaluating the type of willing at work therein. Consider Deleuze's insistence that, for Foucault, the subject is force, and this makes him Nietzschean. [118] If the real subject is force, which is in a reciprocal but non-formalized relationship with forms of knowledge (which refers to the *formalized* aspect of socio-historical discursive stratifications),[119] then genealogical critique, insofar as it delimits those forms in terms of power, refers freedom not to ascertainment, nor legitimation, but to the *unknown* as a site of non-formalized power and potential. Remarking on Foucault and Deleuze's departure from Hegelian critique, Colin Koopman argues that their experimental models operationalize a positive category of indeterminacy, which corresponds to the recovery of contingency Foucault describes. "Indeterminacy," Koopman explains, "refers to a general rulelessness out of which emerge determinate rules, such that these determinate rules possess whatever specific ruleishness they have only against the backdrop of the indeterminacy out of which they emerged." (2016, 97) By depicting the conditions for the possibility of a given object in terms of indeterminacy, and historicizing indeterminacy as situated planes of agonistic relationships of power that determine

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118. This, for example, is why Deleuze and Foucault both insist on construing their critical targets in wholly positive terms. Positivity describes the actuality of a singularity, the fact that any given system or network is less an ontological whole than a constellation of responses to a shared problem or event, and thus more or less open to transformative movement.

119. See Deleuze's elaboration in "Foucault/09; January 7th, 1986.

the object's appearance, critique registers the present in terms of contingencies that can be recovered to *reshape it*. By doing so, *critique problematizes the present in terms that indicate conditions of its overcoming.* Koopman calls this a method of "indeterminate problematization which is itself a set of positive conditions of possibility for the elaboration of *differing determinations*…" (2016, 98; my emphasis) In Foucault's language, critique "will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think." (1996, 316) Recovering the transfigurative element of the ephemeral moment, critical problematization *positively ungrounds the work of freedom to recover possibilities for becoming otherwise, for the work of self-invention*, without capturing it in deductive relationships to the concept. By doing so, it affirms a loss of faith in the categories of reason, a loss of ideal supplement to the work of freedom—a loss of transcendental guarantee.

Critique thus tarries with a most dangerous question—indeed, a rendezvous of questions and question marks. For if willing freedom relates to a sense of truth, a sense that critical work fundamentally unsettles, then the *one who wills freedom* is seemingly at odds with the conditions for its enactment, without a meaning, purpose, or goal for its pursuit, like the critical historian whose relentlessly destructive nature weakens their capacity for creativity. Indeed, in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* Deleuze offers a conception of critique that resonates strongly with these terms. He argues that Nietzsche presents a model of critique that opposes Kant's on five main points. First, will to power, a "genetic and plastic principle," accounts for sense, value, and belief, rather than transcendentally accounting for "so-called facts;" it is a style of *immanent critique* wherein forms of knowledge are accounted for in terms of the indeterminate relations of power that shape them. Importantly, though, knowledge is not simply reducible to power. Both Deleuze and

Foucault adopt the language of relay, transmission, incitation, etc., to insist on this point: relations of power and forms of knowledge are asymmetrical. Now, the second point: thought is detached from reason, or perhaps better put, reason no longer *necessarily* orients thought to truth. Rather, thought thinks power, and reason is a specific, often hegemonic, mode of enactment. Third, genealogical critique opposes Kantian legislation by tracing and teasing out how it is power, or relations of drives in hierarchical relations, that delimit the usage of reason, and not the other way around.[120] Fourth, and importantly, Deleuze describes critique as "the reactive man serving himself rather than the reasonable being," which culminates in the following statement: "the critical type, man *insofar as he wants to be gone beyond, overcome …*" (2006, 94) Thus, Deleuze remarks in terms of a fifth opposition between Nietzsche and Kant, "The aim of critique is not the ends of man or of reason but in the end the Overman, the overcome, overtaken man. The point of critique is not justification but a different way of feeling: another sensibility." Detached from the practice of rational self-legislation, as well as from the truth of God and/or of Reason, critique becomes an experiment in self-overcoming.

Notice that Deleuze explicitly links critique with reactivity. The critical type is one in which reactive forces predominate. Its willing is indexed with consciousness, with "Man," with "knowledge" in the stratified sense, and with a host of other inverted images of difference that iterate aspirations to transcendental purview—slavish figures of reactive triumph. Now, recall how Nietzsche proposes that the problem of ascetic ideals lies with whether the type that wants truth can overcome its reactivity. *The critical type develops in precisely these terms.* Its

120. Elaborating on Foucault's use of genealogy by reference to Nietzsche, Dan Smith claims in his "Two Concepts of Resistance" that, "When Nietzsche inquires into the *genealogy* of morality, he is inquiring into the *conditions* of any particular moral ranking of the impulses: why certain impulses are selected *for* and certain are selected *against*." Those conditions delimit acceptable uses of reason. See Daniel Smith "Two Concepts of Resistance" in *Between Deleuze and Foucault* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016) Page 273.

provenance is moral, having historically developed through pursuits of truth that are now unhinged from scripture and rationality and consequently without foundation, in freefall. Indeed, Foucault's genealogy of critique, or of the critical ethos, describes precisely this possibility of transmuting historico-philosophical *ascesis* into overcoming, transfiguring the work of freedom from an ascertainment of the knowable into *experimentation with the unknown*. By problematizing the contingencies that have made us what we are, critique frees becoming from conformity to models of the knowable. But *for* what? What *ruling thought* compels becoming? Returning again to Nietzsche's thoughts on history, what is so threatening about their nihilistic tendencies is that, without grounds for synthesizing the will toward specific projects, humans spiral into crisis, unable to compel broad, tenable, and healthy pursuits. The nihilist responds by either abandoning desire and pursuit (passive), by waging war on all values or pursuits (active), or—and this is the crucial point—*by self- and world- transfiguration*: *transvaluation* (complete, or perfect nihilism). Only the last, only the one who self-overcomes, gleans tenacity through the crisis; only the truly creative type attains to transvaluation. So too with the work of freedom.

III. Risking Nihilism

Historico-philosophical, ethico-political critique is at the threshold of transfiguring its art of refusal into creative transformation. By problematizing governance it recovers a sense of indeterminacy that expresses possibilities of freedom. But indeterminacy is a double-edged sword: nothing *necessarily* links critique with liberation, much as the 20th Century taught that nothing invariably links reason with autonomy and freedom, much as the self-overcoming of nihilism proffers no *telos*, no ground, no guarantee. Hence, when Foucault aligns critique with the "undefined work of freedom" and calls it experimental, he cautions that we not "settle for the

affirmation of the empty dream of freedom." (Foucault 1996, 316) Rather, the experiment must be tested. In his terms, critical work must "on the one hand, *open up* a realm of historical inquiry and, on the other, put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to *determine the precise form this change should take*." (my emphases)[121] Recall that, with Baudelaire, it was extreme attention to the present that, somewhat paradoxically, opened the possibility of transfigurative art. Similarly, recall Nietzsche's idea that "oversaturation with history" nevertheless registers the possibility of change, for philosophical "attempts," perhaps. In Foucault, historico-philosophical critique is the condition of *experimental work—for which one must venture the risk of giving form to freedom.*[122] Only thereby can subjugation, through critical refusals, become subjectivation.

So, whence critique's empty dream of freedom? Why is the dream empty? At risk of glossing over their differences, I might invoke Kant's famous line from *Critique of Pure Reason*: "Thoughts without intuitions are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind." (CPR B75) If the work of freedom is untethered from the test of reality, if it becomes an enactment of thought divested of *real experimentation*, it is empty. Similarly, in Zarathustra's language, freedom determined in terms of that which it negates signifies a nihilistic will to nothingness, a will

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121. Deleuze and Guattari call these points where change is possible "lines of flight," which correspond to differential velocities that enable transformative enactments.

122. I would place these remarks alongside the following from Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* where, after having insisted on the real, agonistic, conflictual movement of difference(s), he states, "Clearly, at this point the philosophy of difference must be wary of turning into the discourse of beautiful souls: differences, nothing but differences, in a peaceful coexistence in the Idea of social places and functions … but the name of Marx is sufficient to save it from this danger." (Deleuze 1994, 207) The discourse of beautiful souls Deleuze refers to is an inverted image of activity. It substitutes an abstract calculus of concepts ("peaceful coexistence in the Idea") for the real movement of differences, making of becoming a matter of determination by conceptual models. Such substitution amounts to a slavish subreption, a clever separation of active force from what it can do in the image of activity that derives from, and is thus transcendentally guaranteed by, its concept. That is no experiment; its a rigged contest, for the Idea emerges untainted by its actual differences. Marx compels us otherwise.

incapable of affirming itself and passing into a higher state.[123] In bad faith of their *ressentiment* for being incapable of self-invention, the nihilist makes of critique a project of punishment. Now, at this juncture recall how ascetic self-contradiction separates humanity from "the world." The laughable juxtaposition "man *and* world" marks the overdetermination of the moral subject *against* the world, like the sinner's spiritualized *agon* in pursuit of their eternal afterlife. Dissimulated, badly analyzed composites serve the articulation of problems wherein value is cast in opposition to the earthly—*all* the earthly. If critique recovers those composites to overdetermine the work of freedom as opposition to the world, it *reconstructs a moral antagonism that lapses into nihilistic devaluation*. Freedom, in these cases, is put at odds with itself; the 'free from' stands in for and disfigures the 'free for' in a negative image of salvation and deliverance from actuality. From real movement to inverted image—*freedom devalues itself*.

I should be clear: I call nihilism a *risk* for the critical work of freedom in an effort to stay with terms of power as well as to avoid lapsing into an equally nihilistic framework in my own critique. Critique is not inherently nor necessarily nihilistic; freedom is not inherently nor necessarily devaluative. These are risks for the subject of critique, for the *one who wills freedom.* Inasmuch as nihilism is its premise, affirmative transvaluation remains a matter of cultivating a disposition that transmutes moral *ascesis* into creative, *experimental form-giving*. It's courage that slays pity, and that elevates Zarathustra to his vision of eternal recurrence. He doesn't arrive at it by castigating his dwarf-like companion, nor *himself*. Similarly, my position regarding the value of freedom is that we have to assess it in terms of disposition or tenacity. Put differently, we need to *typologically evaluate different problematizations* in terms of the *forms of freedom*

123. In Deleuze's terms, it remains a type subordinate to the rule of reactive forces, one in which what is active is *incapable* of taking its own differentiation, its own undefined becoming, as an object of affirmation.

they instigate. If *reality itself* is the problem, and freedom becomes total negation for the sake of moral deliverance, which type of willing does this presuppose? What force has taken hold of and determined the problem? The answer, in Nietzschean terms, is *the nihilist:* the one whose ruling thought is punishment, judgment, and revenge, and who accordingly condemns the whole world. In this moment, I hear Zarathustra's admonition, "Mistrust all in whom the impulse to punish is powerful … And when they call themselves the good and the just, do not forget that they would be pharisees, if only they had—power." (TSZ "On the Tarantulas") Indeed, the problem is not only that nihilistic types of freedom are incapable of overcoming specific forms of governance, nor *that* the active nihilist punishes, but moreso that when "freedom" is a mere vehicle of punishment it *capitalizes on the unfreedom* presumably opposed, like ascetic priests who thrive on the suffering they proliferate. Put otherwise, in bad faith of its own type of willing, the nihilistic critic makes of the work of freedom an effort in self-destruction. Freedom has its priests, too—and revenge ain't no solution.[124]

IV. Conclusion

How can we transmute critical philosophical *ascesis* into experimental works of freedom? When genealogy opens "a realm of historical inquiry" it does not recover grounds that necessitate a particular way of living, nor a specific political project. What it does is recover indeterminacy to unground the work of freedom, freeing possibilities of becoming otherwise. But the work is incomplete if it stumbles and stays in the ungrounding, rejecting any concrete project of "determining the precise form this change should take." That is to say that the possibility of

124. Propagandhi, "Without Love" from *Supporting Caste* (G8 Welcoming Committee; March 10, 2009). Track 9.

"no longer being what we are today, tomorrow," requires the courage of creativity, or a *form that transfiguratively revaluates freedom*.

Critique, of course, *can* be a sign of strength. In some cases it expresses a strong, healthy valuation of freedom. Genealogically tracing the limits of contemporary acceptability can very well express a type of life that has outgrown its day, and thus seeks to become more—so too, in another iteration perhaps, can detecting political-economic contradictions under specific modes of production indicate conditions of communist revolution.[125] The key is this: without *formative revaluation*, willing freedom remains unworthy of its work, of the problems it poses. It retains an ascetic denunciation of the world that only reproduces nihilism. All too often are we content to be lion-like; all too often we relentlessly negate the world, glimpsing freedom in oblivion—but the creation of new values is the final sense of the problem of nihilism. *Critique without revaluation is inadequate. It makes the problem more acute*. Absent the agonistic, typological framework I have constructed, this problem remains hidden. But, of course, *it was there from the start*.

125. There are, of course, major differences between genealogical, historical materialist, and other modes of critique. In the terms I have proposed, though, I believe they share in the same ethos.

Chapter Five: Moral Twilight

Critique, on Foucault's reading, generates specifically political effects. The right to question governance expresses an ethos of freedom, demonstrating a fundamental concern with political subjugation, domination, and liberation. In Chapter 4 I showed how Foucauldian critique marks a shift in what he calls the "critical attitude." Developing through different regimes of truth (from the truth of scripture and revelation through that of knowability), the critical attitude enters into and reckons with truth's self-overcoming. It interrogates power, and the conduct of freedom shifts accordingly. Ungrounded, the question of its value is raised. By way of that question we can assess different valuations of freedom in Nietzschean terms: as symptoms of nihilism or signs of affirmation. Doing so will enable us to sense what indicates possibilities of overcoming and what limits, detracts from, or is inimical toward them.

In what follows I propose that the concept of "destituent power," while advancing a radical valuation of freedom, nevertheless often slips into a nihilistic framework by advnacing a moral antagonism that refuses the formative element of willing. This constitutes a grave threat, not only in failures to experiment with forms of freedom, but in types hostile to its processes of becoming. I begin reflecting alongside Nietzsche on how freedom relates to the unknown and what effects that produces. I take his seafaring, oceanic imagery as a call for revaluating freedom. Staying with this moment, I then analyze perspectives on destituent power as an ontological affirmation and a specific type of political insurrection. I engage with Giorgio Agamben, whose more "passive" sense of destituent power signifies a way of life lived in the form of the "as-not." For an example that bridges ontology with politics, I turn to Saul Newman, who argues, via Agamben and Max Stirner, that destituent power is activated through

insurrections that both displace power and refuse to articulate alternatives. Similarly, in a final and most telling example, the Invisible Committee propose that destituent power "unmasks" or "empties" sites of power, thereby generating conditions for commonality. I argue that, in each case, destituent power nihilistically determines problems of power, which inadequately valuate of freedom. After working through possible counter-arguments, I conclude by elaborating on the consequences I take to follow from what I set forth.

I. Freedom and Becoming

Consider the following: for Nietzsche willing truth generates liberating effects. When knowledge is taken as an end in itself, he thinks it constitutes a historical rupture. "It is something new in history that knowledge wants to be more than a mere means," as he tells it in GS 123. Knowledge becomes more than a mere means when willing truth sufficiently develops such that it no longer requires spiritual or moral supplement. In a word, it achieves self-valorization: knowledge for knowledge's sake. Untethered from the purview of Judeo-Christian doctrine, its *ascesis* opens onto the possibility of setting ends for itself. This is indeed liberating. "We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us," Nietzsche goes on in GS 124. Willing truth is here likened to burning bridges, which recalls its critical function, its manner of profaning or destroying illusions. The destruction of illusions, in the twilight of old idols, activates new possibilities of becoming for the subject of knowledge, even as it invites nihilism. Continuing with Nietzsche: "But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage!" Freedom like an ocean is awesome, infinite—and *terrifying*. It is the near-paralyzing

infinity one encounters in nihilism, here described as the absence of land. Hence, "Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more *freedom*—and there is no longer any 'land.'" No longer any land, no longer the sanctity of the ideal. Our seafarer, the *one who wills truth*, longs for repose.

What, then, of freedom? In our longing for repose do we flee it, scared and shuddering? Must we make for the shelter of a beautiful illusions lest we spiral, suffering without meaning?[126] We might return to Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditation* on history for a clue. In his final section therein he begins with the following:

> Mindful of this situation in which *youth* finds itself I cry Land! Land! Enough and more than enough of the wild and erring voyage over strange dark seas! At last a coast appears in sight: we must land on it whatever it may be like, and the worst of harbours is better than to go reeling back into a hopeless infinity of scepticism. Let us only make land; later on we shall find good harbours right enough, and make the landfall easier for those who come after us. (HL 10)

"Let us only make land," he says. What he means in this particular context is that education, and particularly scientific education, ought to be integrated with cultural life. Science, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, which "seeks to abolish all limitations of horizon and launch mankind upon an infinite and unbounded sea of light whose light is knowledge of all becoming," must be reintegrated with "culture as a unanimity of life, thought, appearance, and will." (Ibid.) For this, naturally, Nietzsche counsels one learn from the Greeks, who "learned to *organize the chaos*" by thinking back to their own needs, and thereby cultivating a "strong *moral* nature." By

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126. Recall that Apollo, god of healing, prophecy, and the beautiful illusion, attenuates Dionysian revelry in precisely these terms. Their union, which symbolizes a *unity with life*, allowed both repose within *and an affirmation* of finitude.

composing a unity with life that integrated thought with their own needs, Nietzsche considers the Greeks to proffer a way for healing the nihilistic malaise induced by the excessive, unbound historical sense of modernity, along with its relentless destruction of illusions.[127] For the Greeks, mind you, this was not a denial of their freedom, but an affirmation of it. Their composition of an existential unity with thought and life celebrated chaos—it *harnessed* becoming, like giving birth to a dancing star. (TSZ "Prologue" 5)

As with our seafarer, freedom longs for land. What I call critique's risk of nihilism unfolds in terms of that longing. Its nihilism appears in concepts that reconstruct an antagonism with "badly analyzed composites," often with *all reality*, and which formally repeat moral-transcendental judgment. This is especially evident—and indeed, most pernicious—in appeals to a non-ground, absence, or some ineffable, unnameable (im)potentiality or impossibility. What is impossibility but an inverted image of becoming, of the sea's unbound horizon? All impossibility can do is interrupt, like death at work within.[128] In these gestures, freedom collapses into refrains of opposition that make of it but another value that passes judgment. Negation becomes sovereign; *one wills freedom as nothingness*. By substituting deliverance for concrete, agonistic experimentation, and in tying value to a rejection of reality, the critical nihilist *devaluates freedom in this world*. Drifting ever further into the infinitely deferred horizon of its actuality freedom becomes untenable, an empty dream that can only castigate failed experiments in its name, as the sun sets forever on a world of lies. That is to say that by way of their longing for the tenacity of a horizon while nevertheless drifting unbound, the one who wills freedom, insofar as

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127. Nietzsche calls this "the unhistorical and the suprahistorical," wherein the unhistorical designates what he will call in GM II:1 "active forgetting," while the suprahistorical describe the "powers which lead the eye away from becoming towards that which bestows upon existence the character of the eternal and stable, towards *art* and *religion*." In Chapter 6 I deal explicitly with both.

128. "So then death worketh in us, but life within you." 2 Corinthians 4:12

they remain incapable of making land, of *composition*, returns to willing nothingness. They would rather will nothingness than not will freedom. In Nietzsche's terms, this produces an inadequate or incomplete form of nihilism—inadequate precisely because it cannot generate, cannot even dispose us to and is in fact ultimately hostile toward, concrete and formative processes of becoming, thus defaulting to moral categories of value in bad faith to sustain willing. Absent the form-giving component so crucial to Nietzsche's notion of creativity, and equipped with a freedom that can only pass judgment, the critical nihilist thus remains an agent of punishment, an artist of slander and would-be pharisee.

In what follows I argue that the ethico-political concept of "destituent power," while developing a radical sense of freedom, slips into such critical nihilism. This, I see mainly in how it signifies some vital, ontological potentiality invariably violated by passing into concrete forms. Additionally, these latter are often conflated with one another, gathered into some overarching sense of power that stands-in for social, historical, and political-economic complexities. Destituent power's terms of antagonism thus reconstruct a moral antagonism that advances nihilistic patterns of valuation. I note here at the onset that my critique remains on the terrain of power and value—that is, at the level of *ethos*. As such, and as an iteration of affirmative critique, the problem I articulate at the same time presents terms for overcoming, for completion. To do so, in Chapter 7 I reconnect destitution to forms of composition. The point here is that I am not opposed to the problem destitution articulates. My aim is to transfigure it.

II. Destituent Power

In the wake of the 20th Century, radical political philosophies—anti-capitalist, anti-racist, feminist, decolonial and queer political philosophies—have developed critical concepts of power

and freedom that extend well beyond the purview of classical revolutionary frameworks: Stalinist revolutionary communism,[129] European-modern revolutionary struggle (e.g. the French and American revolutions), and classical anarchist humanism (e.g. the radically self-legislating individual), to name a few. These critiques spring forth alongside concrete shifts in the composition of political, economic, and social power, whose detection often requires, or at least invokes, a Foucauldian methodology. Non-formalized, concrete power-relations are seen to subtend the traditional figures (e.g. the factory, the capitalist, the proletariat, etc.) of political-economic and discursive regimes. Conversely, such regimes can be displaced by leveraging power at those non-formalized sites, such that different types of knowledge and subjectivities are constructed.

Freedom can only be activated within specific stratifications of power. Power is not strictly economic, or "political," but extends into the purview of the social, personal, cultural, and institutional—into the very reproduction of life. This, Foucault calls "biopower," alongside "biopolitics." By recovering indeterminacy, as I describe it following Foucault in Chapter 4, historico-philosophical critique *problematizes* biopolitical institutions by exposing the ubiquity and contingency of the relations that sustain and reproduce them.[130] Thus Foucault says, "[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power." (1978, 95) Problematization enables resistance in the *one who wills freedom*, who enters processes of becoming otherwise, similar to what Deleuze and

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129. I specify Stalinism, here, because, while I think it is incorrect to conflate Soviet Communism with Fascism, I nevertheless think it equally important to be clear about the excesses and transgressions upon freedom enacted by Soviet, Eastern Bloc, and Chinese Communist parties and states. Nothing is all bad, but what is bad, is.

130. On the other hand, in his critical analysis of analyses of biopolitics, Achille Mdembe articulates a concept of "necropolitics," which rather emphasizes the determination of *who must die.* While I do not engage with Mdembe in this project, it is worth mentioning, here, below, that biopolitics has no purchase on necessity. That is to say that it admits its own analytical flaws and inadequacies, engagement with which can transfigure the concept in compelling ways. See Achille Mdembe *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019)

Guattari describe as "becoming-revolutionary."[131] Critique therefore activates possibilities for becoming that specific institutions, discourses, and technologies can subjugate but never wholly exhaust.

The Argentinian Colectivo Situaciones develops a critical concept of "de-instituent power" through their experiences in Argentina's 2001 uprisings. It resonates strongly with the terms I have set forth.[132] After years of a grueling recession, with unemployment at nearly 20% (closer to 25% by some estimates), Argentina's economy was on the brink of total collapse, with $132bn of sovereign debt mainly to institutions like the World Bank.[133] The Argentine peso's fixed 1-to-1 exchange rate with the U.S. dollar, the IMF's insistence on tightening austerity measures, political corruption, and other factors converged in what became a national crisis. Throughout 2001 President Fernando de la Rua's administration increasingly restricts public spending, including severe cuts to education and government subsidies for public utilities. By December 13th, shortly after the government announces it will halt pension payments to nearly 1.4 million people, unions call for a general strike.[134] Subsequently, on the 17th, the government presents its 2002 budget which includes further spending cuts. By the 19th and 20th, weeks of protest culminate into riotous insurrection. In a total lack of faith in both politicians as well as the unions meant to represent workers' interests, the Argentine people shout "*¡Que se vayan todos!*" ("They all must go!") as they take to the streets of Buenos Aires. Protesting against the

131. For a nuanced discussion of Deleuze (and Guattari) and Foucault's different approaches to resistance and power, see Daniel W. Smith "Two Concepts of Resistance: Foucault and Deleuze" in *Between Deleuze and Foucault,* ed. Nicolae Morar, Thomas Nail and Daniel W. Smith (Edinburgh University Press, 2016) pgs. 264-282.
132. For a useful chronology of the term see at https://destituencies.com/2020/destituent-power-an-incomplete-timeline/ (accessed 09/12/2022)
133. See "The Events that Triggered Argentina's Crisis," in *BBC News* Friday, December 21st, 2001. (available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/1721103.stm accessed 9/12/2022)
134. See "Argentina Delays Pension Payments" by Tom Gibb in *BBC News* Thursday, December 13th, 2001 (available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1707666.stm accessed 09/12/2022)

neoliberal agenda imposed upon them in the form of austerity measures, spending cuts, and rampant privatization, people directly confront sites of state power. The police, armed with tear gas and water cannons, fail to hold them back. 22 people are murdered with several more injured. A state of emergency is declared on the 19th to try and quell the uprisings. By the 20th, de la Rua, as well as his minister of economy, Domingo Cavalla, both resign.

The Colectivo Situaciones theorize, in notes, dialogues, and exercises "in situation"—a "simultaneity of acting and interpreting" (CS 2011, 63)—how the insurrection of the 19th and 20th coalesced around a sense of multiplicity. While people from all walks of life mobilized against neoliberalism through a shared distrust of both politicians and traditional leftist leaders, radically new forms of struggle and autonomous organization emerged.[135] For example, the roadblock, proliferated by *piquetero* movements of unemployed workers, is a widespread tactic. *Piqueteros* consisted, in the Colectivo Situaciones's words, of "unemployed workers seeking to *solve problems connected to their own existence."*[136] (2011, 95; emphasis mine) Their movement outside traditional forms of struggle gave shape to radically decentralized forms of organization.

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135. See Peter Ranis, "Argentina's Worker-Occupied Factories and Enterprises" in *Socialism and Democracy* (Vol. 19, No. 3, November 2005). Describing the 2001 uprising Ranis says, "The rebellion in Argentina of December 2001 was a spontaneous outpouring of wrath and a demonstration against the imposition and consequences of a prescribed neoliberal economic model. But it also included a direct confrontation with the governing institutions and political leadership...The cacerolazos (pots and pans demonstrations) that began in December 2001 represented the mass of Argentine society from all walks of life. Argentina had never experienced such a spontaneous multiclass uprising. It represented the poor, the working class, the unemployed, the retirees, civil servants, students, the middle class, professionals and shopkeepers. This was a movement from below, distrusting even leftist parties that sought changes from above. There was little confidence in established political leadership cadres, in or out of power, as mediators of the public will. Nor was there any clear evidence that these new social formations had the unity to challenge for political power or that they had a shared commitment to develop new mechanisms of public responsibility and representation." Available at https://sdonline.org/issue/39/argentina%E2%80%99s-worker-occupied-factories-and-enterprises accessed 09/12/2022

136. "*Piqueteros*," the Colectivo further explain, "is not a synonym for *unemployed.* The unemployed is a subject determined by need, defined by a lack. The piquetero is someone conditioned by need, but not determined by it. The difference is a major one: the piquetero has managed to produce a subjective operation on a socially precarious background. She cannot deny her condition, but neither does she submit herself to it. And in this subjectifying *act* she appropriates her possibilities of action." (2011, 104)

Ambitions of representation, vanguardist projects of centralization, and what the Colectivo Situaciones call the "politics of integration"—politics premised on integrating outsiders, the "excluded"—are displaced by what amounts to a counterpower of multiplicity spread out across "assemblies, committes, plenaries, and horizontal forms of decision-making." (CS 2011, 108) It is this fundamentally plural and *generative* counterpower that the Colectivo Situaciones see expressed on the 19th and 20th. "Without either speeches or flags," they explain, "without words unifying into a single logic, the insurrection of the 19th and 20th was becoming potent in the same proportion as it resisted every facile and immediate meaning." (2011, 48) [137] "Potency" [*potencia*] is the key word: the 19th and 20th signified an *affirmation of freedom* whose power escaped, undermined, and exceeded the figures that might stand in for, mediate, and re-present it to state institutions. In other words, rather than converging in an institution of soverignty via some mode of representation, this counterpower was *de*-instituting.

De-instituent insurrection marks a way out of reproducing logics of sovereignty that return power to the state and its executors. By perpetuating the movement of a right to solve problems connected to one's own existence, it is both self-*critical* and, as the Colectivo Situaciones describe it, "an experience of self-affirmation."[138] (2011, 52) Self-affirmation indicates the problem-solveing capacities activated by those who refuse to defer the problems

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137. In the words of Colectivo Situaciones, "Each had to resolve in a matter of minutes decisions that are usually difficult to make: moving away from television, talking to oneself, and to others; asking what was really going on; resisting for a few seconds the intense impulse to go out to the streets with the pots and pans; approaching rather prudently; and, then, letting oneself be driven in unforeseen directions...The most radical spontaneity sustained itself in collectively organized memory. They were thousands and thousands of people acting with clear and precise goals, enacting a collective intelligence." (2011, 45)

138. It is worth noting that the Colectivo Situactiones adopt explicitly Deleuzian, Spinozist, and Nietzschean language to characterize problematization as an active mode of thought. "To think," they state, "is not to know. One and the other—thinking and knowing—constitute two different moments. We could assimilate a generic idea of thinking to the capacity to resolve problems...Thinking is something we all, and not only people, do. Life itself thinks, and is forced to do so time and again, since life itself depends, in order to continue being such, on constantly facing up, taking on, and resolving problems." (CS 2021 84)

they confront to the institutions that inevitably reproduce them, as if the unemployed were only ever those who *lack* a job, as if their multiplicity *lacked* organization. Instead, what emerges is a "positive 'no'", whereby the displacement and deferral of the institution affirms "the conditions to experiment with new forms of counterpower." (CS 2011, 64) "*¡Que se vayan todos!"* therefore expresses the immanent condition for experimentation with forms of life that overcome the reproduction of the problems that had confined and strangled them.

Now, we ought to understand de-instituent power as a critical development of the concept of "counterpower" that fundamentally reworks Lenin's initial conceptualization of "dual power." The idea, in either case, is to identify a network or organization of power that can contest the state and its attendant institutions. For Lenin, the goal of the Bolshevik government was to seize state power and establish a dictatorship of the proletariat. By contrast, the logic of de-instituent power aims to avoid capture of, and by, sovereignty. The goal is thus not to seize state institutions but, as we will see, to *empty* them. De-instituent power thus revaluates counterpower by reconstructing it as insurrection that flees or "destitutes" sites of power rather than availing itself of them for constructing alternative institutional models or, at worst, modeling itself on the state-form:

> But the *no* of the *pueblada* was an affirmation in a deeper sense: there is a possibility inscribed in the very form the insurrectional negation taken on. The fact that the multitude has acted as the single author means that the power (*potencia*) of the *no* lies, precisely, in that it does not become state power: it does not need to *legitimate* itself by means of proposals, nor does it respond to the communicative norm that requires

> seductive discourses and attractive images. The energies of the movement are, in their way, *constituent.* (CS 2011, 65)

Notice how they re-inscribe insurrectional energies as *constituent*. This is important, and while in what follows I focus mainly on de-instituent power (hereafter "destituent"), I return explicitly to constituent energies, and the Colectivo Situaciones, in Chapter 7.

The problem, now, is contoured by the paths destituent power has followed in the wake of the Colectivo's initial, powerful theorization. Going forward I follow different perspectives on destituent power to explore and problematize the possibilities announced by its "positive 'no'." The question is this: in its various iterations, what *type* of critical revaluation does destituent power express? In the examples that follow, I argue that, perhaps in spite of its ferocity, it lapses into nihilistic refrains. Ever reaching for its affirmative return in further becomings, destituent power yearns for completion in a robust concept of counterpower. Note beforehand that the problem is categorically *not* with tactics of destituting institutions, nor with insurrection. Tactics like road blockage are fundamentally open to a plurality of valences and uses; *insurrection is not necessarily nihilistic*. Indeed, abandoning institutions of oppression is virtually a necessary condition of radical social, political, and economic change. For radicals it almost goes without saying. Similarly, while my proceeding analysis recalls some of Foucault's cautionary comments about "fundamental anarchism," my position is neither that anarchism is *necessarily* nihilistic. To my mind the anarchist expresses a strong, critical, and transformative ethos: *this life is what we make it*.[139] The problem lies with how critical, radical valuations of freedom as becoming

139. One Reason, "The Black and The Red" on All Rivers Run South, All Roads Lead Home (Plan-It-X Records, 2004) I would juxtapose this with the following from Nietzsche: "All the beauty and sublimity we have bestowed upon real and imaginary things I will reclaim as the property and product of man: as his fairest apology." (WP I.0). An apology for the ways ideals have otherwise misshapen and disfigured a love for life, anarchism's possibility is the promise of a type of life that overcomes exploitation, oppression, and the diminution of human possibility.

more or less risk reproducing moral judgments. Those judgments, as we have seen, preserve us as we are.

Nevertheless, antagonistic vectors of differentiation are certainly augmented by undermining traditional figures of political power, and this, like Nietzsche's lion-spirit, is important for the development of radical political creativity. Concepts like Foucault's sense of critical resistance or Deleuze and Guattari's "lines of flight" as "becoming-revolutionary," and the Colective Situaciones's "de-instutent power," are well-suited to that end. Todd May convincingly argues for Deleuze, Foucault, and Lyotard's affinity with anarchist thought in precisely these terms.[140] So too does Thomas Nail, whose *Returning to Revolution* presents a strong case for how Deleuze and Guattari's concepts relay with the politics of the EZLN in Chiapas, Mexico. And then, of course, Nietzsche, though surely an antagonist in many respects to any "politics of the people," is nevertheless an important interlocutor insofar as he theorizes power, becoming, and overcoming. Perhaps it's a healthy agonism.[141] At any rate, insofar as destituent power's revaluation of counterpower seeks to actualize the freedom to become, we have to interrogate its capacities for agonistic creativity.

a. Agamben's Agon

With regard to radical politics, Giorgio Agamben's inheritance and interpretation of destituent potential is highly influential.[142] On his view, destituent potentiality is invariably violated when it passes into institutions modeled on the logic of sovereignty (e.g. a political

140. See Todd May *The Political Philosophy of Post-structuralist Anarchism* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994)
141. For a strong case regarding Nietzsche's contributions to democratic (though not anarchist) politics see Lawrence Hatab's *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy*.
142. The Invisible Committee, with whom I engage at length below, is a prime example of this influence.

party; the modern state; the flag).[143] Conversely, rendering those institutions inactive or "inoperative" allows it to emerge. Thus, in Agamben's language, destituent power expresses that to truly "become otherwise" we must depose the biopolitical institutions that constitute and confine life to "the incessant, inevitable dialectic between constituent and constituted power, violence which makes the law and violence that preserves it." (Agamben 2014, 70) The ontological terms of political enactment are accordingly shifted away from logics that return politics to sovereignty, in fact challenging "the very site of politics itself." (2014, 65) By fusing possibility or potentiality with interruption or deactivation—creativity with destruction, in the Nietzschean sense—destituent power thus positions the subject of freedom, the destituent "form of life," against the reality of "the constituted."

While not necessarily an opposition, there is nevertheless a tension between destituent power and constituent power. Constituent power has a long history in legal theory and political philosophy. Legally speaking it designates the legitimation of a constitution by reference to its grounding figure: "the people," in the modern revolutionary sense, or "the proletariat" in its Marxist iterations. From the perspective of destituent power, constituent power *names* the violence of sovereignty and law from which it cannot be extricated.[144] On Agamben's view, following Nazi political philosopher Carl Schmitt, it expresses how the constitution of any politico-legal apparatus necessarily includes an extra-legal decision—a primordial violence in its reproduction and institutionalization of the "state of exception" that is the essence of sovereign

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143. The terms of potentiality, actuality, and constituent power refer mainly to arguments set forth in Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer,* who is likely the foremost theorist of destituent power, especially insofar as it relates a sense of life removed from the exigencies of work or organization. For my part, I am interested in typologically assessing how destituent power poses an ethico-political problem, as well as how its ontology shapes that problem. That is, I ask what type of problem destituent power poses, what type of life it valorizes, how that valorization is actualized, and what effects it produces.

144. For an extensive and detailed discussion of Agamben's critique of constituent power, contra Antonio Negri, see Kevin Attell "Potentiality, Actuality, Constituent Power" in *Diacritics* (Vol.39, No. 3; Fall 2009) pgs. 35-53

power. Any contestation of law, any struggle against oppression, re-enacts the same sovereign violence insofar as it re-institutionalizes power, both figurally and legally. Agamben's "incessant, inevitable dialectic" thus designates a kind of double bind: constituent power, even in the name of freedom, is ontologically delimited by a sense of potentiality whereby an inclusive exclusion of "bare life" becomes the requirement of realization, or of becoming "constituted" in concrete institutions. Damned if you do, damned if you don't. Conceptually then, destituent power *critically ungrounds constituent power by recovering a potential in tension with and antagonistic toward the act of constitution.* Liberatory possibilities generated by that ungrounding, akin to the question of "not being governed quite so much," negatively delimit a dialectical impasse between constituent power and what it constitutes.[145] Thus, Agamben concludes, "And if revolutions and insurrections correspond to constituent power, that is, a violence that establishes and constitutes the new law, in order to think destituent power we have to imagine completely other strategies, whose definition is the task of the coming politics."[146] (2014, 70)[147] Completely new strategies for a type of power that transposes political potential

145. Negri, in "Giorgio Agamben: The Discreet Taste of the Dialectic," identifies Agamben with the generation of French, Italian, and German thinkers who decisively break with the dialectical model. On his reading, Agamben's thought fails to consummate that break insofar as it fails to affirm a productive element in human life, instead rendering the latter as a symptom of biopolitical foreclosure. In other words, he argues that Agamben's "negative ontology" precludes the possibility of actualizing freedom in concrete works. This is (encouragingly) close to my thoughts here.

146. While destituent power is a more recent conceptual development, both in political philosophy and for Agamben, nevertheless, the form of Agamben's pronouncement, and his insistence that it is a question of ontology, has remained the same at least since *Homo Sacer*, wherein he claims, "Only an entirely new conjunction of possibility and reality, contingency and necessity, and the other *pathe tou ontos,* will make it possible to cut the knot that binds sovereignty to constituting power. And only if it is possible to think the relation between potentiality and actuality differently—and even to think beyond this relation—will it be possible to think constituting power wholly released from the sovereign ban. Until a new and coherent ontology of potentiality (beyond the steps that have been made in this direction by Spinoza, Schelling, Nietzsche, and Heidegger) has replaced the ontology founded on the primacy of actuality and its relation to potentiality, a political theory freed from the aporias of sovereignty remains unthinkable." (1998, 44)

147. Note that this is precisely what Agamben himself declares his intention as. He begins "What is a destituent power?" with the following statement: "What was my intention when I began the archaeology of politics that developed into the *Homo Sacer* project? For me it was not a question of criticizing or correcting this or that concept, this or that institution of Western politics. It was, rather, first and foremost a matter of shifting the very

from here and now to the ever-arriving but fundamentally never-present future—one might sense where I am headed.

Interestingly—tellingly!—Agamben turns to St. Paul for an example of how destituent power unsettles law. Paul exemplifies "a destituent strategy that is neither destructive nor constituent" in how messianic faith neutralizes or deactivates law without "refusing" it or aspiring to "abolish" it. Abolition, presumably, incites constituent power, just as prohibition, for Paul, incites sinful desire. Faith is *not* abolition because it does not attack law but simply withdraws from its mechanisms. Paul's destituent strategy is thus a "way of life" lived "in the form of as-not." It affirms a destitution that unsettles any commitment, any work, possession, property, or organization. In Agamben's terms, "The 'as not' is a destitution without refusal. To live in the form of the as-not means to deactivate every juridical and social property, *without establishing a new identity*." (2014, 71; my emphasis) Implicit, here, is destitution's imperative: become a form of life lived in the mode of the "as not;" destitute all works, all states, all institutions. And indeed, striking a fittingly mystical tone, Agamben states, "Inoperativity is not another work that appears to works from out of nowhere to deactivate and depose them: it coincides completely and constitutively with their destitution, *with living a life*. And this destitution is the coming politics." (2014, 74) In place of the Colectivo's earlier emphasis on a plurality of forms of organization, then, here we have a "form of life" infinitely deferred to a future that seems ever to remain just so far out of reach, like a dream on the horizon.

Agamben revisits several of these themes in his recent essay "Destituent Potentiality and the Critique of Realization" (2023). He argues within that destituent power ungrounds classical

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site of politics itself. (For centuries, politics remained in the same place where Aristotle, then Hobbes and Marx, situated it.)"

conceptions of politics as the realization of philosophy, or of the concept. "What I mean by *realization,"* he says, "is the idea that political action consists in realizing, in facts or deeds, a doctrine, a philosophy, an ideal, a plan, or whatever else one wants to call this sort of obscure presupposition to every political praxis."[148] (2023, 10) *Every* political praxis? Political praxis modeled on Western metaphysics, perhaps—and indeed, this is Agamben's point: the site of politics is overdetermined by the Western "metaphysical apparatus" that separates "the possible from the real and...potentiality from the act, which get split in the human sphere to then be rejoined in God." (2023, 15) Re-uniting the possible with the real is the metaphysical logic of sovereignty, of constitution by an act of inclusive exclusion, such that, conversely, destituent potentiality is the absolutely other that cannot be "realized" in concrete works. Relating this to Walter Benjamin's sense of the "messianic," Agamben states,

> We must stop thinking of possibility as something that must, in passing into the act, be realized; on the contrary, it is the absolutely unrealizable, whose reality, which is complete in itself, acts like a terminus (*Ende*) on historical occurrence, which has been petrified in facts—that is to say, breaking and annihilating it. This is why Benjamin (2002: 306) can write that the method of world politics 'must be called nihilism.' The radical heterogeneity of the messianic allows neither plans nor calculations for its coming true in a new historical order, but can appear in it only as a real demand that is absolutely destituent. And a destituent potentiality is one that never lets itself be realized in a constituted power. (2023, 15)

Here, the destituent challenge to the logic of sovereignty is recast as a nihilistic critique of Western metaphysics. In place of specific refusals, situated rights to "not be governed thusly," or

148. At the risk of sounding petty, is it really an "obscure presupposition" to have a plan for praxis?

analyses of distinct socio-discursive or political-economic forms—of the kind one finds in Foucault, for example—Agamben rather appeals to a "radical heterogeneity" uniquely positioned against a composite of political forms *categorically* indexed with the sovereignty of the concept.

One may rightfully ask: what can destituent potentiality *do*? Agamben leaves questions of strategy for another time.[149] Here, he suggests the following: because it is fundamentally unrealizable, one must "understand that if we leave the model of realization behind us and enter into this other paradigm, our strategies will have to change completely." (2023, 17) Leaving aside the question as to whether "this other paradigm" is a part of or indicates a plan, the issue, as I see it, is the nihilism, or what Antonio Negri calls its "negative ontology."[150] In Agamben's iteration destituent potentiality's negativity corresponds to negations of *all* political praxis, on *all* representations of power, as if they were all violent, disfigured illusions. Its problematic dissimulates a homogeneity between all political organization heretofore insofar as each has appealed to some figure of extra-legal legitimacy or political subjectivity for its constitution (including, strikingly, those that have corresponded to projects of freedom).[151] Falling backwards into the mystifying semantics of a power impossible to be realized, it *reconstructs a moral agon*

149. Perhaps this is a play on Agamben's part, for whatever strategy, whatever politics, follows from a destituent deactivation of law is one that, because fundamentally unrealizable, can therefore only ever be "coming." That aside, it is suspicious, to say the least, that what amounts to a challenge to *every* political praxis claims to admit none of its own.

150. See Antonio Negri "The Discreet Taste of the Dialectic" in *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 109-125.

151. An important part of Agamben's argument involves ungrounding the determination of human life in terms of production or labor, and so, he challenges traditionally Marxist concepts. While the challenge is warranted, it is not necessarily the case that Marx, nor Marxism, *uncritically* determines human life as labor, or work, so much as one grants the premise to enact an immanent critique of capitalist relations of production. In his *Marx Beyond Marx*, for example, Negri states the following: "In the *Grundrisse*, work appears as immediately abstract labor. We can only understand it and integrate it within theory at this level. Work is abstract in so far as it is only immediately perceptible at the level of the social relations of production. Thus we can only define work on the basis of the relations of exchange and of the capitalist structure of production. We can find no concept of work in Marx that is not that of waged work, of work that is socially necessary to the reproduction of capital, thus no concept of any work to restore, to liberate, to sublimate, only a concept and a reality to suppress." (1991, 10)

with reality wherein resistance collapses into self-valorization without concrete form.[152] In a word, its "no" is not positive at all. It is nihilism made acute. Hostile to concrete conditions of growth, *it generates untenability for the one who wills freedom*. Negri expresses the problem well:

> New problem: from Agamben's perspective, having flattened the reality of the biopolitical field onto the fabric of an indefinite negative ontology, and having excluded production from the biopolitical context, innovation, progressive development, and the productive excess of life become useless and irksome. If you wish for something new, you will find it on the margins of being. The event will be mystical rather than a hard ascesis within being. You will be left with vision and contemplation rather than activity and construction; ecstasy, in place of enjoyment.

As a mystified ecstasy of human potential, resistance is reduced to "living a life;" in place of collective work, there is the ineffable potential of "deactivation" which can only nihilistically interrupt power without, thereby, composing its own. One refuses the *ethos* of the experiment for the sanctity of an ideal.[153]

It is in this sense that his turn to Paul is telling. *Agambon's agon repeats Paul's*. The flattening of reality Negri criticizes recalls the ascetic priest's ruling impulse to become master "not over something relating to life, but over life itself, over its deepest, strongest, most primitive conditions." By construing con-figurations of political institutions, and political praxis itself, as

152. This is akin to what Thomas Nail describes as ontological anarchism's "ambivalence," its inability to ground specific political projects and, thus, its vulnerability to fascist, capitalist, and colonial repurposement.
153. In this regard we might turn to Nietzsche's remarks on "passive nihilism," or the nihilism that has grown weary, that no longer attacks, and seeks refuge in intoxications. Messianic faith offers one possible escape.

invariably violent usurpations of ontological becoming and potential, Agamben iterates an ascetic priestly framework.[154] We might expect, then, a redirection of *ressentiment*—and indeed, we find it: "This is why revolutions run aground every time on the problem of transition, for example, in the Marxian model, from the society divided in classes to the classless society. The transition, insofar as it remains caught up in the paradigm of realization, cannot but go on and on." (2023, 16) Revolutionary failures, in other words, are *our fault.* They result not from violent counter-revolution, repression, or police militarization—indeed, not even from experimental flaws that we can redress—but from having willed, from having attempted to give explicit form to revolutionary freedom at all. Consequently, and similar to the individual seeking eternal salvation in the Paulinian sense, the destituent subject, the "way of life lived in the form of the as-not," is but the harbinger of a messianic "coming politics." If the Paulinian, disfigured agon overdetermines the significance of individual lives by relating them to the possibility of immortality through the figure of resurrection, Agamben's destituent agon overdetermines the significance its own potentiality by relating it to the possibility of deliverance from law itself, from the foundations that have purportedly dictated all politics heretofore. It thereby sacrifices experimentation with freedom for a project of absolution—which, in Nietzschean terms, signals the contagion of self-hatred. In the typological sense, and in Zarathustra's language, what it is "free for"—its ruling thought—is revenge in bad faith.[155]

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154. I take the point that "praxis" means practice made in the image of the concept, however, that does not preclude other types of praxis horizontal with conceptual activity. In fact, this is what the Colectivo Situaciones propose above.

155. Revenge on what, exactly? In this regard we might consider the following. The ascetic priest creates out of lack, out of a felt sense of impotence that makes them hostile to conditions they otherwise cannot master. In a perverse kind of creativity they therefore craft ideals to profit from preserving impotence, thereby *variegating and creating more suffering*. In an interview with Cesare Casarino, and while nevertheless professing deep love for his dear friend, Negri states, "In short, we love each other very much. I am older than he is. And, unlike myself, he was never involved in political struggles, for which he has an incredibly voracious curiosity, as they constitute a great lack in his life—and he very much regrets not having had such experiences. He is quite limited

b. The Insurrectionary Subject

Agamben's nihilism commits to a kind of passivity. What destitution attains to is not active refusal but life lived in the form of the "as-not," like the scrivener who "would prefer not to." We might consider Agamben's ontological messianism as not unlike a remedy for the wearied willing of freedom. In contrast to this, *politically* insurrectionist articulations of destituent power proffer a more *active* sense of destruction consonant with anarchist critiques of state institutions. Destituent potentiality, nearly in spite of itself, gestures toward a purportedly concrete and determinate form. But does this address its hostility to creative composition? Does it *complete* the nihilistic movement? In addressing these questions we will see how destituent power potentially loses the baby with the bathwater, inadequately valorizing becoming by failing to experimentally determine the precise forms freedom could take.

Consider the following. In his essay "What is an Insurrection? Destituent Power and Ontological Anarchy in Agamben and Stirner," Saul Newman argues that political insurrection is an articulation of "ontological anarchism." Ontological anarchism, the idea that "there is no absolute law, ruler or origin of being—from the Greek word αναρχία, anarchía, 'without ruler' or 'without origin,'" (Nail 2019, 32), rejects any transcendental grounding of being, especially qua subjectivity. Rather, and here Newman turns to Jacques Lacan, the subject is split or fractured. It arises from a *lack* of being, an absence of wholeness or completion—a lack that paradoxically compels and perpetuates the vicissitudes of desire. When transposed into political thought, this means that political referents and concepts which refer to transcendental and/or representational

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when it comes to understanding politics—and in his work this limitation takes the form of a radical Heideggerism." See Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri, "Vicissitudes of Constituent Thought" in *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) pg. 152

figures are similarly (un)grounded in lack. In a word, they are fissured. Within them is death, whose compelling absence precludes claims of necessity, universality, immutability, and/or sovereignty. What is politically at stake for Newman is thus not classical anarchism but a "post-anarchism," or an anarchism fused with post-structuralist concepts.[156] By unsettling stratified forms of power, ontological becoming incites an insurrectionary politics of freedom.

Newman goes on to read Agamben's destituent power alongside Max Stirner's concept of insurrection. From Stirner he gleans that political insurrection is an act of individual affirmation over and against the external conditions that inevitably seek to determine or confine them. "In other words," he says, "the insurrection starts not with the desire to change the external conditions that might be said to oppress the individual, but rather with the assertion of the self over these conditions." (2016, 4) Notice the premise: the individual over and against its external coordinates. Insurrection begins with an assertion of the individual's ~~sovereign~~ potential; it excepts itself from institutional determination. This, Newman claims, means insurrection *a la* Stirner is not "anti-institutional" but "extra-institutional." It is an expression of the individual's limitless possibility insofar as they are ungrounded and consequently unbound by institutions that capture, stifle, and normatively regulate their becomings. By transposing Agamben's terms of destituent potentiality into Stirner's framework of individualist insurrection, Newman argues that both thinkers are insurrectionary inasmuch as "they are interested in displacing forms of sovereign power without necessarily proposing any alternative (even non-statist or anarchist)..." (2016, 7) The destituent insurrectionary thus "destitutes" all political organization.

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156. Work done on the relationship between "post-structuralism" and anarchism often insists that this is precisely the place where the former is useful for the latter, namely in its unsettling of statist, imperial, or otherwise authoritarian conceptual figures. Newman discusses this at much greater length in *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power*, as, again, does Todd May in *The Political Philosophy of Post-Structuralist Anarchism.*

Strangely, organization *itself* is something to be disarticulated. In Newman's words, "...unlike revolutions, which always risk the re-institution of power, insurrections, in suspending the operations of power, seek to keep open a space of political contingency in which new and autonomous practices, discourses and relations might emerge."[157] (2016, 5) By "[opening] a space of political contingency" for autonomy insurrections activate the critical possibilities Foucault describes as a recovery of indeterminacy. Destituent potential is freed up in the gesture of refusal, in its relentless movement of freedom, its violent force of de-institution. But does not *refusing* to articulate alternatives position freedom against itself? Does it not dirempt the value of freedom from its work? Here, the insurrectionary post-anarchist slips into another empty dream. For when the work of freedom collapses into the ontologically emptied project of "opening space," the experimental work of freedom *in this world* is waylaid, making of the destituent imperative a devaluation of freedom that leads only to nihilism. In this case, the insurrectionary subject's refusal to articulate alternatives of sustainable political organization is but an incomplete, inadequate, negative valuation of freedom, like a lion's roar to spite the child.

Why "insurrectionary subject?" Do not both Newman and Agamben take steps to preclude an ontological relapse into subjectivity? Indeed, the critique of constituent power is at the same time a critique of the political subjectivities that have historically legitimated sovereign violence. But voiding the ontological category does not necessarily void its moral function. The active nihilist retains categories that pass judgment; for them, the apparent world remains to be condemned; they are still, if only, willing nothingness. So too the insurrectionist, in spite of

157. Note the terminological slippage between "instituted" or constituent power and *power* as such. Newman argues, or rather admits, that he uses "power" and "domination" interchangeably in *From Bakunin to Lacan.* Strange to lose sight of such an important distinction. And in fact, one often finds similar slippages in contemporary critical theory. In Nietzschean terms, though, if we oppose *power* as such, we oppose our own capacity for overcoming.

steering away from Agamben's "passivity:" "*pereat mundus, fiam!"*[158] While Newman via Stirner articulates an "indifference to power [that] translates into an affirmation of the self and a capacity for autonomous action," (2016, 23) he then, somewhat paradoxically, claims that what distinguishes this "affirmation of the self" from constituent power is "that the individual does not seek to constitute a new form of power or will a new form of society, but rather simply wills him or herself."[159] (2016, 24) Not a power, but a willing, simply willing. In place of any tenable project, the ontologically emptied subject just wills—*what?* Not as if they need some determinate end, but rather, *what is their ruling thought?* Deleuze, for whom Stirner is an extreme nihilist and the final avatar of the dialectic, provides the final word: "State and religion, but also human essence are denied in the EGO, which is not reconciled with anything because it annihilates everything, for its own 'power' … Overcoming alienation thus means pure, cold annihilation, a recovery which lets nothing which it recovers subsist…" (2006, 161) More active, indeed, the destituent insurrectionist *wills annihiliation*. All dissolves, all life becomes the venue of its affirmation; all actuality a mere ruse to stifle the majesty of its compelling absence. Freedom for is a nothingness willed.

Allow me to clarify a possible confusion: the issue is not so much *that* there is a category of subjectivity retained. Rather, it is *which type* of subjectivity that is. Recall Deleuze on Nietzsche's form of the question: "which one?" asks what type of force must be presumed for this or that case to be true. The subject that denies everything *including* "human essence," that

158. In GM III:7 Nietzsche writes, "What accordingly does the ascetic ideal mean in a philosopher? My answer is—as you will have guessed long ago: the philosopher smiles at the sight of it, seeing it as an optimum of the conditions of highest and boldest spirituality—he does *not* deny 'existence' this way, on the contrary in doing this he affirms *his* existence and *only* his existence, and this perhaps to the point that he is not far from the sacrilegious wish: *pereat mundus, fiat philosophia, fiat philosophus,* ***fiam****!"*

159. Paradoxical in this sense: does not "willing" necessarily involve power? Does not power express the prejudice of a type? An "indifference to power," on my reading, is the expression of a particular *type* of power. As such, the semantics of "simply willing" belie an affirmation, and a slavish one at that.

annihilates everything for its own 'power,' typifies an unbound will to nothingness. By fashioning an ontological account of becoming positioned against actuality, such subjectivity repeats acetic priestly valuation, whose mastery is premised on saying "No to an 'outside,' to a 'different,' *to a 'non-self'*: and *this* No is its creative deed*."* (GM I:10; my emphasis) And indeed, as Nietzsche tells it, insofar as every drive seeks to rule, it aspires to do philosophy—that is, to fashion a worldview conducive to its growth and development. (BGE 6) Who wills freedom by saying No to the world, seen as an aggregate of conditions hostile to the self? For whom are the conditions of life but illusions to be destroyed? The active nihilist. If destituent insurrection opposes conceiving of political organization for the sake of freedom, it does so at the cost of freedom as well. Destitution becomes the prerogative of a type of subjectivity in bad faith of its ruling hatred and hostility to the *actual conditions of freedom*, or what Foucault calls the test of contemporary reality.

c. Invisible Friends

Hostility, in spite of Agamben, does not mean indifference. The ascetic priest lives for the struggle. As I have presented it, the active nihilist, too, lives to fight; it is, after all, a "violent force of destruction." Its fight, however, is punitive: the active nihilist lives to castigate, to condemn and repudiate. So, while Agamben's destituent power implies a kind of passivity, Newman's insurrectionary subject achieves a more active sense, expressing a type or case of sufficient strength in which, rather than escaping into mysticism, the nihilist actively wills destruction. Negation, or "interruption," becomes the mode of the insurrectionary subject's ~~sovereign~~ "willing," like the active nihilist who, with only values that pass judgment, castigates the apparent world absent a truth that would absolve it. A moral agon without spiritual ground; a

destruction of illusion, for no sake at all—we are lost at sea. One might object: but destitution is not destruction, at least not in the conventional sense. Rather, and presumably closer to Nietzsche's Dionysian sense of creative destruction, insurrectionary destitution is at the same time "self-organization," or organization without reference to a model or plan.[160] Clearing space in the present *is* the creation of conditions for a new world, much as critique, on Foucault's reading, recovers indeterminacy to instigate the possibility of new modes of subjectivity, of "no longer being what we are today." While I address this at greater length below, I insist here that, in spite of appeals to the transformative nature of destruction, collapsing the transfigurative, form-giving component of the experimental work of freedom with a clearing or interruption of power only expresses a *devaluation of freedom*. Put differently, not all destruction is creative. Sometimes it is just destructive. *Assuming* creative capacities simply positions us badly.

We can see this most clearly in a final example: the Invisible Committee. The Invisible Committee affirm destituent power as a type of power activated through insurrections that target capitalist institutions and relations. Returning to materialist framing, and in contradistinction to Agamben's ontological conception, they argue that destituent insurrection deposes capitalist reality by interrupting its institutional reproduction, revealing the extra-legal violence otherwise hidden within its everdayness. Such insurrection generates conditions for new relations that overcome capitalism. It is worth quoting them at length:

> To institute or constitute a power is to give it a basis, a foundation, a legitimacy. For an economic, judicial, or police apparatus, it is to ground its fragile existence in a dimension that is beyond it, in a transcendence designed to place it out of reach. Through this operation, what is never anything but a localized, specific,

160. Is autonomy via insurrection not a plan?

> partial entity is elevated to an elsewhere from which it can then claim to encompass the whole. As a constituted thing, a power becomes an order with no outside, an uncontested existence with no counterpart, which can only subject or annihilate. The dialectic of the constituent and the constituted comes to confer a higher meaning on what is never anything but a contingent political form. This is how the Republic becomes the universal banner of an indisputable and eternal human nature, or the caliphate the single locus of community. Constituent power names that monstrous piece of magic that turns the state into that entity that's never wrong, having its basis in reason; that has no enemies, since to oppose it is to be a criminal; that can do anything, being without honor.
>
> So to destitute power it's not enough to defeat it in the street, to dismantle its apparatuses, to set its symbols ablaze. To destitute power is to deprive it of its foundation. That is precisely what insurrections do. There the constituted appears as it is, with its thousand maneuvers—clumsy or effective, crude or sophisticated. "The king has no clothes," one says then, because the constituent veil is in tatters and everyone sees through it. To destitute power is to take away its legitimacy, compel it to recognize its arbitrariness, reveal its contingent dimension. (2015, 75)

Note the terms: destitution deprives its object of its foundation, leveraging the contingency of its partial, perspectival, and illusory form against its claims to power. Again, we find the critical function Foucault articulates. Through insurrection, what constitutes us today, the actual political infrastructure that sustains "what we are," is compelled to "recognize its arbitrariness," to "reveal its contingent dimension." The tricks of *power*—and here note a slippage akin to Foucault's in

his "What is Critique?" lecture, namely that it is power *as such* at stake—and its ghostly figures of legitimacy are unmasked.

Why "unmasked?" Because constituted power always misrepresents a part as the whole. It proffers, like the ascetic ideal, that it is the one and only truth. Constituent figures emblematize that truth: the nation, the people, the working-class, the individual, etc. Revolution, because it proposes to replace one subject with another (e.g. the bourgeoisie with the proletariat), is thus ensnared in a never-ending back and forth between equally illegitimate political forms. Countering this, destituent insurrection reveals the crisis of a world fragmented by capital whose violence is glossed over in everyday life. In the Committee's words, "Economy rests on a pair of fictions, therefore, that of society and that of the individual. Destituting it involves *situating* this false antinomy and bringing to light that which it means to cover up." (2017, 137). What is covered up? "The operation which the social fiction depends on," we are told, "consists in trampling on everything that forms the situated existence of each singular human being, in wiping out the ties that constitute us, in denying the assemblages we enter into…"[161] (Ibid) Destituent insurrection thus relates the truth of the "ties that constitute us:" that we are singular beings in motion and that, in any given case, there are thresholds of becoming trampled on insofar as we remain subjects of "the social fiction" that feigns governmental immutability, transcendentality, or universality. Destitution thus wields truth against the shadowy figures that hold us in degradation, that bind and bid us to live at odds with ourselves and each other, barely able to see who sits beside us.[162]

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161. This sounds like counterrevolution.

162. The Committee continues, "...and then forcing the depleted atoms thus obtained into a completely fictitious, spectral association known as the 'social bond.' So that to think of oneself as a social being is always to apprehend oneself *from the exterior*, to relate to oneself *as an abstraction*." Like shadow-puppets dancing on stone walls, taunting our bondage—here, I would recall the following from Nietzsche: "Every philosophy also *conceals* a philosophy; every opinion is also a hiding place, every word also a mask." (BGE 289)

Now, while it seems right to argue that there are institutions that usurp our capacities for autonomous problems solving, the question is how insurrection aims to reactivate our constitutive ties? How is recovery enacted? According to the Invisible Committee, "The destituent gesture does not *oppose* the institution. It doesn't even mount a frontal fight, it neutralizes it, empties it of its substance, then steps to the side and watches it expire." (2017, 81) Cutting off its lifeline, destitution enacts the withering away of the institution. It is not "opposition," but rather, "To destitute is not primarily to attack the institution, but to attack the need we have of it…To destitute the government is to make ourselves ungovernable." How do we "make ourselves ungovernable?" Andrew Culp elaborates on the Invisible Committee's position: "...build commonality with others, get organized by building consistency, and fuck the police as well as all forms of governance. [The Invisible Committee] suggest that destituence occurs in building alternatives that cut governance out of the picture."[163] "All forms of governance"—a telling remark. In any event, what are those alternative commonalities?

Elaborating on how destituent insurrection simultaneously generates forms of commonality the Committee state the following:

> In the conflict of the spring of 2016, one could have seen the birth of a form from a perfectly singular, perfectly identifiable point. On the Austerlitz Bridge, a courageous little group forced the riot police to pull back. There was a first line of masked people sporting gas masks and holding a reinforced banner, other masked ones backing them in case of attempted arrests and making up a bloc behind the

163. https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/on-giving-up-on-this-world-andrew-culp-interviewed-by-thomas-dekeyser I also might add that "building alternatives" directly contradicts other destituent insistence on *refusing* to articulate alternatives. I would add as well the following question: is *governance* cut out, or a specific *form* of governance?

> first line, and behind that bunch and on the sides, baton-wielding masked folk who whacked on the cops. Once this little form had appeared, the video of its exploit circulated on the social media. And kept making babies in the weeks that followed, up to the acme of June 14, 2016 when its offspring could no longer be counted. Because that's how it is with every form, with life even, the real communist question is not 'how to produce,' but 'how to live.'" (2017, 154)

Echoing Agamben's argument that "transition" presumes an end-goal that iterates the Western metaphysics of realization and a politics of sovereignty, the Committee argue that communism is nothing to transition *toward* but is rather "transition entirely: it is *en chemin*, in transit." (2017, 154) Moving away from Agamben's mystified passivity, their iteration of "living a life" is tied to concrete acts, like the bloc of baton-wielding freedom fighters on Austerlitz Bridge.[164] Local to a specific event at a specific moment in time, this "birth of a form" expresses the concrete potential of singularity, or the way in which the passing present presents ephemeral determinations critique can recover and leverage against the mystifications of power. But is the form really *singular?*[165] Perhaps more importantly, how does it correspond to commonality, and how does that commonality transfigure the present it contests?

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164. In "The Reality of Destitution is the Destitution of Reality" (2021), Jose Rosales makes a strong case for the Invisible Committee's reframing of destituent power in terms of a "historical and material potentiality." This, they claim, corrects Agamben's confusion of the concrete with the ontological. In spite of that reframing, however, in my view the Committee still retain categories of evaluation and judgment that place them squarely in a nihilistic, self-devaluating movement of freedom, however inflected toward the streets.

165. Is singularity an identifiable point? Foucault, for his part, elaborates a complex historico-philosophical method to "recover singularity," dispersed as it is into various archival components. The "absolute singularity of sexuality," for example, does not designate a numerically singular moment, but a historical one composed of variegated discursive, political, semiotic, and technological elements. Singularities accordingly designate the ontological principle of historical movement as a matter of localized responses to problems of power (problems in the Deleuzean sense). Deleuze too insists that singularities distribute, but do not appear in, ordinary points. They are decidedly *non*-identifiable, and rather *generate* the regular, or the identifiable. Singular form, then, does not emerge in a "perfectly identifiable" moment, but through dispersed regularities, or dispersed responses to specific problems. The Committee's iteration above sounds more like a story of how a really good idea in Paris was bequeathed to the entire world by virtue of vast, decidedly capitalist communicative infrastructure.

The Invisible Committee call upon insurrectionary affinity groups to let action materialize out of their confrontations with power, to let form emerge organically, as above. Through acts of "blockage, occupation, riot, sabotage as direct attacks against the production of value through the circulation of information and commodities," resistance accrues consistency.[166] Destituent power is generated. (IC 2016, 188) They go on, "The power they generate is not something to be mobilized *with a view to* victory, but victory itself, to the extent that, little by little, the power grows." (Ibid) Power, then, is immanent to its enactment; affirmation is not double, it does not return to itself, but is unitary.[167] Resistance is victorious by virtue of being resistance; the fight *is* the victory. In the same way Agamben's form of life *lives* the Paulinian "as-not," in the same way the insurrectionary subject does not will power but "simply wills," the Committee's invisible "friends," subjects of "fraternity in combat," are "victory itself," *are* communism.[168] The attack *is* the commonality, just as destitution *is* deactivation, just as the fight *is* the victory (even if we lose?), just as our weakness is—our strength?

Is this not nihilism? Echoing Deleuze, the Invisible Committee considers "established values" to be nihilism. They are correct, to a point. But as we have seen, nihilism lies not only in traditional moral values that oppose becoming. It also occurs through endeavors to wholly *abandon* morals. The fundamental point of nihilism being a transitional stage is not to settle for the event of transition, but to *overcome nihilism in new values*, *new morals*. Turning Plato on his head is no simple inversion: it relates a completely different sense of truth, belief, and existential tenacity. And so I ask: does destituent power adequately *transvaluate* freedom? Or, as I have

166. Presumably, direct attacks against the production of value attack our need, not the institutions themselves. I might ask, then: is this a workable difference? If our need *is* the institution, is not attacking the institution thereby also attacking our need? Or is it an ascetic project: do we attack *ourselves,* so as to become otherwise? In which case, how to blockages, etc. augment that *ascesis*?

167. I elaborate on "double affirmation" in Chapter 6.

168. Well! That saves us all a lot of trouble.

argued thus far, does it relapse into moral valences? The Invisible Committee's sense of destituent insurrection valuates freedom as an indeterminate double negation: a rejection of previous models and a refusal of futural projects. Their insistence on singularity as an evental rupture with present reality is couched between these two negations. Freedom accrues value only insofar as it both rejects "established values" and refuses to become an image of the future. *But this too is nihilism,* for collapsing form-giving into gestures of negative liberation precludes the kind of experimental value-creation of the child-like spirit who overcomes nihilism in both the camel that bears its day *and* the lion that rattles its cage. We enter the desert only to drown, drifting at sea. Rather than the "empty dream of freedom," then, we need not deactivation, nor interruption, but *transfiguration.* A critical and affirmative sense of freedom can only be completed by *harnessing* the *pathos* of evental rupture for *transvaluative, formative* experimentation. Derailing beforehand dispels freedom into a nihilistic abyss—and just as appeals to singularity do not excuse ahistoricity, immanence, or the Invisible Committee's "victory in the fight," cannot substitute for building a future.

What of affirmation? If affirmation corresponds to transvaluation, then affirming freedom requires engaging with concrete forms that elevate us, with self-inventions that generate tenacity for constructing new worlds. As I have presented it, while destituent power critically unsettles figures and institutions linked to problems of the present, it fails to valorize movement beyond them. In each example above, freedom suffers a relapse, stuck in the twilight of its moral provenance. Whether in Agamben's Paulinian sense of destitution, Newman's insurrectionary subject, or the Committee's invisible friends: each proffers a sense of freedom typologically

couched between a rejection of reality and refusal of giving *any* form *for* the future.[169] With nothing left but overdetermined, self-referential figures of value ("living a life," "willing," and "victory in attack"), freedom becomes an ontologically emptied transcendence that can only pass judgment. And such transcendence always belies its ruling thought: hatred of reality.[170]

III. Counter Considerations

This brings me to some important considerations. Regarding the value of truth, or the value of values, the affirmative approach is not that nihilism ought to be rejected. Such would be a nihilistic gesture in itself, a failure to complete its movement. The perfect nihilist leaves nihilism behind by moving through it, by cultivating a transmutation of the type. From sympathy with hating reality they gather love. Insofar as I have used terms of inadequacy, incompletion, or failure to characterize the problems I address above, my intention has been not to categorically reject destituent power, but to complete it—to perfect it, if you will. Allow me to gesture toward that completion by way of considering potential counter-arguments.

One might respond to what I have presented here as follows. Against power conceived in terms of representation (e.g. the property of the despot, the possession of the strong or weak) Deleuze argues, citing Zarathustra, that "willing *liberates*." (2006, 85) Power is not what the will wants, but is rather the genetic element of socio-psychological, typological differentiation.[171]

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169. Giving form *for* is not the same as giving form *to.* In the former the dative is hospitable; in the latter, it is an order, or a command.
170. Or, to use Andrew Culp's language, "hatred of this world." Culp's *Dark Deleuze* presents a reading of Deleuze in terms of negativity. In spite of the latter's relentlessly affirmative thinking, Culp argues that Deleuze also offers terms to cultivate or galvanize a type of negativity through which the world can be incited to change. While certainly rhetorically suited to insurrectionary, non-programmatic and non-organizational anarchism, I fail to see how it augments experimentation. Rather, I see a relapse into moral, nihilistic, self-devaluating expression of freedom.
171. This is why Deleuze argues Foucault is Nietzschean at the level of his ontology of forces, namely because "The genetic element (power) determines the relation of force with force and qualifies related forces." (Ibid)

Power, in other words, is "plastic, *inseparable from each case in which it is determined*…" (Ibid; my emphasis) Determinate cases accordingly express different configurations of active and reactive types. In any given case, active types identify willing with liberation by taking their own differentiation as objects of affirmation. Additionally, active differentiation is not determinate negation; it is not "difference from," or difference whose movement terminates in establishing an identity of opposition. Such would be a reactive or slavish sense of difference (e.g. "I am *not you* and therefore I am good"). Now, critique, as Foucault and Deleuze present it, is a development of a reactive type. The question of "not being governed thusly" or "quite so much" activates a movement of de-subjugation that opens conditions for the experimental work of freedom by delimiting and thereby resisting specific forms of governance. Limits become opportunities for transformation. Freedom becomes affirmative when it follows a line of flight or a "difference in the present" and repeats it in a project that seeks not to confine or represent it, like the possession of some sovereign subject (e.g. the proletarian state), but to embolden it, to proliferate it in new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Between following the line of flight and repeating it in new ways of being, negation takes on new valence. No longer a movement of determination, it instead becomes a power of difference, a destruction subordinate to the generation of different ways of life rather than a movement towards a future modeled on the concept. Accordingly, in Deleuze's terms "negation in this new form has become critique: destruction becomes active, aggression profoundly linked to affirmation…The creator of values cannot be distinguished from a destroyer…" (2006, 86-87) The counterpoint to what I have proposed would therefore be this: destituent power *activates* the creation of new values by enacting the destruction of established values. It critically delimits

stratified possibilities in the present and recovers a sense of indeterminate potential for the sake of becoming otherwise at their thresholds, and this through its refusal. Destituent power in the street relays the same function: a liberation of political potential from its incarceration in capitalist, statist, or otherwise violent institutions. If I diagnose it as nihilistic, then, it is because I mistake its sense of negation. What I call "negation become sovereign" in the active nihilist becomes, in destituent power, affirmative negation in the type that wants to be overcome: the form of life that destitutes power.

Second, I might be challenged as follows: I seemingly conflate form-giving with constituent forms, and with political constitution, and thus myself present a "badly analyzed composite" of political organization. That is to say that when I argue that destituent power's collapse of form-giving with interruption expresses a hostility to reality, I smuggle in a conservatism of the concept inasmuch as I implicitly identity "reality" with what "has been." Mistaking the ontic for the ontological, so to speak, I return to metaphysics by reintroducing a realization of the concept rather than affirming a vital, differential ontology. My longing for land makes a colonizer of me, in bad faith of the idea that we can stay free at sea—that form, like negation, can be both variable and active. Should it become so it would no longer be constituent, and no longer rely on laws and legitimacy, but would self-organize from within the gesture of refusal, or within the attack—*in medias res*, as it were. Similarly, I can imagine the retort that there *are* autonomous politics at work in insurrections, and that I disservice freedom by glossing over them. Destituent revaluation of freedom thus transmutes negation by giving *determinate* form to it in acts of refusal that catalyze the self-overcoming of reactivity in the one who wills

freedom. In spite of myself, then, having separated creativity from critique as well as having re-institutionalized form, I return freedom to a nihilistic or reactive framework.

Let me work backwards. My insistence on form-giving is not necessarily an insistence on sovereignty, nor on the metaphysics of the concept. What Nietzsche insists upon as early as "On Truth and Lies," and what I propose in my reading thereof, is precisely that an aesthetic sense of creativity envelops form, even rational, conceptual form. To assess the type of power in any given phenomena thus requires we evaluate the socio-psychological *aisthesis* its figuration expresses rather than any conceptual relationships.[172] It is a question of the *real movements of desire and disposition*, expressed in types that are always assessed through *determinate cases*. Now, abdicating the transcendental model of the concept does not mean abdicating other types of conceptual expression, nor does it mean relegating all form-giving to pure aisthesis, to the intensity of the event in place of those concepts and institutions that betray it. On the contrary, as Cremonesi puts it regarding Foucault, the possibility of self-invention is "conceived as a work of self-transformation, always related to the historical determinations that shaped our being." (Cremonesi 2016 108) In other words, creative form-giving designates a *transfigurative relationship with the historicity of the present that compels us toward further determinations*.[173] This is the essential point of recovering formative *aisthesis*. Affirmation grows out of nihilism, not in opposition to it. Experimental forms of freedom similarly *transfiguratively reconstruct modes of subjectivity.* Creativity taps into the genetic element of real movements and catalyzes differentiated perspectives, "counter-actualizing" them, in Deleuze's terms, not by leveraging

172. This, for example, is part of the reason Robert Pippin argues that Nietzsche's project consists of referring traditionally philosophical questions to psychology, that is, to excavate the psycho-social, aesthetic element.
173. Recall that this is precisely what Foucault articulates via Baudelaire, that self-invention is a transfigurative relationship to the present that generates new forms out of those that make up the present.

desire against organization, since *determinate assemblages give form to desire*, but by shaping experimental cases in which difference returns to itself as an object of affirmation. Conversely, deference to interruption as the moment of some organic self-organization that simply "happens" belies the fact that there is in fact a form of subjectivity at work—one that, by construing organization itself as ineffably conservative (in the historicist sense), is continuous with a nihilistic, ascetic devaluation hostile to actual possibilities of freedom.

Nevertheless, a virtue of destituent power, at least in its insurrectionist variants (if not its ontology), lies with its intent to embolden and respond to actions in the street—the site of freedom's catalytic *aisthesis*. Indeed, its origin is not in the mind of the political philosopher, but the heart of the protest. In coining the term, the Colectivo Situaciones, to whom I return in Chapter 7, affirm a sense of multiplicity that is both organized and in excess of historical models of anti-capitalist resistance. Indeed, their's is a decentralized insurrectionary political potential that nevertheless presents a plurality of forms of organization. We might similarly consider Seattle's anti-globalization protests in 1999, Occupy Wall St. and Tahrir Square in 2011, and more recently, 2020's protests against police violence and anti-Black racism in the US insofar as they offer similarly experimental forms of resistance that reject leadership, embrace de-centralized, non-hierarchical organization, and refuse co-optation by NGOs, political parties, and other comparable institutions. Importantly, these examples also express a rejection of theoretical leadership. Theory and concepts are not bequeathed by the ivory tower, but develop alongside resistance.[174] Protest generates philosophy; philosophy augments the protest—but it doesn't stop there. The circuit has to become ampliative.

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174. Colectivo Situaciones offers the figure of the "researcher-militant," one who interrogates and elaborates "situated practical hypotheses" from a place within the struggle, developing research alongside resistance, without subsuming it under already given models of politics.

Resistance has to glean consistency to complete the transfigurative movement. Returning difference to itself as an object of affirmation requires creative organization, otherwise it remains caught between genesis and the negative, the ungrounded and the untenable. "Difference-in-itself" becomes a term of transcendence rather than a project of immanence—a moral value, rather than a "meaning of the earth." (TSZ "On the Afterworldly"). This is how we can understand Deleuze's transfiguration of negation as *subordinate to actualizing* the difference it carries. If destituent power rejects all political organization by refusing to experiment with alternatives, it drives difference into political abnegation. It fails to "counter-actualize the event" by refusing to consider possible transfigurative reconstructions. Nail similarly argues that affirming "pure eventness" positions difference as abstraction "from all actual and concrete political relations as well as different political events in their specificity." (Nail 2015, 83) So too Rodrigo Nunes, who while critiquing a simple opposition between organization and spontaneity, or between what Deleuze and Guattari call the "arborescent" and the "rhizomatic," argues that one must think organization and becoming at the same time, such that "the event is not just a pure becoming, it is also a becoming *something else*…the means through which a shift in sensibility is *given a form*." (2014, 109; emphasis mine)[175] Collapsing creative resistance with the differential intensity of the moment of refusal truncates its transfigurative potential rather than repeating it. *It devaluates the work of freedom.*

On this point make no mistake: devaluation is not a mere abstract movement. Active nihilism is an *active* destruction; its hostility to life is mobilized. Destituent insurrection attacks

175. This is also similar to Todd May's conclusions regarding Deleuze in his *Reconsidering Difference*. May argues that Deleuze cannot properly be a "thinker of difference." Instead, he claims that in order to think difference one also has to think unity. The "contingent holism" May proposes is an example of this. (May 2014, Chapter 4: "From Ontological Difference to Ontological Holism: Gilles Deleuze")

organization—and, presuming an affirmative tenor by virtue of confrontations with "established values," siphons power away from its possibilities.[176] But are law, governance, or institutionalization, for that matter, done any harm? Nail cites Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "absolute negative deterritorialization" to describe cases in which affirming rupture is self-destructive. Moving relentlessly away from all stratifications of power heretofore, "it not only fails to connect with other deterritorialized elements and create a new arrangement, it deterritorializes too fast, too much, and becomes self-destructive…Ultimately, it ends up strengthening the processes of political representation." (Nail 2015, 95) Deleuze and Guattari similarly caution their readers: "The worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever." (1987, 161) Suicidal collapse is *the worst that can happen.* In this regard I would also recall the following from Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*, "Whether we immoralists do virtue any *harm?* - As little as anarchists do princes. Only since they have been shot at do they again sit firmly on their thrones. Moral: one must shoot at morals." (TI 36) One doesn't shoot at morals to be wholly rid of them. That only secures the throne. If we shoot at morals, it ought to be to make them stronger.

And so, I might ask: *why* oppose institutionalization? Must we truly refuse to even analyze the successes of, say, Cuba's promotion of literacy rates amongst its populace because of

176. I am suspicious of the frequency with which "leftists," "Marxists," and other figures of resistance and revolution are often the targets of contemporary continental, insurrectionary anarchist, and destituent critique. I am even more suspicious of the seemingly greater frequency to which "leftists" are targeted by academic political philosophers. Careerists reproduce capitalist relations of production by siphoning critique into bourgeois networks of value, both political economic and semantic, just as nihilistic critique undermines the possibility of building alternatives. Of course, disciplined self-critique is important. But it risks becoming self-destructive and nihilistic. This is why we should assess the types of solidarity possible with groups and actors principally opposed to organization. Mind you, that does not mean pursuing solidarity with liberal NGOs, political parties, nor, especially, with law. But if our purpose is overcoming reliance on those forms, we have to create our own—and *sustain them.*

its centralized model? What of the Zapatista's Councils of Good Government [*Juntas de Buen Gobierno*]—are these governmental institutions to be rejected as well? Presumably not. But more emphatically, and unfortunately contemporarily, ought we to join with Agamben in his opposition to preventative measures and institutional responses to the transmission of COVID-19, including mass vaccination, because they seemingly declare an unending "state of exception?" Such positions, to my mind, capitalize on moral supplement, as when Agamben says regarding the absurdity of quarantining, "...the enemy is not somewhere outside, but within us." (2020) Yes, we suffer, we have let them internalize the crisis—*it is our fault.* Have we not heard this before? These positions exacerbate a crisis wherein we remain desperate to valorize projects that sustainably overcome the problems we confront, and so instead, they come crashing down heavier than ever.

Before concluding, and to say it again: it is not the tactics of blockage, sabotage, occupation, and/or riot that I am contesting. As I argue in Chapter 7, I am committed to a counterpower of mulitiplicity, and these tactics are valuable—virtually necessary for radical political action. One favorable, entirely biased example is Atlanta's ongoing "Stop Cop City/Defend the Atlanta Forest" campaign, wherein occupation and sabotage have played a prominent role in resisting the city's ambition to build a militarized police training facility over a demolished urban forest.[177] Destitution, in this cases, is warranted—and yet.[178] My position is mainly that these tactics can and ought to be integrated into forms of political consistency that can sustain resistance and catalyze further overcoming. A more affirmative concept of counterpower ought to indicate how.

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177. For more information see "Defend The Atlanta Forest" at https://defendtheatlantaforest.org/

178. The movement has now been largely channeled into a movement for a referendum process which, while currently and seemingly successful, has diluted some of the movement's more radical energies.

IV. Typological Musings

Nihilism expresses a crisis of untenability wherein truth confronts its own provincialism, untethering *ascesis* from its refuge in the ideal. Insofar as the one who wills freedom is connected to, or descends [*Herkunft*] from, a way of being in relation to truth, nihilistic movements of devaluation have particular effects on the value and work of freedom. That is to say that the work of freedom is tied to the problem of nihilism. Consequently, affirmation, understood as the self-overcoming of nihilism, the "perfection" of its movement, initiates a revaluation of freedom.

Amidst incomplete forms of nihilism we also live with inadequate forms of freedom. Completion involves creating new values, values that attend to specific ways of living, or to "becoming what you are." Accordingly I have argued we can diagnose incomplete forms of nihilism by addressing types of willing through *specific problems of power*. In the examples of destituent power I present above, I see one such nihilistic problem of power. Freedom is valorized as escape, abandonment, and deliverance to a new world wholly detached from the one we exist in. Nevertheless castigating failed experiments in its name, the destituent insurrectionist defaults to a reactive image of freedom, a value that can only pass judgment by interrupting the institutions it opposes and devaluating the becoming it presumably lauds.

By way of conclusion allow me to set into relief the threat I see. I say above that my goal is to complete the problem destituent power poses, and broadly speaking, this stems from a love, a personal investment, in radical politics of freedom. This is not a problem I touch with the cold hands of a disinterested skeptic. It is one I feel, deeply. And so I reflect on an interesting remark Nietzsche makes concerning ascetic priests in GM III:13:

> The ascetic priest is the incarnate desire for a different mode of being, for being in a different place, and moreover he is the highest degree of this desire, its genuine ardor and passion: but the very *power* of his desire is the fetter that binds him here, it is the very thing that makes him a tool that must work on creating more favorable conditions for being-here and being-human—with this very *power* he binds to existence the entire herd of people who are deformed, depressed, underprivileged, failures, and those of every kind who suffer from themselves, by instinctively walking ahead of them as shepherd.

It is the power of their desire for another mode of being that binds the ascetic priest here, to the fallen world of sin and suffering. Their reactivity requires a world to deny. Importantly, they gather around themselves others who suffer, or are incapable of overcoming, shepherding them into a wholly spiritualized terrain of new kinds of suffering (e.g. bad conscience). The ascetic priest thus preserves their flock in conditions of impotence, inciting torturous self-violations in those who otherwise mindlessly await (or in some cases actively pursue) the absolution of oblivion.

My concern is that philosophical critique, that the *critic,* operates much the same vis-a-vis the *one who wills freedom*, more or less fashioning ascetic ideals that gather and preserve conditions of servitude while demanding we endlessly interrogate our failures. Failing to galvanize new sensibilities, they instead capture desire in otherworldly terms through figures that pass judgment on life, consigning us to projects of annihilation. We destratify so much, so fast, that we collapse. *But*—courage can emerge, courage that slays pity and, indeed, courage that might give form to freedom, even at the risk of violating its purity. *This life is what we make it*.

We are not opposed to reality nor the world—we are of it, this world of conflict and suffering, the one we are not juxtaposed with but are rather expressions of, and in which we can compose and construct (counter)powers that transfigure the present into unwritten futures. But if we remain caught between a world reified in the likeness of capital and the failures of our revolutionary aspirations, we deny ourselves the possibilities we need to become free, to keep becoming free, and instead dwell in moral twilight, never to pass into dawn, nor into—affirmation.

Chapter Six: Past Tense, Future Perfect

It's in my blood. No, not that tired cliche. For me it's literal, just check the hospital bill.

It's in my heart. Filed under "left for dead," and sewn together with a needle and thread.

It's in my head. History is fiction. God can't touch us now; we're out of his jurisdiction.

We are invincible. We might bend, we will not be broken.

— Paint it Black, “Past Tense, Future Perfect”

If the question of the solution is at the same time the determination of the problem—if the quest for affirmation determines the problem of nihilism—then the question, now, is this: what is affirmative transvaluation, and how does it complete or perfect nihilism? Transvaluation—both revaluation and transfiguration—violates and refigures nihilistic self-devaluation. One enters into it to be transformed: a transfigured Dionysus in place of a resurrected Christ. Affirmation signifies willing self- and world-reinvention. In what follows I describe it as the completion of nihilism along three related axes: redemption, temporality, and creativity. I argue that affirmative redemption transvaluates inherited valences, and that eternal return is the image of that redemption. It expresses the possibility of opening the past to new meanings that catalyze transformative growth in the *one who wills return*. To elaborate and clarify, I turn to Deleuze, who conceives of eternal return as the principle of differential repetition. I argue that affirmation expresses a positive principle of differential repetition through the *one who learns to become otherwise.* Relating this to *amor fati*, I conclude that willing return *is* loving fate*,* for becoming always primarily relates to concrete processes one is always already caught up in. I then consider two important challenges, both which serve to refine affirmation as a project. First, I attend to whether affirmation is normative. Second, I consider feminist critiques of Nietzsche’s tropes of patriarchal individualism, expressed mainly in his later ideas. These questions and critiques

enable me to propose affirmation as a disposition toward practices of creative love that draws from processes that exceed the self. It completes nihilism by giving experimental form to ways of life beyond the moral parameters of nihilistic self-devaluation.

I. *Ressentiment*, Redemption, and Revenge

As Nietzsche tells it, *ressentiment* follows from reaction being denied and forced to discharge upon imaginary effigies—but there is more to the story. Zarathustra tells us that the will's "most secret melancholy" is not simply that one failed to overcome or incorporate this or that experience but more so that one cannot *will backwards* to overcome what *has been*. The passage of time—*finitude*—denies true reaction best. "Willing liberates," he says in "On Redemption," "but what is it that puts even the liberator himself in fetters? 'It was' … and that he cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy." Time is *covetous*: possessive, it hoards experiences, writing history like inventorying its assets. While one might desire to alter or revisit the past, that desire cannot effectively achieve its end. Willing backwards invariably runs up against its own impotence; *ressentiment* at *having been* is thus an acutely painful mode of the affect. For example, if a past decision is taken to cause some present suffering, one may well wish or will that it could be changed, like wishing I knew then what I know now. Knowing that decision's consequences, and taking myself as its author, brings with it its own kind of pain: guilt, here and now—but I cannot change it, and more importantly, the desire to change it expresses a rejection of what I have become. *For we become from what has been*. And so, such rejection becomes the desire for a different past that mobilizes ascetic hatred of becoming, which the ascetic priest seizes upon to temporalize the subject by imputing guilt. The subject, in other words, is frozen in the image of an unrecoverable deed. Ascetic ideals thus

reject both finitude and earthly existence; the ascetic is at odds with the memories and moments that have made up their actual lives. To put the point a bit differently, becoming and finitude are denigrated to the extent they are the ontological principle that makes painful memories of moments lost.

What of redemption? In English, "to redeem" typically indicates taking possession of something (e.g. redeeming a prize). In the Christian-moral sense, redemption signifies atonement. One regains possession of their immortal soul by serving penance for past sins. Indeed, *having been born* into sin, one returns to the soul by opposing earthly existence. As with the ascetic who attains to a blessed life through self-abnegation, Christianity models redemption on Christ's sacrifice, whose resurrection expresses affirmation premised on denial. Only through death do we attain communion with God in the kingdom of Heaven.

Zarathustra explicitly relates redemption [*Erlösung*] to the impossibility of willing backwards. He says, "To redeem those who lived in the past and to recreate all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'—that alone should I call redemption."[*Die vergangnen zu erlösen und alles „Es war" unzuschaffen in ein „So wollte ich es!"—das hiesse mir erst Erlösung*!"] (TSZ "On Redemption" [*Von der Erlösung*]) While "*zu erlösen*" is translated as "to redeem" (and *Erlösung* as redemption), there are other semantics at work in the term. The prefix *er-* designates reaching a goal or entering a state of completion by way of the attached verbal action, in this case "*lösen."* "*Lösen*" means to loosen or cast off, to break away from, or to undo. Together, *er-* + *lösen* signify entering a state by loosening or undoing a certain hold—breaking free from it, so to speak. *Erlösen* can thus also be translated as to save, to rescue, to deliver, or to solve. In the Christian-moral interpretation, the redemptive state requires breaking with life. For Zarathustra,

it is with the moral sense of the *impossibility* of willing backwards that redemption must break in order to constitute an affirmative and liberating response to the problem of finitude. Before continuing in that regard, though, what about the English sense of repetition or return designated by the prefix re-? While *er-* and re- are not exactly the same, the idea is that, contra the moral sense, breaking free of the past's hold signals a return to the potential for attributing meaning to what has been. One's willing is no longer *determined by ressentiment* at the passage of time, confined and fettered by the "it was," but freed to determine or deem it otherwise.

Zarathustra accordingly proposes that affirmative redemption requires *creative revaluation*. He explains that the past appears as "a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident—until the creative will says to it, 'But thus I willed it.'" What does he mean? Folding the way the past appears into a capacity for creative redemption situates temporality as a typology. We have seen that nihilism is a crisis in valuation. If the past appears fragmentary, accidental, and impossible to creatively re-valuate, it is so for the *one who cannot ascribe purpose to it*: the nihilist bereft of transcendental categories that might otherwise order the chaos. Indeed, for the nihilist—disenchanted moralist that they are—history is a dis-aggregated scene of events deprived of purposive integration. Without coherence, without meaning, this is akin to the melancholic who cannot incorporate or stabilize a sense of their lost object, thus perpetually dwelling with its absence. A friend, a lover, a dream is gone, and the vanity of that loss denies whatever follows in its wake. The world loses its color—my melancholia, to quote Julia Kristeva, expresses "In short, a devitalized existence that, although occasionally fired by the effort I make to prolong it, is ready at any moment for a plunge into death." (1989, 4) Because it is to the enduring presence of the past as fragment and failure that slavish *ressentiment* responds to with ascetic revenge—and

this in conjuring ideals which invert and disfigure the temporality of actual life—without those ideals, the nihilist has but fragment, failure, and finitude to condemn.

In response, the Zarathustrian creative transmutes the "It was" into "But thus I willed it"—and, Zarathustra continues, into "But thus I will it; thus shall I will it." What does it mean to *will* the past? In contrast to the nihilist who laments the absence of inherent purpose, unity, or aim—for whom "It was" is unbearable—the creator sees fragment and accident as material for re-fashioning purpose and value. They reconstitute a relationship with the lost object through creative valuation that incorporates it without glossing over its enduring absence. Fashioning significance for what has been, the creative redeemer convalesces from what had broken them, like learning to embrace a loss we have suffered as our own personal, historical *a priori*. Such convalescent valuation resonates with what Nietzsche calls the "tragic wisdom" of Ancient Greek tragedy: its celebration of finitude and loss—the Dionysian dissolution of form—through aesthetic figures who express a unity of human life with nature, affect, and embodiment.[179] So, too, with his endeavor to put historical education in the service of life, and this by educating youth to think according to their own needs.[180] Affirmative redemption wills the "it was" by composing figures of value that revaluate the past and express gratitude for what has been, for *finitude*.

Gratitude starkly contrasts with the *ressentiment* ascetic ideals seize upon. It is important to underscore this point. Nietzsche insists that creativity emerges from embodied, passional,

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179. Ofelia Schutte dwells at length with this healing aspect of the early Nietzsche's "Dionysian wisdom." She sees this as a compelling element lost in the later Nietzsche's more authoritarian model of willing as domination. See Section V.b below.

180. Nietzsche states, "The Greeks gradually learned to *organize the chaos* by following the Delphic teaching and thinking back to themselves, that is, to their real needs, and letting their pseudo-needs die out. Thus they again took possession of themselves...This is a parable for each one of us: he must organize the chaos within him by thinking back to his real needs." (HL 10)

Dionysian abundance. That abundance corresponds to *real movements of willing* which, as I describe in Chapter 2, are intensive processes sensed as affective relations one is caught up in and that make them "what they are."[181] Gratitude exemplifies a will—a capacity and desire—to cultivate and creatively harness those movements. On the other hand, Nietzsche considers ascetic preistly creativity mendacious and perverse. It creates out of lack or impotence, conjoining desire with *in*capacity, and channeling *ressentiment* into ideals hostile to life, growth, and change. For example, take the metaphysics of "free will." Because every deed is presumed to follow from a subject's decision, one could always "have done otherwise." The subject becomes accountable, indebted to what has been insofar as they must testify to their authorship of the deed. The moral interpretation of accountability becomes guilt [*Schuld*], or indebtedness for *having willed* at all—but, in Nietzsche's view, *willing admits of no choice*. As he tells it in GM I:13, "the deed is everything" [*das Thun ist Alles*], and as deed, willing is continuous with singular causal conditions, not to a subjectivity presiding over them. The ascetic priest constructs "the free will" as the *causa prima* of deed to temporalize subjectivity as guilt, denying those singular conditions and vicissitudes in efforts to master it. Such efforts belie a hatred of powerlessness, ashamed of finitude. Thus, whereas ascetic redemption is hostile to conditions of earthly life—to finitude, the body, affect, and deed—affirmative gratitude celebrates them as conditions of *creative tenacity*.[182]

In *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism* Robert Gooding-Williams distinguishes three types of redemption throughout Zarathustra's development of the thought of eternal recurrence. "Redemption 1" is the reading described above: redemption integrates the past in an act of value

181. See Chapter 2, Sec. II.
182. I consider "creative tenacity" as a term that contests the kind of "reactive tenacity" I diagnose as nihilistic in previous chapters.

creation. It operates on historical inheritances, or what Gooding-Williams calls "materials that the creator finds 'already there' *prior* to creating anything." (2001, 207) Those "materials" are passions that persist despite the historical triumph of ascetic ideals—affects a creator can recover and harness for new works. "Redemption 2" is Christian-Platonic: redemption as revenge upon and hostility toward becoming and, consequently, redemption as deliverance from earthly finitude.[183] In this perspective, human life *suffers from* and so denies its finitude. Inability to alter the past translates into an inability to affirm life. In Gooding-Williams's words, "the past comes into view as exceeding the will's power, and not, as from the perspective of the creative will, as available to creative redemption."[184] (Ibid.) Zarathustra struggles with this, for he is literally at pains to see how he can overcome the impossibility of willing backwards. Tempted by the soothsayer's prophecy that "All is empty, all is the same, all has been!" (TSZ "The Soothsayer"), he feels doomed to endlessly repeat reactive life.

Contra the ascetic, "redemption 3" *wills backwards*. Gooding-Williams addresses two objections. The first is that willing backwards invariably confronts the impossibility of acting upon past events. Metaphysically speaking—and note that adopting this perspective lands us squarely within an ascetic purview—because we are finite creatures subject to time's passing, we have no retroactive causal power. We cannot travel through time and steer ourselves from certain events: relationships, careers, trauma, etc. But, Gooding-Williams argues, we *can* conceive of willing backwards as a practical postulate that regulates conduct and opens up other ways of

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183. Gooding-Williams reads this in the parts of Zarathustra's speech wherein vengeful redemption is what "madness preaches." For example, Zarathustra says, "'Can there be redemption if there is eternal justice? Alas, the stone *It was* cannot be moved: all punishments must be eternal too.' Thus preached madness." (TSZ "On Redemption") One sees here how close revenge is to the ascetic image of eternity.

184. One ought to consider in this regard Nietzsche's treatment of Wagner's "redemption" in *The Case of Wagner,* specifically Section 4, wherein he describes how Schopenhauer's influence shipwrecked Wagner by introducing a sense of redemption as renunciation and revenge.

relating to past events that are not necessarily truncated by the impossibility of explicitly acting upon them. Put differently, there are ways to will backwards without willing to erase, alter, or atone for what has been.[185] If I will backwards to undo a moment for which I am ashamed, say an argument with my partner, I will only ever be met with my incapacity for time travel. But if I will backwards to revaluate it, I can compose a meaning for it that actively reinterprets it as a contribution to what we are now. This generates the possibility of integrating the experience into our character and conduct.

The second objection is significant as well: if one wills to *undo* the Christian-Platonic past, then one effectively undoes the conditions for affirmative redemption. Removing the advent of nihilism "appears to foreclose the possibility of new-values creation … Thus, it would eliminate the possibility of a creative willing that redeemed the Christian-Platonic past…" (2001, 213-214) Consequently, redemption 3 crystallizes Zarathustra's problem: if it is possible to *will* backwards, how else could he will regarding the increasing moralization of humanity, and the development of human smallness, other than in opposition to it: with regret that it happened, and with vengeance upon its history?

Gooding-Williams argues accordingly that Zarathustra must reconcile redemptions 1 (the creative act) and 3 (willing backwards). He is right, I think, to focus on this.[186] Redemption must

185. Gooding-Williams claims "My point here is not that one absurdity justifies another; rather, it is that a practical postulate is significant, not because it asserts a convincing physical or metaphysical theory, but because it illuminates the connection between some deeply held hope or commitment and our beliefs about the self and the world."

186. Gooding-Williams's reading is unique among the scholarship: he claims that Zarathustra's vision of a perpetual "Now" in "On the Vision and the Riddle" is a kind of second sense of eternal recurrence that expresses a lion-spirited formulation. His references are many, and his work is nuanced, however, for my purposes, I eschew the minutiae and instead extrapolate from his claim that eternal recurrence articulates a specific sense of redemption as willing toward, and creating out of, historical inheritances. For a critical review of *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism* see Paul Loeb, "The Thought-Drama of Eternal Recurrence" in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* (Issue 34, Autumn 2007) pp. 79-95; for Gooding-Williams's response, see "Ruminations and Rejoinders: Eternal Recurrence, Nietzsche's Noble Plato, and the Existentialist Zarathustra" in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* (Issue 34, Autumn 2007) pp. 96-112.

will backwards *without revenge.* How does one re-valuate an inheritance that seems only to diminish them? How does one say "Yes" to a past whose persistence characterizes our loneliest melancholy? These questions invite evaluations of becoming, change, and finitude—in fact recalling, as Paul Loeb (2007) explains, Zarathustra's claim that "It is of time and becoming that the best parables should speak: let them be a praise and a justification of all impermanence." ("Upon the Blessed Isles;" Loeb 2007, 85) Contesting ascetic revenge requires we relate to the "It was" not through a desire to fundamentally change or lament what has been but to exploit it for revaluative self- and world-invention. Creative tenacity then celebrates the "It was" as a *condition for becoming otherwise*, for "becoming what we are." Neither revenge upon nor a denial of loss, affirmative redemption attributes meaning to the lost object it could not have as pure absence, in the reeling sadness of its dear departure. For while that pain surely registers our flesh and finitude, holding it—embracing it—we can sew our hearts back together with a needle and thread. By doing so we integrate what has been with what is and will be, practically transforming "it was" into "But thus I willed it...But thus I will it; thus shall I will it."

One might object: this is simply redemption 1, redemption as creative integration, and so it is unnecessary to distinguish redemption 3 as willing backwards from redemption as creative willing. I think this misses a crucial typological distinction. Revaluating what one inherits simply describes *what* value creation *is*. Ascetic priests inherit and revaluate. Integrating past events into purposive *metaphysical* wholes, they sustain those suffering from finitude by elaborating denial into an *ethos*. Nietzsche finds this perverse, for they create from a feeling of impotence in the "incarnate desire for a different mode of being" that is nevertheless a *"protective and healing instinct of a degenerating life."* (GM III:13) Figuring eternity as the absence of change,

becoming, and willing, ascetic ideals redeem by counseling deliverance from finitude. It is as if, for fear of the loss it invites, the melancholic ought never to invest in anyone, anything, ever again. Desire for worldly objects always confronts willing with its impotence upon their absence —rather will nothingness. Gooding-Williams's distinctions allows us to glean that not all value creation is affirmative, and not all redemption is transvaluative.

Transvaluative redemption completes nihilism. It does not deny or refuse it. It counsels confrontation with the "It was," such that affirmative, transvaluative redemption returns to Christian-Platonic history not to deny it but to harness, exploit, and exceed it, practically incorporating ascetic morality in order to exemplify stronger values (in Nietzsche's agonistic sense). What can one harness from the history of ascetic ideals? We have already seen Nietzsche's answer: willing truth. The ascetic who aspires to master the conditions of life, and the nihilist who considers existence *as such* to lack aim, purpose, and value, express a will to truth at the limit of its capacities, whereby it attains to a valuation of all life. Affirmative revaluation therefore requires transmuting nihilistic hostility into gratitude for *all life* through an *image of eternity* that affirms finitude, singularity, and earthly life—the apotheosis of celebrating change, becoming, and willing. For the loss I feel, let my sadness make of me a life actually lived, a soul of flesh and blood. Let the will become "*its own* redeemer and joy bringer" by valorizing its own conditions of development—self-valorization as willing backwards *without* revenge. (Gooding-Williams 2001, 211) As we will see, this is what eternal return presents.

II. Eternal Return

We can understand eternal return as the formula of affirmative redemption—indeed, as the "highest formula of affirmation at all attainable." (EH "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" 1) In what

follows I engage the concept first by working through Nietzsche's presentation in *The Gay Science,* not necessarily because this is his first published account of the idea, but because there it appears as a provocation: a question or problem that gauges one's capacity to desire life. It is a presented as a matter of disposition, of *ethos*. In this way, eternal return serves to generate transformative belief in the one who wills it. I then work through Zarathustra's "On the Vision and the Riddle" to determine how the temporality of eternal return elaborates transmuting truth-seeking into experimental form-giving. Reflecting on how repetition or return can, albeit somewhat paradoxically, compel creativity, I then turn to Deleuze to clarify how willing return signifies learning to love fate.

a. The Test

Those acquainted with Nietzsche's works know that the first published presentation of eternal return is section 341 of *The Gay Science,* titled "The greatest weight." I quote it here at length:

> *The greatest weight.*— What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!

> Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.' If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, 'Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?' would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?

A question is posed: "What, if…?" What if a demonic question *stole* upon you? Not offered nor suggested, but forced. You had no choice. How would you respond? Is recurrence a gift for which you would be grateful, enthralled by the promise of the life you have and will live? Or would it be a curse: a sentence passed upon you, an eternal punishment? Either transformed or crushed, the question repeats in the future imperative: how well disposed would one *have to become* to *crave* recurrence?

Responding to those questions expresses one's *personal* disposition to becoming. The demon steals after the subject in its "loneliest loneliness" which, as Zarathustra tells it, relates an incapacity to will backwards. Provoking us at this juncture signals that the question of affirmation is principally tied to how we relate to the past, to "every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh." Each and every event repeats, no matter how small, like fragments imbued with purpose simply by virtue of having happened in sequence, which is to say no purpose at all. It is a sequence without rhyme or reason, "without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: '*the eternal recurrence;*' it is the most

extreme form of nihilism: the nothing ("the meaningless"), eternally!" (WP 55) Eternal recurrence in this perspective is repetition made absolute and transcendental.[187] All existence is experienced as repetition; what is, repeats. Repetition becomes the grounding principle of life. Its power is raised to the *nth* degree: "repetition for its own sake"—not, as it were, repetition of particular cases progressing toward some comprehensive goal ("aim"), nor repetition subordinate to systematic totality ("unity"), nor repetition as instances of universal forms ("truth"). (WP 12 (A)) Unhinged from moral-transcendental ordinance and "without meaning or aim," repetition *as such* radicalizes the loss of faith in the categories of reason, itself catalyzed by a development of truth-seeking. Reeling in their absence the one who wills truth becomes the nihilist incapable of affirming both existence and themselves. Repetition in eternal return can thus be understood as the will to truth, the will to fabricate intelligible similarities, brought to its absolute limit. In a personal regard, it is repetition of "every joy and every pain" without inherent meaning or truth. Can they be affirmed without transcendental recourse?

We ought to recall here how ascetic ideals attribute meaning to suffering. Ascetic priests craft ideals in the way the "teachers of the purpose of existence" (GS 1) fabricate meaning for the species, that is, by positing a scene of valuation populated by figures of veracity that ascribe moral significance to events by integrating them into purposive wholes. By doing so they glean reactive tenacity, for "If we possess our *why* of life we can put up with almost any *how*…" (TI "Maxims and Arrows" 12) Accordingly the problem is not, as Nietzsche tells it in GM III:28, suffering in itself, but rather the why of suffering: *for what do we endure*?[188] "The human being,"

187. When repetition is made transcendental in the image of eternal recurrence it shifts the register of the transcendental. It elevates the present, the threshold of the passage of time, to a kind of omnipresence that unifies singularity with universality. What is universal, in other words, is situated nows; what is infinite is the finite nature of becoming. Transcendental repetition is thus, in Deleuze's language, pure immanence.

188. I am, again, summarizing an otherwise important and complex problem in Nietzsche's work. For a strong account of Nietzsche's views on suffering, see Christopher Janaway, "On the Very Idea of 'Justifying

he explains, "the animal that is bravest and most accustomed to suffering, does *not* deny suffering as such: he *wants* it, he even seeks it, supposing that he is shown a *meaning* for it … *and the ascetic ideal offered it a meaning!*" Ascetic ideals supply an "artifice for the *preservation* of life" that binds "to existence the entire herd of people who are deformed, depressed, underprivileged, failures, and *those of every kind who suffer from themselves*…" (GM III:13; my emphasis) As shepherds for the sufferers, ascetic priests make it possible for the otherwise ill-disposed to endure life and, importantly, to endure themselves.

One may rightfully ask: from what of *themselves* do they suffer? From Zarathustra's comments on redemption we can surmise an important aspect of what eternal return contests in the ascetic and achieves in the one who wills it. Ascetic redemption mobilizes opposition to finitude. The impossibility of changing or altering a past event leads to *ressentiment* at time's passing, captured in the thought that "If I were stronger [or better, or smarter, etc.], things could have went otherwise." It's a torturous, cruel, and endless return to a past one can neither escape nor forget.[189] Ideals that retroactively elevate previous moments, especially previous failures or self-denials, into morally righteous decisions offer a way out. They interpret and revaluate weakness as strength—an absurdity in Nietzsche's view. (GM I:13) But the point is this: it is principally self-hatred, specifically the hatred of one reflecting on their own past, that ascetic ideals activate in proclaiming "It's your fault." But *what* is their fault? That they ever willed at

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Suffering'" in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* (Vol. 48, Issue 2; Summer 2017) pgs. 152-170. Bernard Reginster similarly interrogates suffering in *The Affirmation of Life,* reckoning with how, in Nietzsche's view, suffering follows from the will's inability to attain its object or end. My views above are not incompatible with Reginster's, however I am less concerned with a working definition of suffering as such, which to my mind reads like a return to metaphysics. Rather, I refer the *problem* of suffering to the *task* of affirmation in an existential and practical sense.

189. It is worth noting that Nietzsche's views on forgetting as an "active force," especially in GM II:1, suggest that healthy natures are capable of forgetting experiences, of always making room for new ones, whereas the sick and slavish become "dyspeptic—he cannot "have done with anything." (GM II:1)

all. *Willing itself* becomes the venue of their suffering; they suffer for ever having tried. By way of the blame, the world becomes a scene of revenge for the one who can endure neither themselves nor it.[190]

To contest that hatred eternal return provokes an affirmative disposition to becoming. In the same clause one is asked how well-disposed they would have to become to both themselves *and* to life. The elemental reciprocity at work between affect and becoming challenges ascetic world denial and self-abnegation to become "well-disposed to the world and to life." Put differently, whereas the ascetic self-contradiction of "life against life" crystallizes in a hostility against oneself and the world, eternal return proposes, as Lawrence Hatab explains, that "The redemptive possibility of actively willing *every* "it was" just *as* it was can only be truly tested by facing one's own specific repulsions that would have to be actively willed." (Hatab 2005, 69) Successfully overcoming ascetic hostility requires we revaluate "every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh" into conditions of growth.

One might at this point inquire into whether Nietzsche intended eternal recurrence factually, as metaphysical doctrine, or as cosmological theory. Deleuze, for example, proposes an ontological account (which I attend to in Section III). Heidegger argues that eternal recurrence of the same, alongside will to power, constitutes a "fundamental metaphysical position" that positions Nietzsche at the culminating end of Western-Platonic metaphysics (in spite of his efforts at thinking *beyond* that tradition).[191] I began with GS 341 because I think the fundamental

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190. The affect of hatred unites hostility to the world and to oneself. It is not that one hates oneself, and therefore the world, nor the world and therefore oneself. Rather, the movement is reciprocal, even circular. Hatred of one's own impotence is at the same time hatred of the circumstances in which one encounters that impotence.

191. For example, Heidegger states, "Nietzsche himself quite early characterizes his philosophy as inverted Platonism; yet the inversion does not eliminate the fundamentally Platonic position. Rather, precisely because it seems to eliminate the Platonic position, Nietzsche's inversion represents the entrenchment of that position." (1984, 205) Heidegger's point here, I think, is that Nietzsche's position, insofar as it signifies the *end* of Platonic metaphysics, invites, without adequately addressing, a more originary and original gesture of inquiring into

promise of thought is the typological transmutation of the nihilist. Who is the nihilist? Recall that, above, I claim that eternal return redeems the Christian-Platonic past by harnessing it. It is the ascetic, the nihilist—*the philosopher*—whose willing of truth situates life in the perspective of eternity. Eternal return achieves transmutation by referring the thought of eternity to the *pathos* of singular events. Rather than justification by an otherworldly authority, eternal return compels justifying life, *all life*, in terms that are *actually lived*. Craving its "ultimate confirmation and seal" is intimately tied to the experience of tremendous moments in a way that unifies philosophical thought and life.

Can a moment truly justify life? Each moment is enveloped in what came before and what follows. Our lows are united with our highs, the valleys with the peaks—sadness and suffering with exuberant joy. Recovering that unity enables revaluating finitude as the condition for actually experiencing tremendous moments. As an exercise in personal investment, allow me to offer one of my own. Of the dozens of times I've seen The World/Inferno Friendship Society, one memory (perhaps composed of several) remains vivid. I remember dancing with and embracing a stranger in the middle of the circle pit. Jack was spitting blood and screaming on stage, exhorting us all to waltz as if it were our last. We obliged, and in that moment, by way of that song, we were both lost and found at once—lost, as who we were outside or otherwise, our everyday selves, dissolved in Dionysian revelry; found, as united in rapture. I sensed then that this was what Nietzsche might have meant by the idea that a moment could justify the whole, that something ephemeral could attain to eternity.[192] Intoxication and joy charged becoming

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Being. Nietzsche thus only prepares the way—for Heidegger.

192. These were the moments wherein I related a burgeoning love of philosophy to an enduring love of punk. The tension within that relationship is one I often explore—and did so even then, in spite of the disdain of close friends who would have rather kept dancing.

otherwise through a catalytic reciprocity between ourselves and the stage. The moment wrote itself into my skin; it guides me still, as if everything that had happened before, every intolerable sorrow and intractable regret, lead to that dance. Everything that followed, transfigured in its afterglow…"I hummed an old lyric by you, you know it broke my heart. I can still hear it, I can still feel it."[193] Gratitude for that particular moment spreads across so many others, like living to exemplify the promise of a song. An important lesson for a young punk: its *our* lives that justify existence. *This life is what we make it.* Its the beauty we learn to make that gleans tenacity for the terrors we face, like a devil—or some guy from Jersey—waltzing to a heart attack. He sang, "What a wonderful, wonderful world."[194]

By reckoning with what has been, with the melancholy of having been, having laughed and lost, eternal return broaches the question of the value of values in terms of actual lives. It challenges the nihilist-philosopher by situating the valuation of eternity in terms of their own tremendous moments. *The value of figures of truth becomes a function of lives actually lived*. Now, one might object: isn't it a problem to refer the value of existence to one's own experiences? Is this not a radical, almost solipsistic individualism wherein what matters must matter for *me*, or else it simply has no value? To the contrary: recall that nihilism is a crisis of disposition that unfolds at the level of willing. It follows from siphoning willing into pursuing truth, exclusively and above all else—truth at any cost, in the image of similarities that repeat across different cases. Eternal return takes this metaphysical sense of repetition to its limit:

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193. "Don't Get Me Started, Don't Get Me Wrong" by The World/Inferno Friendship Society on *This Packed Funeral* (Alternative Tentacles, 2014) Jack died last year. I won't hear the song again. As much as that pains me, to know it was possible is nothing short of a total celebration of life on this floating fucking rock. I will forever be grateful for the waltzes and wine; I will always, eternally, return to them in future dances. In Laura Jane Grace's words, "To know that he is now gone I am left inspired knowing someone like him was possible."
194. "Heart Attack '64" by The World/Inferno Friendship Society on *Just the Best Party* (Vibromonk Records, 2011) Jack Terricloth sings, "The dope and the wine and the stage, they gave back to me what I gave. What a wonderful, wonderful world."

recurrence without meaning, eternally. At that limit the question of value activates and provokes transfiguration. Displaced from a metaphysical interpretation into one of willing and valuation, what repeats is not the concept nor the identity of the similar but the moments that charge our lives with significance. Instead of a mode of capture, *repetition becomes a power of singularity*. We return to and repeat moments that generate significance. Consequently, rather than foreclosing on meaning outside the individual subject, affirming eternal return demands investment in the events that actually compel the attribution of meaning and value: the embodied, affective coordinates of specific places, times, and forms of life, often within particular "régimes of truth" (in Foucault's terminology). Those events and conditions exceed the category of the individual. The affective abundance Nietzsche insists upon has no *causa prima* in the subject. Commitments to and sharing values with others is thus made possible without premising them on categories of abstract similarity that deny the singularity of specific events, including 'the subject.' Young punks "ascribe new values to our lives."[195] Eternal return makes affirming shared values possible without premising them on life denial.

b. The Vision

Zarathustra's vision in "On the Vision and the Riddle" conjoins the singularity of eternal return's existential provocation with the universality of cosmological recurrence. There is much to say about it—and indeed, much has been said. What follows in my reading is limited to two ends. First, I argue that the way Zarathustra links cosmic recurrence with singular moments distills Nietzsche's imperative to take problems personally into an image of eternity as affective investment. Second, I articulate how eternal return's sense of creativity completes and

195. "There's No Way 'Punk Was Meant To Be Done' (You Clown Doctor)" by Latterman on *Turn Up The Punk, We'll Be Singing* (Deep Elm Records, 2005)

transfigures nihilistic devaluation into transvaluation. Tying these threads together, I argue that affirmation transmutes truth-seeking into experimental form-giving by cultivating a different response to the passage of time that redirects one's moral attention from regressive conservatism to futural creativity. It completes nihilism by reigniting a love for life that transforms the nihilist into the one who wills return.

Before attaining to his vision Zarathustra summons courage to resist the leaden words of his companion: the half-dwarf, half-mole personification of the spirit of gravity. Courage contests its attempts to seduce him into *ressentiment*, into pity that disdains repetition and seeks deliverance from the circle. Gooding-Williams argues that the invocation of courage signals Zarathustra's transformation into a lion-spirit that breaks from, or says "No!" to, Christian-Platonic pity, *freeing* him for value creation. (2001, 216-225) Indeed, Zarathustra says, "This courage finally bade me stand still and speak: 'Dwarf! It is you or I!' For courage is the best slayer, courage which *attacks*…" (TSZ "On the Vision and the Riddle" 1) Courage that *attacks*, then, can overcome abysses and "slay even pity." In Chapter 4 I suggest courage risks the problem by summoning strength for its challenge. The risk, here, is the temptation to pity human inability to will backwards, to "suffer-with" [*Mitleid*] those who revenge themselves upon finitude. "'No deed can be annihilated: how could it be undone by punishment? This, this is what is eternal in the punishment called existence, that existence must eternally become deed and guilt again. Unless the will should at last redeem himself...'"—thus does "madness" preach, the madness of revenging oneself on the past. (TSZ "On Redemption") Why is it mad? Because time will pass again, and with it, revenge will find ever more immovable stones to flail against. Such is the temporality of Christian-Platonic guilt. By way of its separation of willing from the deed

history becomes an arena of debts one can never repay, for which one can only atone. Zarathustra's courage thus ventures the possibility of willing backwards without accusation or guilt.

He begins articulating his vision by describing a gateway called "Moment" [*Augenblick*] that stands between two eternal paths: the past and the future. He asks the spirit of gravity if they believe the two paths eternally contradict each other, to which the dwarf responds:

> "All that is straight lies," the dwarf murmured contemptuously. "All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle."
>
> "You spirit of gravity," I said angrily, "do not make things too easy for yourself! Or I shall let you crouch where you are crouching, lamefoot; and it was I that carried you to this *height*."

Why is this articulation of circularity a problem? How is it making things too easy? Gooding-Williams notes how "lamefoot" recalls Zarathustra's prologue, where the jester leaps over the tightrope walker who then falls to his death.[196] Zarathustra honors the latter as one who "made death his vocation" even as the jester had mocked him as one who "[blocks] the way for one better than yourself." If the dwarf is now the lamefoot, we might expect Zarathustra to be the jester poised for leaping over him: for overcoming him in laughter. Indeed, the dwarf's contempt for the circle expresses a pessimistic valuation of life through its denial of the possibility of overcoming recurrence, or of willing backwards without revenge. They thus block the way for one who desires life (Zarathustra), separating active force from what it can do.

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196. The jester that emerges from behind the tightrope walker calls the latter "lamefoot," and claims that he "blocks the way for one better than yourself." It is interesting, and relevant, then, that the jester proceeds to leap *over* the lamefoot walker, who then falls to his death. Zarathustra honors him as one "made danger [his] vocation." Comedy, in this scene, overcomes tragedy; laughter overcomes the all too serious.

Hatab suggests that the dwarf's presentation of circularity distances the subject from their actual experience of recurrence, diminishing its existential import. Graphically representing time as a circle disengages one from their own envelopment in it—that is, it "violates a central tenet of Nietzsche's immanent naturalism: there can be *no* 'extra-cyclic' vantage point from which to grasp the whole in some way…" (2005, 73) The dwarf presumes at least a hermeneutic distance from recurrence which defuses its personally provocative element. Hence, similarly, "Picturing time as a circle completely bypasses (or suppresses) the profound existential task at the heart of eternal recurrence." (Ibid.) The dwarf makes it too easy by failing to grasp the problem of eternal return *personally,* instead construing it propositionally and only seeing in it an invitation to despair. By doing so, they efface the conditions for the transformative growth eternal return can otherwise activate.

Eternal recurrence can only be properly encountered in terms of *the real movements one* is caught up in[197]—the affective-phenomenal and typological coordinates of one's willing: one's circumstances, one's geographico-historical events. Nietzsche presents it in singular terms like 'this spider' and 'this moonlight' (returning to images from GS 341) to concentrate recurrence in passing moments whose *aisthesis* harbors temporal velocity—momentum for becoming. This suggests two ideas: first, that conjoining the passing moment with cosmic recurrence unites singularity with universality. All experiences occur in terms of their singular elements. What makes them unique is also what makes them universal. Second, eternal return's affirmation of *aisthesis* submits that creative work follows from finite, partial perspectives, like a parable that praises and a justifies all impermanence. (TSZ "Upon the Blessed Isles") When the dwarf disdainfully represents recurrence as a proposition of temporal circularity, they extirpate that

197. Chapter 2, Section II.

singular, aesthetic, and personal element. Grasping the problem with "the antennae of cold, curious thought," they deny its passional premise.[198] (GS 345) But the problem must be felt—*strongly*—such that one taps into life like material for transfigurative art, not unlike the sense of transfiguration Foucault describes in considering Baudelaire's thoughts on modernity.[199] Eternal return thus makes of the present a metamorphic moment we are compelled to meet.

Now, reflecting on eternity, Zarathustra asks "Must not whatever *can* walk have walked on this lane before? Must not whatever *can* happen have happened, have been done, have passed by before?" (TSZ "On the Vision and the Riddle") "What *can* happen" denotes an active element in any given occurrence. Events come like fate, arriving in terms of proximate causes that, because eternity means that what *has* happened *will* happen again, are *temporally united* with their effect, "knotted together so firmly that this moment draws after it *all* that is to come?" Now, because it is the ascetic-philosopher who attains to a view of eternity, and because eternal return's promise hinges on encountering the "most extreme form of nihilism" from within the purview of their perspective, its transformative power signifies a transmutation of the will to truth. Only at the limit of what truth can do does the question of value take on a properly catalytic form: the question of the value of the whole, "a rendezvous, so it seems, of questions and question marks," wherein what is at stake is the affirmation of *all life* (BGE 1) To that end Nietzsche proposes an image of life justified on its own terms: as an arena of concrete, finite, embodied willing. Absent categories of truth that gloss over singularity in figures of global

198. In fact, sticking with GS 345, we might go even farther and see that, by proposing a simple proposition "Time itself is a circle," the dwarf fundamentally misses the following *crucial* element of the problem: the question of the *value* of recurrence. I have argued thus far that the question of the *value* of truth incites thinking beyond good and evil. Here, it is no different: if eternal recurrence is to test and select the affirmative will capable of becoming otherwise, capable of creating new values, then it must provoke the question of the value of truth.

199. This, I would add, recalls Deleuze's ontological account of problems, encounters with which are principally *sensed*. Recognition and representation are secondary products of what is primarily encountered affectively and, it follows, aesthetically.

purposiveness—aim, unity, truth (WP 12(A))—eternal return presents an image of life wherein a parabolic composition of the whole principally affirms the singular moment. It is a thought integrated with need, or "A thought that would *affirm* life instead of a knowledge that is opposed to life," in Deleuze's words. (2006, 101) And indeed, the thought marks an effort in composition —a philosophical work that transfigures the ascetic-philosopher into the philosopher-artist whose pursuits of knowledge are endeavors to amplify what Keith Ansell-Pearson calls "possibilities of life."[200]

If eternal return is parabolic, does it matter whether we truly believe in it? That is, must we commit to the belief that we will *actually* live our lives over and over? Here I would turn to what Hatab calls his "literal reading" of recurrence. A literal reading suspends disbelief in order to encounter the "immediate disclosive effect" of eternal recurrence as a kind of mythico-poetic, philosophical expression. He writes, "I believe that Nietzsche wanted us to take eternal recurrence *as written* and *as read* in an immediate sense, because if it were taken as symbolic of something other than repetition, or even as a hypothetical as-if, it would lack the existential force to draw out a concrete response to the issue of life affirmation." (2005, 99) Eternal return's capacity for life affirmation thus follows from taking it as literally true, which does not necessarily mean metaphysically true or factual.[201] The advantage of this reading is that it dwells at the level of *aisthesis* and willing in advancing the issue of response: how we enter into and

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200. See Ansell-Pearson, "Overcoming the Weight of Man: Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Possibilities of Life" in *Revuew Internationale de Philosophie* Vol. 61, No. 241 (3) (September 2007) Pgs. 245-259. Pearson states, "In a note from 1881, as he is preparing *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche states that the fundamental condition of the passion of knowledge is to give existence an aesthetic meaning and so augment our taste for it, which is to augment our taste for living out possibilities of existence."

201. Hatab is careful to distinguish the literal from the factual, and to articulate his position in terms of the former. See *Nietzsche's Life Sentence: Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), specifically Chapter 5: "Making Belief: Literal Repetition and its Existential Force"

respond to the problem expresses our disposition to transforming through singular events composed of forces in immanent, finite arrangements, confrontations, and alliances.

Singular events are not exhausted by the concept nor the category of reason. Their unity is not epistemic but rather a function of embodied finitude, of affect and abyss:

> "'And this slow spider, which crawls in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway, whispering together, whispering of eternal things—must not all of us have been there before? And return and walk in that other lane, before, in this long dreadful lane—must we not eternally return?'"

By uniting eternity with singularity and elevating repetition to universality, eternal return presents the moment [*Augenblick*] as a metamorphic site of transformative *pathos.* Becoming is no longer mummified in the concept nor ideal, no longer opposed to terms of actual lives. Rather, it *returns to earth*, to moments of lives lived. As a formula of affirmation eternal return describes an *ethos* wherein thinking is made active in the creative who breaks with asceticism to channel affects into figures that revluate what has been as what will be and will have been. *Through eternal return we encounter the question of the value of existence in a way that contests moral-transcendental figures of significance and reinvests embodied, situated, immanent possibilities of life*. Ascetic hostility becomes gratitude for and celebration of immanence. The one who wills return reinvests problems not as registers of incapability but as opportunities for radical becoming.

c. The Riddle

Zarathustra's vision gives way to a riddle. A shepherd gags on a thick black snake that has bitten into the back of his throat and is suffocating him. Zarathustra tries to tear it from his

mouth but his efforts are in vain. He thus counsels the shepherd to bite its head off. The shepherd does so, spits the head out and stands up, "No longer shepherd, no longer human—one changed, radiant, *laughing!* Never yet on earth has a human being laughed as he laughed!" Scholarship generally agrees that the shepherd symbolizes Zarathustra, especially insofar as he later tells his animals that the snake had in fact climbed into *his* mouth. (TSZ "The Convalescent") The snake symbolizes nihilistic opposition to human becoming and growth—a suffocation of instinct and passion, a diminishment of *aisthesis*. Biting its head off marks courage which attacks, conveying that freeing oneself from nihilism makes possible a laughter that leaps over and overcomes the human. The transformed shepherd thus symbolizes a future beyond Christian morality, beyond the reign of ascetic ideals and the triumph of reactive forces that separate active forces from what they can do—separating us from what we can become.

How does this *complete* nihilism? Does recurrence not suggest rather that nihilism, too, will forever return, or that Christian-Platonic ideals are eternal, as well? In his encounter with recurrence Zarathustra confronts his greatest personal repulsion, his "great disgust with man" in the return of the slavish, reactive, "small man." (TSZ "The Convalescent") That is the snake that bit his throat: "The nothing…eternally!" (WP 55) is the recurrence of the *will to nothingness.* And yet, by framing this as a meditation on how the "small man" *accuses* life*,* and by asking "And I myself—do I thus want to be man's accuser?" (Ibid.), Zarathustra suggests that the issue is not *that* human life has undergone reactive diminishment, but rather that if his own revaluation of life is meant to *correct* that reactivity, then *he, too, accuses life*. In other words, he senses his proximity to the priest. Lest he himself become "one who accuses," which is precisely what the ascetic priest is under Christian-Platonic morality*,* Zarathustra must affirm the small man, must

affirm the history of the self-devaluation of the highest values and their culmination in nihilism and, by way of temporal unity in eternal return, *must affirm them again, tomorrow*.[202] Only by doing so is the "Thus I willed it" conjoined with the "Thus I shall will it," effectively becoming a "Thus I will have willed it—again and again." *Past tense, future perfect.*

I would accordingly modify Gooding-Williams's position. Zarathustra is not only upset that willing backwards to undo the Christian-Platonic past would remove the possibility of affirmation. He is upset because he realizes that a project of *improving* the future expresses at the same time a desire to *correct* the past, to [A] see it as a deed or an error for which we ought to [B] be held *accountable* and atone. To understand this let us return to Nietzsche's criticism of free will. He argues 1) it falsifies reality by positing a fictitious doer behind the deed who *could have* acted otherwise (GM I:13) and 2) leverages that fiction against what *did* happen to channel *ressentiment* and facilitate the impulse to punish. 1) expresses a "reality that had to be slandered and denied" for the erection of the ideal (GM II:24), specifically in the premise of choice, as if "[t]he strong is free to be weak" and "the very weakness of the weak...were a voluntary achievement, something willed, chosen…" (GM I:13) 2) steers *ressentiment* toward an object of blame*:* what happened is neither accidental nor contingent on some external force, but the fault of the *willing subject*—in the ascetic mode, *"You yourself!"* Accountability temporalizes the subject through indebtedness: they house the intentional will that authorized the deed. It becomes *guilt* [*Schuld*]. With this, *ressentiment* refracts into the interiority of the subject who becomes accountable to *having willed*. In its religioius-moral development, this guilt or accountability internalized as indebtedness becomes eternal through the figure of the sacrificed Christ. (GM II:21) Humanity, in other words, is indebted to the God who died such that we could live and

202. For my presentations of philosophy as an art of slander, see Chapter 3 Sec. II.c and Chapter 4 Sec. I.

will. Life is thus premised on deified sacrifice; willing is cast in the image of atonement for having ever willed at all. At its limit and in the afterglow of the sacrificed Christ, indebtedness become absolute. Life itself is fallen, sinful—we are *all* guilty.

Now, with regard to Zarathustra's problem, the issue is this: if the Christian-Platonic past is seen as an error, as something that *ought* to or *could* have went otherwise (if only we had known better), then the resultant project of affirmation is dangerously close to the premise of ascetic revenge: namely, its historicization of humanity as atonement. This would constitute the same slanderous type of absurdity Nietzsche criticizes in demands that strength express itself as weakness (or vice versa). That is, in heralding the arrival of a future that overcomes Christian guilt, Zarathustra realizes just how close he is to willing what will be as a correction of what was, of what *caused* nihilism in the first place. Doing so would make of his encounter with Christian-Platonic values an accusation and attribution of guilt. Conversely, his efforts in value-creation would express revenge, thereby making the problem of nihilism more acute by perpetuating its fundamental hostility. This, on my reading, is why the riddle of return includes the shepherd, who symbolizes the ascetic. The shepherd achieves overhuman laughter only when courage transfigures their hatred into something celebratory.

Completing nihilism requires transforming accusation into an art that *restores innocence* to life and becoming.[203] As Nietzsche tells it, "That no one is any longer made accountable, that the kind of being manifested cannot be traced back to a *causa prima*…*this alone is the great liberation* – thus alone is the *innocence* [*Unschuld*] of becoming restored." (TI "The Four Great

203. See for example Zarathustra's speech "Before Sunrise," wherein he describes "blessing" as a restoration of chance, accident, innocence, and prankishness. "'By Chance'—that is the most ancient nobility of the world, and this I restored to all things; I delivered them from their bondage under Purpose … this blessed certainty I found in all things: that they would rather *dance* on the feet of Chance."

Errors" 8) In what sense is innocence being used? The German *Unschuld* has a rather specific meaning: not guilty. The restoration of innocence through affirmation is thus a liberation from guilt [*Schuld*]. We can thus return to and clarify eternal return's sense of redemption. Return loosens [*lösen*] the grip of universal guilt—it restores innocence [*Unschuld*] to human finitude—and thereby activates the possibility of creative revaluation. How? Through an image of eternity in which what was is also what will be, such that one affirms what has been as if it were to come *again tomorrow.* By distilling valuation into the *aisthesis* of singular events, repetition *completes* the perspective of eternity by restoring the rights of creative response to what has been—to *all* that has been. It re-opens the problems of finitude and becoming—problems posed by the ascetic ideal—to creative valuation, and by doing so, it makes possible transforming the ascetic into the artist. Zarathustra's disgust thus refers not to his struggle with affirming the small man in the past tense, as something that "has happened," immovable like the stone "it was" until it is replaced by the "overman." More than this (but not necessarily to the contrary), it follows from his realization that *he too will be an accuser of life and becoming* unless he creates values that affirm nihilism—and indeed, affirm it again, tomorrow.

How can philosophy restore innocence? At its limit the will to truth broaches the question of the value of all existence, indeed of the conditions of life itself, such that the problem nihilism poses is the condition for affirming all actual life and all becoming. Harnessing the ascetic's perspective the philosopher, too, crafts ideals that express valuations of the whole. Eternal return is one such ideal, perhaps the formula for any insofar as one aspires to affirm life. For insofar as it unites the personal with cosmic recurrence, eternal return provokes the one who wills truth—the nihilist, the philosopher, and the one who wills freedom—*to create concepts out of*

immanence. Such concepts can be assessed by the degree they embrace, without denying, a lack of inherent value—the degree to which they remain open to contestation, revaluation, and what Hatab describes as a "Dionysian formlessness tearing at the edges of form." (74) Instead of aspiring to *know truth,* such philosophers would aspire to *learn* how to become. Instead of mummifying life in concepts of the knowable and known—instead of reading history in order to preserve it or, conversely, to destroy the present—they would experiment with forms of life that invest in and respond to situated conditions of growth. If eternal return is the "highest formula of affirmation at all attainable," it is because it transforms the philosophical perspective of a total loss of meaning into an absolute investment in local conditions of variation, significance, and thought. In a different vein, the formula ought to read as follows: *perfect nihilism is complete affirmation.*

III. Repetition and Learning

At this point we would do well to meditate further on the nature of repetition as the conduct of becoming. How can repetition enact creativity? If one is doomed (or destined) to repeat the same life over and over, this would seem to be the case—but to attain to this perspective wherein one can *see* each repetition as an iteration of another life would, I sense, express an aspiration to a view unbound by concrete finitude and one that consequently violates, as Hatab describes it above, a Nietzschean commitment to "immanent naturalism." Indeed, it would repeat the spirit of gravity's contempt for the circle.

Deleuze considers repetition to be the fundamental power of ontological difference.[204] Ontological differences are on his account wholly earthbound and affectively charged sites of

204. For a helpful elaboration of these ideas in Deleuze, especially in their relation to Kant, see Dan Smith, "Deleuze, Kant, and the Transcendental Field" in *At the Edges of Thought* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015)

differentiation given over to experience as problems that "can only be sensed," like so many real movements that compel, without appearing in, our regular perceptions. Repetition, he claims, is the only power difference can sensibly have on its own terms, without mediation by identity in the concept. Invoking a sense of difference that is decidedly *not* a difference between already established identities nor a difference between individuated instances of the same object, Deleuze argues that to actually generate *differentiation*, difference has to *return to* or repeat its elemental, catalytic relation in new cases. In other words, if difference was always already subsumed under the self-same or self-identical, there could be no actual differences. He thus recovers a sense of repetition that *actually iterates* difference. In this perspective, much as the confrontation with finitude and flux compels the movement toward intelligibility for Nietzsche, the repetition of difference, on Deleuze's account, is the condition for the appearance of regularity, identity, and conceptual–phenomenal determination. Self-identity is *conditioned;* it is a response to encounters with difference.

Repetition conceived thusly is wholly a matter of conduct. The subject who responds either creatively harnesses difference or covers it over by representing what occurs as an instance of a general tendency or concept. The latter is a type of creativity, to be sure, but a nihilistic one —and yet, covering over difference is not necessarily 'wrong.' Self-identity is not the worst that can happen. But if difference is the ground, so to speak, then any schema of interpretation is always subject to further interpretation and valuation, and thereby to transformative reorientation, re-figuration and, in the more extreme sense, to total upheaval, abolition, and rebirth.

Deleuze accordingly proposes two related senses of the eternal return. The first explicitly builds upon this ontology of difference and its repetition. He proposes that eternal return expresses that returning to itself, or repetition, is the essence of difference. In his language, "*Returning is the being of that which becomes*." (2006, 48) Rejecting both a "return of the same," like an essential "I" or something self-identical that returns for another go at life, and a mechanistic understanding that presupposes the telos of a terminal state, Deleuze argues that eternal return, in the cosmological and physical sense, can only be understood "as the expression of a principle which serves as an explanation of diversity and its reproduction, of difference and its repetition."[205] (2006, 49) That is, and in short, eternal return expresses an ontology of the reproduction of difference.

The second sense is ethical and selective. It expresses an imperative: "*whatever you will, will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return*." (68) Whatever you will, will it on condition that you can also will it to occur again and again. Deleuze states, "One thing in the world disheartens Nietzsche: the little compensations, the little pleasures, the little joys and everything that one is granted once, only once. Everything that can be done again the next day on the condition that it be said the day before: tomorrow I will give it up…" (Ibid.) Why might such conciliatory gestures dishearten Deleuze's Nietzsche? We might consider, as Deleuze does, an alcoholic—more broadly, an addict.[206] For an addict, *this* time is always the last. Tomorrow they will turn things around—tomorrow they discharge their debts to past deeds. And yet, repeating

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205. Accordingly, Deleuze returns to the figure of eternal return at several points in *Difference and Repetition*, for example remarking that" The eternal return does not bring back 'the same,' but returning constitutes the only Same of that which becomes. Returning is the becoming-identical of becoming itself. Returning is thus the only identity, but identity as a secondary power; the identity of difference, the identical which belongs to the different, or turns around the different." (2006, 41)

206. "Spinoza: The Velocities of Thought: Lecture 03" published as part of "The Deleuze Seminars" by Purdue University. Available at https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/lecture/lecture-03-8/ (accessed 9/13/2023)

"this is the last time" enables the return, tomorrow, of the last time, again and again. It's an endless failure to revisit moments when the drink or drug enlivened, when it elevated them to rapture. In a cruel kind of bad faith, the addict lives to die in the image of a self confined to the past tense. They wholly deny becoming, rejecting singularity and stifling the possibility of becoming otherwise by dwelling in a past they relentlessly invoke. The addict's nostalgia is a wish for death. But tattoos fade—"You'd do better living more and commemorating less"—and survival requires transformation.[207] The addict has to learn to create conditions such that there are no further "last times;" they have to invent a self liberated from the past that continues to insist upon the present.[208] Quite literally, it's do or die.

Recall that, in Chapter 2, I describe how problems activate creative thought. Encounters force us to think*;* they compel *questions*, or what Deleuze calls the "pure thoughts of the *cogitanda,"* that compel thought by confronting it with something that exceeds it, that breaks with its traditional categories.[209] Thought becomes what I describe as "a sensing, repeating, and incorporating of differences that, in cases of sufficient strength, is not premised on destroying or diminishing them." (Chapter 2) Sensing and repeating a difference designates entering into a problem to form cases of solution that express, without exhausting, their problem. Deleuze calls this process *learning*. "To learn," he says "is to enter into the universal of the relations which constitute the Idea [read: problem], and into their corresponding singularities." (1994*,* 165) To use one of his examples, one learns to swim not by mimicking the instructor's movements, but by diving in and conjugating their own movements to propel forward. It's not that emulating the

207. Jack Terricloth, "Tattoos Fade" by The World/Inferno Friendship Society on *East Coast Super Sound Punk of Today!* (Nosliw Co. Records, 2000)

208. Similarly, we would do well to consider the function of shame, guilt, and indebtedness in the circuit of addictive behaviors. So many times, it is the pain of having done that brings the addict back to the drug. So many deaths by way of returns to lives lost to time.

209. See Chapter 2, Section II.b

instructor doesn't help, but rather that learning is principally a test of a reality whose differential conjugations exceed conceptual models. Similarly, we could return to my example of the melancholic. Healing from a loss involves learning how to move forward. One doesn't return to who they were before, but rather becomes a self for which the loss is integrated. Or, perhaps most importantly: how can we compose concepts that augment the power of resistance*?* In each case, learning is an art of conjugating creative response to the specific realities we face—a "loosening" (recall *Erlosung*) alongside a composition—both unhistorical and suprahistorical (HL 10)—or a deterritorialization, as Deleuze and Guattari will come to describe it, alongside a creative reterritorialization, or experimental play at form-giving. Because our solutions never exhaust the problems, because concepts do not exhaust the realities they attend to, and because typological organizations of drives and desires are processes of becoming for which reified self-identity is a limit—learning, like critique, is permanent. Problematization is thus an art of what Deleuze calls an "*infinite* 'learning,' which is of a different nature to knowledge." (192; my emphasis)

Learning is infinite in the same way repetition is eternal: through the unity of universality and singularity. Eternal return transvaluates repetition by bringing it to its limit as a power of truth, provoking transfiguration through the question of its value for a reality unhinged from transcendental guarantee. The question of the value of truth thus subordinates repetition of the same, in the cosmic sense, to repetition of difference in the ethical and selective sense. *Why* do we repeat? *How* can we do so in a way that affirms the abyss, like a Dionysian dance that justifies all of life? Learning iterates this ethical sense by affirming repetition as the conduct of creative thought. For if nihilism is a crisis of disposition, it's completion heralds a *desire to*

repeat localized conditions of becoming and growth: the problems we confront, that make us what we are, the joys and sorrows that we feel, deeply, and that catalyze creative response. Learning expresses that desire as an *ethos* of thought: as a way of thinking and feeling about knowledge, such that one desires to continually become otherwise by thinking through, responding to, and testing concepts in reality. In a word, *learning transvaluates knowledge*.

In this framework, as we considering in Chapter 5, negation acquires a different valence. Previously the motor of conceptual self-identity, it now becomes "active," or subordinate to becoming. Put differently, negation repeats a difference: the addict destroys themselves to be reborn as one who desires life. "Active negation or active destruction," Deleuze says citing WP 24, "is the state of strong spirits which destroy the reactive in themselves, submitting it to the test of the eternal return and submitting themselves to this test even if it entails willing their own decline." (2006, 70) "Active destruction" presumably expresses "the one who wants to perish," (174) the one who transfigures morality to command not self-identity but, on the contrary, becoming otherwise. Through the test of return the will to nothingness "is converted and crosses over to the side of *affirmation*" by being "related to a *power of affirming* which destroys the reactive forces themselves." (Ibid.) More than a simple reversal of values, then, affirmation achieves a total conversion of the element from which values derive. The value of any given evaluation is its capacity to cultivate differentiation, which translates into growth, health, and a capacity to create beyond oneself.

But who is this "one who wants to perish?" If perishing is the end, is this "active destruction" not the "active nihilism" I have contested, for example in the concept of destituent power? The idea is that the active destruction of the self-identical in a process of becoming

subordinates nihilism to becoming otherwise. But in WP 24, cited by Deleuze, Nietzsche explicitly calls such active destruction "nihilism." Making "negation a negation of the reactive forces themselves," then, is a rather peculiar kind of nihilism, for it presumes transvaluation, which on Nietzsche's account is nihilism completed and left behind. Deleuze claims that "Nihilism reaches its completion by passing through the last man, but going beyond him to the man who wants to perish. In the man who wants to perish, to be overcome, negation has broken everything which still held it back, it has defeated itself…" (2006, 175) For whom does one will their own destruction? Zarathustra's children, the overman, a new people—a "coming politics?" Is this not the Paulinian as-not I critique in Agamben?[210] How does one "will to perish" without falling back into Christian-Platonic denials?

Perfection is the clue. In WP 21, "*The perfect nihilist.",* Nietzsche says the nihilist is "unfaithful to his memories: it allows them to drop, lose their leaves; it does not guard them against the corpselike pallor that weakness pours out over what is distant and gone. And what he does not do for himself, he also does not do for the whole past of mankind: he lets it drop." The perfect nihilist is not only the one who destroys, who submits knowable values to deconstruction. They are the one who leaves them behind by looking away toward creative, transformative possibilities—toward *making a future*. In this regard I can elaborate further on "integration." Integration is a matter of incorporating an experience. Experiences are incorporated through figures of significance that conjoin them with personal and collective need. By way of that integration one can have done with or "forget" them. Nietzsche sometimes describes this using the language of digestion: one "digests" and forgets an event, or else one is like a "dyspeptic...he cannot 'finish' anything." (GM II:1) But we should be careful: forgetting is not denial.

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210. See Chapter 4 Sec. II.a

Repression is denial, and through it the "it was" perpetually insists upon the present. Pain becomes pathology. Forgetting, on the contrary, integrates in such a manner that history no longer overdetermines the present nor regresses the future. In other words, we don't heal from loss by dwelling with or revenging ourselves on it. We certainly don't heal by repressing it. We heal by creating meaning for the lost object such that we are enabled—*emboldened*—to move forward, like a hand that considerately—kills. (BGE 69) Similarly, affirmative philosophy can perfect nihilism and restore innocence by crafting concepts that express a future-oriented, creative perspective on what has been, what is, and what will be, loosening or breaking debts to history and disposing us to experimenting with new forms of ethical, social, and political life.

It is interesting, then, that Deleuze's reading of WP 24, at least rhetorically, describes active destruction—active *nihilism*—as nihilism completed.[211] On my reading, active nihilism is close but inadequate: more often than not it is destruction without transformative creativity, nihilism without revaluation, critique without experimental form-giving. And while destruction clears the way, it is not the end. I would thus push the point a bit farther, or perhaps better put, push nihilism a bit farther—to the limit of what it can do: to its perfection. Negation transmuted is not active nihilism. *It is transfigurative negation.* If the lesson of Nietzsche's agonism is that contest can facilitate affirmative value creation, then the courage which attacks must also be the courage to attempt solutions that overcome and integrate concrete problems. Only new arrangements of life, new organizations of drive and will, defeat the triumph of reactive forces and signal the victory of new values. The addict beats the drug not by endless denials, but by becoming someone else: by moving elsewhere, by learning new habits in place of the old. *The*

211. There is every reason to believe this, too, is Deleuze's point, however undertheorized. Deleuze does not think difference is separable from its cases of determination any more than he suggests problems are separable from their cases of solution.

philosopher-artist transfiguratively negates the ascetic priest by crafting concepts that convert valuation from accusations of guilt to restorations of innocence. Returning to that catalytic, elemental differential, they redeem the Christian-Platonic past by transmuting the *one who wills truth* into the *one who wills return*.

What of willing freedom? As I explain in Chapter 4, the "undefined" work of freedom experiments with the "unknown" that delimits what is knowable in a given regime of truth. Critique engages with what is *outside*—the site of "non-formalized power and potential"—to activate transformations. (Chapter 4) It is affective and strategic. Indeed, power is given over as affect; in Deleuze's words, "An exercise of power shows up as an affect, since force defines itself by its very power to affect other forces (to which it is related) and to be affected by other forces." (1988, 71) One thus senses where change is possible, where power can be cultivated for resistance, and experiments with determining the "precise form it should take." Critical experimentation in and for the one who wills freedom thus enacts what I call transfigurative negation. They exploit the *aisthesis* of the right to refuse governance into creative, transformative works, whose affirmative criteria indicate degrees of openness to difference, or to the "Dionysian formlessness" tearing at their edges. Like protests that turn the pain of police murder into rage and resistance—"anger can be power, you know that you can use it?"[212]—revolutionary victory would accordingly be "immanent and [it] consists in the new bonds it installs between people, even if these bonds last no longer than the revolution's fused material and quickly give way to division and betrayal." (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 177) By sensing where and how we can configure relations that overcome capitalist institutions we attain to a revolutionary transformation of collectivity and mutual investment. And if a revolution *is* the

212. The Clash "Clampdown" on *London Calling* (CBS Records, 1979)

new bonds and relationships it composes, then a revolutionary concept, if there is such a thing, augments those relationships.

The moments we "tap into" are not necessarily joyful or celebratory. Creative resistance responds to problems of oppression; oppression rarely makes for joyous occasion. But our responses to oppression, to suffering, and to death, can generate the composition of figures of joy, even laughter (like Zarathustra's shepherd), without denying their pain. We can transfigure what has been, and what is, into creative, experimental efforts that contest not by denial nor diminishment, but by exceeding: resistance as work that transforms oppression into freedom. And indeed, as transfiguration is principally a matter of creating from *aisthesis*, affirmative valuation of what has been, what is, and what will be, is wholly an effort in *making beautiful*.

IV. Loving Fate

It is perhaps no coincidence then that the fourth book of *The Gay Science* begins and ends with *amor fati* and eternal recurrence, respectively. Affirmation cultivates a love for impermanence, finitude, and becoming by valorizing transformative creativity. That creativity is wholeheartedly an effort in *making beautiful*. And indeed, as *amor fati* expresses "that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity"—Nietzsche calls this his "formula for greatness in a human being"—it expresses the type of redemption I have attributed to affirmation of eternal return:

> *For the new year.*— I still live, I still think: I still have to live, for I still have to think. *Sum, ergo cogito: cogito, ergo sum*. Today everybody permits himself the expression of his wish and his dearest thought; hence I, too, shall say what it is that I wish from myself today, and what was the first how well though to run across my heart this year—what

> thought shall be for me the reason, warranty, and sweetness of my life henceforth. I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage a war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. *Looking away* shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer. (GS 276)

What kind of "necessity" is at work here? Necessity in *amor fati* is not necessity as strict determination.[213] It is necessity as affirmation of chance. It designates that what occurs, ontologically speaking, is indexed with processes of becoming—power relations that subtend their forms of appearance and affects that catalyze transfigurative volitions. What becomes is always caught up in giving form to what it will be from what it has been*,* such that it will also always have been what it will become*. Past tense, future perfect.* Nothing predetermines the outcome. Becoming is neither guaranteed by the concept nor subject to God's jurisdiction—"Its got nothing to do with luck, and its got nothing to do with sin." Similarly, "what we are" is an organization of drives, a syncretic aggregate of patterns of becoming: a piece of *fatum* we can learn to steer, stylize, (GS 290) and shape. How is this a "necessity?" Because we are always already caught up in those processes, because *we cannot erase what has been,* and because consciousness is a late-born and fragile artifice that grapples with impulses and events it can only ever articulate partial perspectives on. Learning "to see as beautiful what is necessary" thus requires affirming the finitude and fatalism of never really *knowing* ourselves (GM "Preface" 1)

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213. Richardson suggests it is akin to "compatibilism" insofar as it answers a bit to "both sides" of the debate of free will. I avoid this language in part because I don't think posing the problem of whether or not we "are" free really captures the importance of Nietzsche's innovative concept.

by seeing in it the ineffable potential for fashioning new figures of self-knowledge, for innovative self- and world-reinvention, and for the work of freedom.

Deleuze remarks that *amor fati* is "one with the struggle of free" humans insofar as what is willed and loved is not *what* occurs but "something in that which occurs." Contrasting a love of fate with *ressentiment* and resignation he says, "The event is not what occurs (an accident), it is rather inside what occurs, the purely expressed." (1990, 149) What is the "purely expressed?" *It is will to power*: the principle of elemental differentiation such that *what occurs* is always reciprocated by responses we articulate in encountering it. Whatever necessity there is is so only by way of that reciprocity. At the level of *ethos*, if willing power is always reciprocally conditioned by events in the world, then learning to see those events as necessary signifies a desire for investing into and responding to those events. Thus Deleuze writes, "We are faced with a volitional intuition and a transmutation. 'To my inclination for death,' writes Bousquet, 'which was a failure of the will, I will substitute a longing for death which would be the apotheosis of the will.'" (Ibid) A longing for death is in this sense a longing to be radically transfigured through the event of differentiation. *Loving fate only celebrates death as transfigurative negation*. "To become worthy of what happens to us," in Deleuze's words, is thus to "will and release the event, to become the offspring of one's own events, and thereby to be reborn." (Ibid.) It "makes beautiful" by redeeming the "It was" in transformative, futural creativity—*looking away* from what was by riding it toward what *can be* in a re-fashioning of self and world. *Loving fate is willing eternal return.*

V. Considerations and Refinements

Before concluding, there are two important considerations to address. The first is whether affirmation is normative. The second is the presence, in Nietzsche's account, of patriarchal biases that shape his proposals in ways we ought to critique. Both considerations will introduce important shifts in the conception of affirmation I am proposing.

a. Normativity

Is affirmation normative? By "norms," following Richard Schacht (2012) who follows following Christine Korsgaard, I mean shared standards, rules, laws, or other expectations that compel human conduct to reproduce certain patterns of behavior, whether by advising, guiding, or more extremely, by forcing and commanding. Norms are thus functions of the values that preserve and proliferate situated types of life. In Schacht's words (and in Nietzsche's view), "Values are [form of life]-relational, norms are [form of life]-contextual, and normativity is [form of life]-structural," meaning that norms attend values whose reproduction they secure by regulating human conduct. (2012, 251) In my language, norms secure vectors of tenacity—rules for maintaining a certain grip on life, so to speak—for different types. To the extent they function to limit, secure, or regularize human conduct, they are *reactive,* in Deleuze's sense of limiting differentiation. It is not that they wholly deny differentiation or growth. Reactivity can facilitate becoming. Nevertheless, one can already sense the issue: if nihilism signals the *triumph* of the reactive, then it is also a triumph of a certain kind of normativity. More than this, if nihilism also follows from the self-devaluation of the "highest values," it also marks a crisis in normativity to the extent norms lose their pro- and pre-scriptive force. In other words, if values lose their hold, so too will the norms that reproduce them.

Nihilism is specifically a problem for norms of transcendental values—values, in other words, that exclusively prioritize truth as universal, eternal, and immutable. As we have seen, Nietzsche is a nihilist insofar as he deconstructs those values by confronting them with their origins in human *pathos*. He accomplishes this by leveraging different evaluations against those prevailing—different moralities against the ruling morality—operationalizing his proclamation that "There are no moral phenomena at all, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena."[214] (BGE 108) Similarly, Ansell-Pearson describes genealogy as a matter of "developing a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances under which values emerged, and this will give us an appreciation for the different senses of morality: as symptom, as mask, as sickness..." (2007, 251) Composing knowledge of those conditions is critical insofar as it: 1) reveals the agonistic context through which particular types of valuation occurs, undermining any potential claims to being *the one true* morality, and 2) re-opens heretofore victorious values to being contested by others. When a given moral framework is subject to critique, its values are given over to reassessment, and its norms are made available to contestation. Creating new values thus subjects norms to transfigurative negation: to re-arrangement in efforts of shaping new types of willing.

Affirmative valuation thus cannot be *against* normativity. Creating new values always entails rearranging, or at least reassessing, the norms we inherit and that constitute our everyday lives. Nietzsche himself hints at as much in D 103: "...I don't deny that it is best to avoid and to

214. In *The Language of Difference* Charles Scott opens his chapter on "Transvaluation in Beyond Good and Evil as follows: "Nietzsche transvaluates his inherited language by combining countervailing, often contradictory words, ideas, desires, and beliefs. He arranges an interplay among them that produces transformed ideas, desires, beliefs, and associations among words. Transvaluation takes place as those interplays develop and proceed." I consider this sense of transvaluative inheritance a crucial part of what I describe above as "transfigurative negation." See Charles Scott *The Language of Difference* (Humanities Press International, 1987) Pg. 9

struggle against many actions that are considered immoral; likewise that it is best to perform and promote many that are considered moral—but I maintain: the former should be avoided and the latter promoted *for different reasons than heretofore*."[215] What this suggests is that norms are not necessarily to be condemned *because* they are normative, but rather that they ought to be advanced by different values. Indeed, if the premise of nihilism being a transitional crisis lies with the human need for belief, value, and meaning, then opposing *any* normalization of that need is at the same time opposing conditions of human flourishing. In spite of his nausea, Zarathustra learns to affirm human smallness. The problem with normativity under the rule of Christian-Platonic values is therefore not *that* they regulate conduct, but rather that the *type* of conduct they proliferate is hyper-normative, and this under the authorization of a moral sense of truth that is itself the apotheosis of sameness and predictability, such that life—variation, differentiation, change, growth, and health—are sacrificed.

With affirmative value creation, then, normativity is transvaluated. Regulating conduct would longer be an end in itself but rather subject to facilitating partial and finite forms of life. That is to say that, in my view, affirmative transvaluation does not prescribe or proscribe specific behaviors. As transvaluation, it rather challenges us to re-assess and reconfigure our normative coordinates according to their capacity for overcoming the problems we confront. Note that, because those coordinates are so fundamental to human life, this is decidedly more than simply "choosing different norms" to live by. It is a provocation to take authorship over the norms that shape our responses to what occurs and that facilitate our ways of life.

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215. One can also consider Nietzsche's later position that philosophers ought to harness the rigor, shrewdness, and "hardness" cultivated by the long history of ascetic pursuits of truth as an example of this same position. The norms are not necessarily what is at fault, or what he seeks to transform, but rather the truth and value toward which they are aimed.

The shapes transvaluated norms take will be conditioned by those engaged in the work of value creation. The values they express will, in Nietzsche's language, be rare, individual (*not* individualist; see following section), and solitary. They will be distinguished from "common dogma" (or maybe the *dogma of what is common*) by virtue of restricting their purview to situated encounters whose aggregation nevertheless present a variety of perspectives, affects, and viewpoints to comprehend. (BGE 43-44) Grounded in a unity with life, they express the aspirations of "a soul that craves to have experienced the whole range of values and desiderata to date" rather than one who seeks deliverance, effectively constituting a healing process akin to that enacted by integrating thought with need. (GS 382; HL 10) Put differently, and contra the Christian-Platonic, affirmative norms are agents of convalescence. Transmuting the one that wills truth into the one that wills return subordinates becoming equal or similar to a desire for tangible distinction in celebration of what diversifies life.

How so? Affirmation celebrates becoming, true, but any value one articulates, any *truth* one figures, *must remain open to further becomings*.[216] This is why learning is infinite and critique permanent. Courage doesn't just mean breaking away from nihilism. It also means remaining open to the abyssal limits of the knowable and the known, which translates into a capacity for being affected by and learning from new experiences. That capability requires caretaking. Openness is not a state of being, it is a practice, and effective practices must be reproduced.[217] Norms employed to reproduce experimental ways of life must similarly remain

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216. Hatab similarly argues that eternal return provides a "measure" for formative powers "by bringing us 'face to face' with the abyssal environment of meaning creation..." (74) I agree with this assessment, and would add that to shy away from that abyssal context, to cover it over and supplement form with figures of similarity, is to regress into a moral-nihilistic sense of creativity.

217. In *A Thousand Plateaus,* perhaps responding to criticism's of *Anti-Oedipus's* dynamism and apparent celebration of relentless deterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari provide words of caution alongside articulating their image of experimentation (the Body Without Organs). They say, "You have to keep enough of

open to modification, reassessment, rearrangement, and revaluation such that our efforts to become otherwise are sustained and augmented. As affirmative philosophical "tempters," we ought to remain in good faith of this fact or we risk falling back into nihilistic patterns, derailing new ways of life, *which will always have normative content*, before we even conduct the experiment.[218]

This naturally leads to the question as to what such norms might look like. I say 'might' because I think part of the trouble in narrowing down a clear image of affirmative normativity lies with both its affirmation of partiality and the finitude of its futurity. We cannot know in advance how things will turn out. We can, however, try to set forth favorable conditions for the experiment to run its course. On this point, I would consider Acampora's sense of Nietzschean responsibility modeled on motherhood. While I cannot reproduce the full argument here, its essential import can be described as follows: Nietzsche proposes that philosophers of the future take responsibility for becoming otherwise, for deviating, and for becoming rare and solitary. (BGE 212) Such responsibility requires a kind of "ideal selfishness," or caring for something *of one's own* that is yet to come. (D 552) Acampora views this as suggesting that "...one can *have* responsibility in the sense of being in a relationship requiring extraordinary care without being able to directly determine the outcome and in this respect completely *irresponsible*." (2013, 178) The "selfishness," in other words, is akin to a mother's, whose focus is set on caring for the child she will birth, without knowing exactly what, or who, is coming. As Zarathustra tells it, "To be the child who is newly born, the creator must also want to be the mother who gives birth and the

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the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of significance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it, when things, persons, even situations, force you to; and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality. Mimic the strata." (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 160)

218. This is a point lost to so many figures discoursing on radical politics and ethics.

pangs of the birth-giver." ("Upon the Blessed Isles;" Acampora 2013, 181) What this suggests is that one ought to employ norms that make that care possible, that reproduce it daily, such that favorable conditions are maintained for the future one shares in creating. This, I think, gives a sense of what transvaluated normativity looks like: a caring for and setting forth of favorable conditions for something that is both unknown and yet to come.

b. Decentering

Invoking the image of motherhood leads to another important consideration. Creativity draws not from the font of subjectivity, but from what is outside the self—encounters with singular events that situate and make up what we are. Consequently one has no essential ownership over what makes them what they are, and so the question is: what does this mean for the figure of the strong, heroic, *masculine* individual that appears so frequently across Nietzsche's thought?

On this point I would turn to Ofelia Schutte. In *Beyond Nihilism* Schutte argues that, especially from *Beyond Good and Evil* onwards, Nietzsche advances a reactionary, nihilistic politics. She argues that notions such as "order of rank," the "higher men," and a morality that is no longer committed to truth express a dualistic interpretation of existence that, in spite of his efforts otherwise, return Nietzsche to reactive, alienated life. He becomes "*anticritical"* the moment he leverages an "unshaken faith" in dogmas he fails to critically vivisect. For example, "[Nietzsche] failed to consider the ultimate implications of the death of the patriarchal God. Because he still believed in the great patriarchal myth of Man as creator, judge, and hangman of humanity, Nietzsche did not see that the higher man, as described by him, is a sham." (Schutte

1984, 159) Nietzsche, in other words, spares figures of male supremacy from genealogical interrogation and affirmative transfiguration, a failure which ends up authorizing the hegemony of Western values. Thus, similarly, "Nietzsche's fascination with domination—itself a product of Western values—ruptured the intent of his project and brought the transvaluation of all values to a halt." (Ibid.) In place of transvaluation, then, one receives figures of a return to moral-ascetic values that perpetuate nihilism.

Schutte's criticisms resonate with Luce Irigaray's *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche.* In a book that is as much a testament of love as it is incisive critique—maybe critique as love, as transfigurative negation—Irigaray argues that Nietzsche falls back into asceticism and denial of the body in excluding a relationship with the figure of the woman from his notion of affirmation. For example, of eternal return she says, "Two returns, therefore. To have no further wish to move out of the self, to have no attraction except for oneself in different modes of desirability ... You reproduce your self twice over: as subject and effect of your will, as will to power and eternal recurrence." (1991, 34) Or, similarly: "And your whole will, your eternal recurrence, are these anything more than the dream of one who neither wants to have been born, nor to continue being born, at every instant, of a female other?" (26) Taking transformative rebirth to task, Irigaray essentially argues that Nietzsche fails to complete his own movement of transvaluation by precluding from it a relationship with the sexual other, which denies an otherwise essential component of embodied, finite life: birth from another human, from a woman. In other words, he collapses creativity into the ambit of masculine self-absorption, which reinscribes hetero-patriarchal individualism. By doing so, he regresses into ascetic, reactionary hostility.

Schutte's immanent critique of Nietzschean affirmation leverages an earlier sense she

gleans from *Zarathustra,* wherein she claims "Human beings are not asked to direct their energies to a lifeless beyond; they are asked to work toward the goal of making a more creative life possible for other human beings." (1984, 121) Affirmation on her interpretation valorizes a *shared* sense of creativity, such that creative tenacity is held alongside other people. To return to my above example: the addict does not choose more life alone, for it is life alone that they had found in the bottom of the bottle. Rather, they choose more life by learning how to live with others in a mutually empowering manner, and in affirming that their behaviors extend beyond their purview. Encounters with others activate healthy shifts to their constitutive order of drives. While Nietzsche does criticize a certain kind of accountability as residually Christian, the issue, as I describe it above, is moreso about accusation and guilt: existence as an unpayable debt apotheosized in the God who dies for our sins. We are alienated from ourselves; the Other becomes an end in itself. Now, blunt individualism does not transfigure this situation. If anything it is more like vulgar redress—compensation for the subject's vanity having been wounded by pity. Rather, we overcome guilt and restore innocence by transfiguring the manner of our mutuality. Instead of indebtedness, guilt, and shame subtending the compulsion to remain predictable, manageable, and accountable to the Other or the community, an affirmative ideal of collectivity can restore innocence [*Unschuld*] to human interaction by modeling responsibility on the desire for creating beyond ourselves—like Acampora's image of motherhood above. Schutte's insistence upon the earlier, Zarathustrian model of affirmation thus amounts to affirming the creative potential in encountering differences in other people, ways of life, and types of willing. And importantly, those differences emerge through (without being reduced to) facets of human life like gender, sex, race, etc.

Such challenges enable refiguring and expanding the project of affirmative value creation. While I have employed Nietzsche's concepts of "order of rank," of "higher states," and similar terminology, I have also used Deleuze's language of difference to deactivate their semantics of power as domination and creativity in the image of a sovereign subject. Rather, I describe power as differentiation, as the strength to become otherwise from within a finite, earthbound, and situated purview. I take these semantics to countervail Nietzsche's patriarchal and authoritarian tropes. What could possibly be "new" about male authority conjoined with the mythic figure of a self-sufficient individual? What could possibly be "new" about vulgar individualism? Individualism, today, is the refrain of the consumerist crowd; self-sufficiency, the delusion of those in fear of human collectivity—and *all values* ought to be transvaluated. Transmuting willing truth into an affirmative mode *decenters* the willing subject by grounding creative enactment in encountering differences across the worlds they invariably share. B*y* breaking open the laughable juxtaposition of "man and world" Nietzsche himself indicts, the affirmative philosopher views *the human and the world together*, without mediation by the subject and, in the feminist sense, its patriarchal contours.[219] This is not to say that affirmation is a project of harmony. Rather, it is to insist that values are shared, even if rare—that the agon binds the victor to the community they signal the excellence of, and that affirmative creativity signifies the possibility of being bound to others in ways that embolden *collectively overcoming the problems we share.*

VI. Conclusion

If Nietzschean affirmation has any teaching at its heart, it is this: our interpretations are

219. Schutte also leverages the Dionysian sense of unity one can glean from *The Birth of Tragedy* against Nietzsche's later images of independence and unity.

always evaluations. We express them in how we think, feel, and act in response to problems with real, sometimes grave, stakes in our actual lives. The risk is real—when we pose problems that lead to rejecting reality, or abide solutions that refuse the work of building alternatives, we drift ever further into abyssal self-absorption that makes of our projects a nihilistic circuitry of self-destruction. But this life is what we make it. Returning to philosophy, critique, and freedom, I propose the following: *if affirmation completes nihilism by testing, selecting, and figuring belief in our capacities for concrete, transformative, futural form-giving, then philosophical critique ought to dispose us toward experimentation with new forms of ethical and political life.* Let us think in ways that constitute acts of creativity which embrace the differential, Dionysian, and ephemeral nature of earthly life, ever dramatized in new figures that inevitably recede into the horizon of their finitude, like shapes drawn in the sand.[220]

220. I am of course referring here to Foucault's famous ending of *The Order of Things*.

Chapter Seven: Complete Counterpower

Affirmation completes nihilism in transvaluation. One redeems the past by returning to it as material for experimental form-giving in the present. Affirmative experimentation is thus a praxis of *transfigurative negation*. By cultivating and harnessing the *pathos* of singularity as what is expressed in and through the event (in Deleuze's language), one enters the potential to become otherwise and activates possibilities of freedom. Such possibilities are critical insofar as they confront the limits of the present, its formations of knowledge, technologies of power, and biopolitical institutions with transformative efforts. In what follows, I return to my political philosophical concerns and experiment with possibilities of building counterpower. My aim is to resignify counterpower as building transversal, grassroots solidarity across different liberatory struggles. Alongside others, I work with concepts of labor, unity, communism, autonomy and solidarity, mobilizing their energies. My sense is that these terms, in spite of (or perhaps because of) certain historical uses, harbor energies we can exploit for transfigurative ends, much as Nietzsche views *ascesis* in terms of the possibilities it affords for value creation. Completing the critical movement of freedom in a concept of transversal counterpower generates figures of unity and solidarity, conjoining and augmenting projects of becoming otherwise.

What is the *pathos* of singularity? It can be the way an intoxicating dance writes itself into our skin; it can be the pain of loss, the way melancholia seems to partake of our flesh; it can be what bell hooks describes as "killing rage:" rage in response to acts of racism and sexism—murderous rage, aggressive toward the routine recurrence of murderous oppression.[221] Indeed,

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221. Describing rage and militant resistance hooks states, "As long as black rage continues to be represented as always and only evil and destructive, we lack a vision of militancy that is necessary for transformative revolutionary action." (hooks 1995, 19)

killing rage is a most important example, for it joins the personal nature of suffering, when pain and individuation go hand in hand as what pains me, pains *me,* with the courage to confront the cause of one's dehumanization: what separates us from what we can do. Affirming evental *pathos* leads neither to compliance with the object of rage nor to self-destruction, but to contestation. One (re-)activates a capacity for response; "militant resistance," in hooks's terms, expresses the *pathos* of freedom. The militant attains volitional transmutation, a type of willing capable of transfigurative overcoming. Nietzsche says, "...to put it mystically, the path to one's own heaven always leads through the voluptuousness of one's own hell." (GS 338) Perhaps it is that voluptuousness—a sense of extreme violation—that often gives heart to the work of freedom, fusing the *pathos* of suffering with the creation of new forms of ethical and political life.

In cases of sufficient strength critique abandons self-possession and becomes an art of transfigurative negation. Transfigurative negation is a praxis of what I call creative learning. By steering the *ascesis* of willing truth into socio-historical interrogation of the present one determines the coordinates of a problem. The problem recovers singularity insofar as it reactivates response; it *stages* the event and indicates conditions for overcoming. The determination of a problem is thus simultaneously the articulation of a possibility for real determination, for giving form to the "undefined work of freedom." As such it is fundamentally creative: an experimental learning through which one can, in Foucault's language, "grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take." (1996, 316) Experimental creativity both undermines contemporary institutions and thereby generates futural potential in figures of overcoming.

Transfigurative negation thus differs from ascetic negation. It is not *against* the world, or *against* reality, but wholly earthbound—a repetition of difference in the *aisthesis* of an encounter with wholly material, even visceral, problematics. Eternal return expresses the temporality of problematization as affirmative redemption: the one who wills return *wills backwards* to determine conditions of a different future, celebrating finitude by affirming historicity. Willing return is loving fate. Like the Dionysian artist whose music affirms ephemeral life, the affirmative, critical philosopher-artist determines problems and crafts concepts to augment situated possibilities of life. Uniting singularity with eternity similarly ties valuation to the possibilities those problems catalyze. Put differently, affirmative concepts, affirmative "truths," are parables of impermanence: solitary and untimely, they principally express a type of life that is "rare" to the extent it exceeds, seeks to overcome, and thereby transfigures the present. And yet, as Schutte and Irigaray demonstrate, conflating the solitariness of affirmative value creation with patriarchal, sovereign individualism only repeats normative conventions the self-causing agent. The lover of fate might be solitary, but they are no vulgar individual. Fate is individuated not in the individual but in the event; loving it is a Zarathustrian practice whereby *we* return only by willing freedom, again and again.

If an individual cannot claim ownership of events then loving fate expresses gratitude for that lack of ownership—but that does not entail a lukewarm tolerance for relative differences. Transvaluation is not harmonious co-existence. Recall Deleuze's invocation of Marx against a philosophy of difference becoming a discourse of beautiful souls.[222] *Affirmation proposes an*

222. Andrew Culp's *Dark Deleuze* reads Deleuze against the tendency for joyous affirmation to become what he calls a "'canon of joy' that celebrates Deleuze as a naively affirmative thinker of connectivity." (2016, 1) While I agree with reading Deleuze against that naivete, Culp's insistence on negation and destruction, in my view, needlessly obscures the crucial possibility of joyful contestation, of destroying joyfully, and linking negation to experimental figuration: transfiguration.

agonistics of power. Affirmative values contest figures of reactive triumph; affirmative concepts articulate *perspectives of the event* that catalyze transvaluation through transfigurative negations of reactive formations. Giving form to differentiation—counter-actualizing, in Deleuze's terms—ramifies the intensive encounter into concepts of resistance and figures of healing, unity, and freedom. The possibilities generated by historico-philosophical problematization are therefore potentials the critic *shares in,* that we share in as we conduct critique. The ascetic becomes the artist.

In Chapter 5, I argue that "destituent power" falls into nihilism by failing to valorize giving form to freedom. Agamben's Paulinian figure of the destitutent form of life that deactivates law both rejects alternatives and defers the advent of freedom to a mystified "coming politics." Newman inflects Agamben's more "passive" account toward an "active" politics of insurrection, but freedom is nevertheless still at odds with its actualization in concrete assemblages. Rhetorically, it repeats refrains of escape and refusal for ascetic subjectivities held in bad faith. Finally, in the Invisible Committee, destituent insurrection is presented as an unmasking that, by virtue of attacking our need for capitalist institutions, instigates the realization of autonomy, freedom, and a world beyond nihilistic capitalism. While offering a more active and quasi-materialist sense of destitution, the Committee nevertheless rebound into a moral framework inimical to actualizing freedom in this world. Where one might hope to find the courage to build new types of institusions capable of facilitating and sustaining becoming-revolutionary, one instead finds invisible friends whose "fraternity in combat" falls into a

seemingly unending struggle against reality—and defaults right back to the power-relations we're trying to overcome.[223]

The rejoinder would be that destituent insurrection is not an end in itself but the *determinate* and *practical* condition of radical ethico-political creativity, and that by pursuing it space can be seized for experimentation. This is partly true: just as the lion clears room for the child, insurrection is a necessary condition of revolutionary social transformations. Destituent effects on governing institutions *do* enable experimentation with alternative forms of life, and we cannot do without them. But this only expresses freedom negatively; its perspective on revolutionary creativity is incomplete.[224] If power is only the power to escape then, agonistically speaking, it is inadequate. "Freedom from" is a masochistic will to power that overdetermines "freedom for," short-circuiting the construction of alternatives. In a word, and to repeat, freedom self-devaluates. Destituent refusals of political organization premise their affirmations of freedom on negations of the institution (or "our need of it:" if you suffer the institution, it is because you haven't refused it). An aggrandized will to punish—indeed, if Nietzsche describes ascetic hostility to becoming as revenge on the past, which becomes an inviolable indebtedness to *having willed*, we ought to carefully interrogate the extent to which contemporary radical

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223. Part of Derrida's deconstruction of "friendship" in *The Politics of Friendship* involves a meditation on its supplementation by signs and figures of maleness and fraternity. On this, Derrida is invaluable, for if friendship's rhetorical appeal to a type of non-formalized, shared vulnerability is organized and guaranteed by male figures and tropes of masculinity, then friendship is, not so surprisingly, inhospitable to its own conditions: vulnerability, the Other, solidarity with the unexpected, etc. Indeed, "fraternity" resonates with brotherhood, with patriarchal masculinity, and with prideful displays of violence so characteristic of toxic figures of maleness. One might expect this to cash out in actors keen on the Invisible Committee's valorization of combat. And it does. For one example, see "Why She Doesn't Give a Fuck About Your Insurrection" (2009)

224. Similarly, Thomas Nail states, "Thus, the valorisation of 'lines of flight', 'rupture' and 'heterogeneity' as they break free from or within power, without a positive account of how such lines compose a new consistency of their own, are – and here I am in agreement with Badiou and others – 'the concrete definition of revolutionary failure', since revolutionary struggles cannot be sustained beyond the scope of isolated outbursts against or within power. Without a cohesive theory of how to diagnose, transform and create new political bodies connected through mutual global solidarity, I argue, we cannot hope to understand the philosophy of the present revolutionary sequence." (2015, 22)

political refusals of political organizations stem not from assessments of any capacity for revolutionary change, nor from an *ethos* of becoming-otherwise, but from revenge upon previous failures, on the "moment being missed," or on our own failures to enact revolutionary change. Such revenge involutes becoming by regressing its potential into corrections of past mistakes.

And so, what makes critique experimental? How can we *learn* to become otherwise? Specific forms always harbor vectors of differentiation; they are always delimited by a Dionysian formlessness tearing at their edges.[225] At the same time, forms also exhibit tendencies toward transcendence, wherein one element surreptitiously appears to cause and determine the phenomena to which it relates, like the concept causing its content. Nietzsche diagnoses this as a moral prejudice—however, as I have presented it, he also diagnoses moral prejudice in the opposing tendency toward formlessness, which appears as affirmations of escape or deliverance from life. If both tendencies compromise the *real tenacity* of a given organizational form, we can propose the following: experimental forms of life avail themselves of formlessness to compel transformations while also *facilitating further growth* through the introduction of limits to formlessness (e.g. norms). The test of reality is thus an experiment with *what forms can do* without either foreclosing on differentiation through transcendence *or disintegrating into formlessness*.[226] Put differently, our experiments must be attenuated by caution. "Staying

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225. Deleuze and Guattari characterize capitalism as a system that internalizes its own limits to continuously innovate and adapt technologies for reproducing surplus-value. Capitalism thrives by responding to and incorporating resistance to its mechanisms. In Foucault's language, as we saw in Chapter 4, where there are power-relations, there must be resistance. In Hardt and Negri's view, resistance is primary; capitalism, only reactive, by separating resistance from what it can do. The issue on Deleuze and Guattari's account is that the "capitalist axiomatic" internalizes its limits to reproduce modes of capture that control variation, resistance, and difference, in order to replicate figures tailored to the reproduction of surplus-value: the commodity, *homo oeconomicus*, the consumer, the sovereign male, etc.

226. Acampora describes agonistic contest in part by a "radical openness for the circulation of power that avoids ossification into tyranny." Importantly, that openness is attenuated by limits. For example, In Ancient Greece, ostracizing overly dominant competitors "functioned foremost as protection for the *institution*." (2013 25)

stratified…is not the worst that can happen," write Deleuze and Guattari.[227] (1987, 161) In terms I set forth in Chapter 6, experimental ways of life will always have normative content, and we must be wary of performing formlessness as a kind of transcendental destruction—"absolute deterritorialization," or a kind of pure difference in itself—of reality, as if we could simply enter primordial "becoming" and wage "holy war" in its name.[228]

My efforts to *complete* destituent power iterate experimental critique by reconnecting destitution to experimental forms of freedom. Recall that the completion of nihilism in affirmation restores the rights of creative response to localized problems. These problems are revaluated as conditions of growth rather than objections to existence. Figuring ways of life that overcome them composes unities of thought and life in creative and ampliative circuits of double affirmation—loving fate that transforms the one who wills return and says "I still have to live, for I still have to think."[229] (GS 276) What I call transfigurative negation thus harnesses *ascesis* —truth-seeking criteria, or the rigor of the concept in the determination of the problem—to effect transformative growth: the resolution of difference in a case of solution. Simlarly, the concept of

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227. Deleuze and Guattari describe this as an "art of dosages" wherein one maintains caution in the practice of destratification and critique, since "in dismantling the organism there are times one courts death, in slipping away from signifiance and subjection one courts falsehood, illusion and hallucination and psychic death." (1987, 160)

228. The Invisible Committee write, "If we are not unified individuals endowed with a definitive identity as the social policing of roles would have it, but the locus of a conflictual play of forces whose successive configurations only form temporary equilibriums, we have to recognize that war is in us—holy war, as Rene Daumal called it. Peace is neither possible nor desirable. Conflict is the very stuff of what exists." (2015, 138) Despite an obvious resonance with Nietzsche's more bombastic rhetoric about living dangerously, warrior-like spirits, and grand politics, the Invisible Committee here drift seamlessly into the kind of moralizing nihilism Nietzsche was careful to distinguish himself from, and more importantly, that he describes as inadequate to the task of affirmative value creation. For, like the ascetic, it is truth (here, the truth of finitude and forces, of "the very stuff of what exists") that galvanizes disdain for peace in the insurrectionary subject, whereby the *ressentiment* of the bourgeois intellectual reacting on their own middle-class upbringing becomes as deafening as it is politically defeating.

229. In Deleuze's terms, "Life would be the active force of thought, but thought would be the affirmative power of life. Both would go in the same direction, carrying each other along, smashing restrictions, matching each other step for step, in a burst of unparalleled creativity. Thinking would then mean *discovering, inventing, new possibilities of life.*" (2006, 101)

counterpower I develop below integrates destitutions, or "fleeing" the institutions we critically problematize, *and* creates new figures of overcoming. Counterpower offers a sense of unity through figures that augment the transfigurative energies of local sites of resistance, linking them together not to foreclose upon their singular differences, but to amplify them. Its unity is thus not totalizing, but partial—it is *solidarity*. Affirmative counterpower recovers a strong, differential sense of *unity through solidarity* for the work of freedom that affirms singularity in experimental organizational forms.

I. Completing Counterpower

To get a sense of how destitutions can relate to positive forms of freedom we can return to the Colectivo Situaciones. In 2014, as Jose Rosales (2021) relates, the Colectivo begin to describe the "de-instituent" phase of social movements in more problematic terms. On their account a shift in the prevailing mode of governance, characterized by "an expansion of its capacities to incorporate much of the dynamics represented by the cycle of social protest," has complicated resistance. (CS 2014) "New state functions" legitimize Latin American statehood by integrating with global finance and developing more sophisticated technologies for producing and regulating subjugated subjectivities. These latter the Colectivo call "open institutions" that supplement state capacities for managing social, political, and economic demand. Examples include the registration and funding of "'popular high schools', which practice popular education in factories run under workers' control since 2001." (Ibid.) The plurality of organizations we saw in Chapter 5 are thus integrated into governance like a faux affirmation of their "positive 'no'". Neoliberal governance opens onto *in*formal relationships whose heterogeneity is channeled into economies of consumption and discourses of statehood. They are not neutralized, but controlled.

Non-formalized economies and movements indicate what the Colectivo call "social mobilities." We can think of social mobilities as concrete vectors of differentiation in tension with forms of capture: statehood, commodity markets, state institutions. Critically developing their earlier analyses, the Colectivo claim that social movements are no longer in a relation of opposition to state institutions. Such simplified dualisms are inadequate to the situation.[230] Returning to their figure of the "militant researcher," they argue for deepening and adapting research to local conditions of extreme subjugation to investigate "new *social mobilities*, which in a manner absolutely unlike the movements of the past decade, foreshadow a new map of struggles and languages in their ways of doing and, above all, of problematizing the present." (Ibid.) A new map of struggles and languages figures what they call a "multiform," or the power of a "multiplicity of forms" of "collective protagonism." Collective protagonism resignifies localized sites of exploitation as mobilities of resistance for which the militant researcher can investigate, share in, and augment possibilities of "transversal grassroots counterpower."

My aim in what follows is to amplify this idea. I first work through Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's figure of "the multitude" as an iteration of transfigurative, revolutionary subjectivity. It serves as a kind of precursor to the transversal, grassroots power the Colectivo call for. Indeed, the Colectivo Situaciones adopt the term multitude in their *19th and 20th: Notes for New Social Protaganoism.* For my part, I turn to Hardt and Negri's formulation to recover a sense of multitude as an affirmative, critical figuration of freedom. I then open it onto critical transfiguration. First, I work through Silvia Federici's critique of Hardt and Negri's emphasis on

230. In their words, "From the very beginning, we tried to take on the obstacle imposed upon us: the enormous difficulty of transcending the simplification that reads this complexity in terms of cooptation versus heroic marginalization." That simplification resonates with a binary model of good vs evil, wherein the heroically marginalized become trapped in an interminable dialectic with institutions that co-opt their subjugation.

communicative and informational labor. Federici inflects counterpower toward the socially reproductive labor of women in the Third World, offering new figures of subjectivity for multiformal counterpower. Finally, turning to Verónica Gago, co-founder of the Colectivo Situaciones—returning to and repeating them, in a sense—I argue that the transversal, grassroots counterpower she sees in international feminist struggle suggests building counterpower through relating different struggles to each other without reducing what situates each, but rather affirming it.

a. The Multitude

In *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form* Hardt and Negri propose a communist method of "total critique:"

> Communism must be conceived as a total critique in the Nietzschean sense: not only a destruction of the present values, but also a creation of new values; not only a negation of what exists, but also an affirmation of what springs forth. Critique of the State-form thus means also proposing an effective alternative. This positive aspect of a Marxist critique must also assume as its basis the idea and experience of living labor. (1994, 5)

"Total critique" is, following Deleuze (2006), critique from which "nothing must escape," and that releases "other previously neglected powers." (Deleuze 2006, 89) What is total in this perspective is primarily valuative: "present values," or "all known and knowable values," designate discursively formalized values such that power, in the ontological sense, is reduced to being "the object of a *representation."* Will to power is reduced to criteria of recognition; "what is" is "what can be represented or not, recognised or not." (Deleuze 2006, 81) The problem is that "only values which are already current, only accepted values, give criteria of recognition in

this way." Creative will to power thus regresses onto what is already valued *against* the potential for new values. Deleuze sees this as an iteration of nihilistic slave-morality: for whom is power already determined, already assignable? Those incapable of, and hostile toward, the creation of new values. "Total critique" therefore submits "all known and knowable values" to the Nietzschean question of value by delimiting their terms of recognition and, in Foucault's language, acceptability, in order to release *and affirm* "other previously neglected powers." Hence, what Foucault calls the "undefined work of freedom" describes, as we have seen, experimental figurations of the *unknown* in new ways of life.

Hardt and Negri adapt total critique to a Marxist framework, effectively breaking with the latter's traditionally dialectical methodology. Citing Foucault's rejection of the "blackmail of the Enlightenment," they argue for constituting an alternative to both closed models of "real socialism" ("that is, the socialism that actually existed in the Soviet Union and the other countries of Eastern Europe" (1994, 262) and liberal democracy—to both socialist and capitalist divisions of labor. Rather than the negative determination of a socialist state through total opposition to liberal-capitalism, communist total critique in their view delimits the ontological coordinates of both liberal and dialectical socialist State-forms to affirm new possibilities thereby released. What "previously neglected powers" are freed up? Situating themselves at the level of ontology they claim, "Our conception of being must be open to the production of the discontinuous, to the unforeseeable, to the event … It is as if the world is unmade and reconstructed on the basis of that set of thoughts, actions, and intuitions established on the individual and collective singularity that organize it through its desire and power." (1994, 286) The organization of individual and collective singularity indicates terms of what they call a

"constitutive alternative." The "effective alternative" communist total critique offers, what they describe as "juridical communism," is therefore one that develops individual and collective singularities.

Hardt and Negri accordingly resignify *labor* to designate the creative production of individual and collective life.[231] Akin to Deleuze's "transcendental empiricism," wherein the encounter with what "can only be sensed" is also entry into what compels, but cannot be exhausted by, the determination of specific concepts, experiences, or relations of power, what they call (following Marx) "living labor" similarly signifies creative activities that produce social life. As Jason Read (2022) explains, analyzing Marx's formulation of "living labor" in the *Grundrisse*, "Living labour is the possibility for the creation of any value whatsoever. Or, framed in more antagonistic terms, living labour is the situation that the capitalist mode of production is itself dependent on a powerful, flexible, force of subjectivity that it has not created and cannot control."[232] (222) Understood in this way, living labor exceeds, unsettles, and is captured by specific juridical, political, and economic forms. "It presents itself as the creative, vital locus," Hardt and Negri explain, "a dynamic factory of values and norms." (220) Because living labor is principally singular, any given social formation has localized, disparate, and singular *conditions of actualization.* These conditions are sites that correspond to the activities of creative subjectivities, in both senses of the term: the subjugated subsumed to the daily reproduction of

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231. In *Empire* Hardt and Negri state, "Labor—material or immaterial, intellectual or corporeal—produces and reproduces social life, and in the process is exploited by capital. This wide landscape of biopolitical production allows us finally to recognize the full generality of the concept of proletariat." (2000, 402)

232. Read presents the following quotation from Marx's *Grundrisse,* helpful for understanding Hardt and Negri's use the term: "Labor not as an object, but as activity; not as itself value, but as the *living source of value* … Thus, it is not at all contradictory, or, rather, the in-every-way mutually contradictory statements that labor is *absolute poverty as object*, on one side, and is, on the other side, the *general possibility* of wealth as subject and as activity, are reciprocally determined and follow from the essence of labor, such as it is *presupposed* by capital as its contradiction and as its contradictory being, and such as it, in turn, presupposes capital."

specific relations of power, and subjectivities whose creative efforts can potentially counter-actualize new possibilities for communist overcoming.[233]

To figure those possibilities Hardt and Negri adopt the term "multitude" from Spinoza. Decidedly Marxist, yet non-dialectical, the multitude articulates the potential of living labor to constitute a revolutionary subjectivity capable of contesting and constituting alternatives to state and capital.[234] It expresses the *potentia,* in Negri's Spinozist terminology, of what I call transfigurative negation. Like the proletariat, it negates specific relations of production and technologies of power; in excess of them it is, like Dionysus, suffuse with energies of creative transformation.[235] Its determination expresses an affirmation of singularity that overcomes capture by different societal arrangements of power, such that we can consider it *a figure of critical multiplicity.* Indeed, in *Empire* (2000) Hardt and Negri call it "an irreducible multiplicity; the singular social differences that constitute the multitude must always be expressed and can never be flattened into sameness, unity, identity, or indifference." (105) It ramifies not only through economic relationships but also "race, ethnicity, geography, gender, sexuality, and other factors." (103) The multitude is therefore not reducible to class struggle but rather relays with multiple vectors of differentiation from which one can questions governance and resist capture.

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233. Hardt and Negri describe this in terms of "self-valorization," which indicates the possibility of value being returned to those who produce it, like an active force in an ampliative feedback loop. They state, "The new era of the organization of capitalist production and reproduction of society is dominated by the emergence of the laboring subjectivity that claims its mass autonomy, its own independent capacity of collective valorization, that is, its self-valorization with respect to capital." (1994, 279)
234. In fact, in terms that resonate strongly with the Colectivo's analysis of new forms of progressive governance, Hardt and Negri continuously argue that the possibility of subjectivation, or a subjectivity capable of self-valorization that contests biopolitical capitalism, is opened by modes of subjugation, or what the Colectivo described as institutional mechanisms through which informal relations are captured so as to supplement governance.
235. We might recall here Ofelia Schutte's description of Dionysian truth in terms of a "dynamic unity" with natural life. Cf. Schutte 1984, pp. 14-21. For example, she states, "Through the perspective of the Dionysian Nietzsche stresses that our conception of individual existence represents a disruption of the fundamental continuity and harmony of the individual with nature ... What the Dionysian state makes available is the return to the dynamic continuity of life." (14)

Consider the Colectivo Situaciones's analysis of the Bolivian garment workers, specifically in terms of the interrelationship of migration, racism, illegality, and "super-exploitation," as an example. Beyond the intensive reproduction of surplus-value through wage labor, such non-formalized labor exists at the intersection of social, political, and economic power relations that both intensify exploitation and open resistance to a range of other struggles. Occupy, and 2011's "movements of the squares," from Zuccotti Park in NYC to Tahrir Square in Cairo, are additional examples of the kind decentralized, mulitiform resistance that Hardt and Negri figure in the multitude. The point is not to identify either with the other, nor to flatten their respective problems. It is to gesture toward augmenting solidarity across struggles through a figure "based not so much on the current empirical existence of the class but rather on its conditions of possibility." (105) Such conditions are like resonant problematics—events whereby the subjugated seize for themselves the right to question governance and, at the same time, to become otherwise. As a potential that emerges alongside increasingly differentiated relations of power and production, the multitude expresses a "plural ontology" capable of conjugating diverse forms of resistance and autonomy.

One can see how the composition of the multitude resonates strongly with willing eternal return. Ontologically it conjoins singularity with the possibility of freedom at the level of existence; historically, it can only be "brought into being" based on "cultural, legal, economic, and political conditions." (Hardt and Negri 2004, 221) Hardt and Negri continue,

> These two multitudes, however, although conceptually distinct, are not really separable. If the multitude were not already latent and implicit in our social being, we could not even imagine it as a political project; and, similarly, we can only hope to realize it today

> because it already exists as a real potential. The multitude, then, when we put these two together, has a strange, double temporality: always-already and not-yet. (221-2)

Always-already and not-yet—the multitude is doubly affirmative: of singularity in localized struggles, and as return in the *figuration of a unity through multiplicity* that augments them. It does not collapse specific differences, but revaluates them as conditions for the actualization of an alternative. Indeed, while Hardt and Negri insist it is not a matter of unity in the centralized sense,[236] figuring the composition and horizontal relation of singularities, it nevertheless *unites thought and life*—like a parable of impermanence.[237] The multitude transvaluates social, political, and economic relations of power into possibilities of communist self-valorization. Like willing return, it exemplifies fashioning new forms of life through encountering concrete historical problems and freeing possibilities for their overcoming.

We can reconsider the relationship between destituent and constituent power in these terms. For their part, Hardt and Negri claim they ultimately agree with critiques. They affirm that thinkers like Agamben and Derrida present strong cases against constituent power as it appears in modern legal theory, where it is identified with sovereignty. The problem however "is that they do not grasp what constituent power really was in modern revolutionary struggles and what it is becoming in contemporary movements." (Hardt and Negri 2017, 33) Attending to the ways

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236. In *Commonwealth* (2009) they state, "We propose the multitude as an adequate concept for organizing politically the project of exodus and liberation because we are convinced that, in the current biopolitical context even more than before, traditional organizational forms based on unity, centralized leadership, and hierarchy are neither desirable nor effective." I take the type of unity I proffer above to express a difference of kind from the type of unity present in centralized, hierarchical organizations.

237. In these terms, returning to *Labor of Dionysus*, Hardt and Negri state, "The rigorous application of the philosophy of difference to the juridical and normative system leads directly to the recognition of the singularity of the multitude, the unrepresentable community. In other words, the proposition of a radical alterity is not a matter of advocating the cause of the weak against the powerful … but rather a matter of affirming one type of power over another: the constituent power of the multitude against the constituted power of the State. The critical perspective must grasp the genealogy of social movements and emerging subjectivities not as reformist pressures on the existing order, but as elements of a new constituent power." (307)

constituent power develops through similar struggles over the last decade or so, they argue it becomes "a continuous, radically plural and biopolitical process…no longer compatible with representation and sovereignty." (37) The constituent power of the multitude therefore does not gesture toward sovereignty but rather toward inventing "new, *non-sovereign* institutions." (Hardt and Negri 2017, 39; my emphasis) So, while "It is not paradoxical for us to take what is power for capital—subjection—as an occasion for destituent subjectivation," that is, for emptying out the institution(s), "To this destituent endeavor needs to be added a constituent project of subjectivation, that is, in the language we used earlier, machinic assemblages to produce alternative subjectivities." (223) Alternative, constituent subjectivities return differentiation to itself—folding it, so to speak—through counter-actualizations of historical inheritances in agonistic assemblages. Constituent power gleans machinic tenacity for the work of freedom.

Just as sovereignty has no necessary purchase on form-giving, the State-form has no necessary purchase on social, political, or economic institutions—capital has no necessary purchase on our economic relationships. Completing destituent power means institutionalizing non-sovereign counterpower.[238] Additionally, as an affirmation of finitude and singularity, counterpower requires an openness to transformative encounters, such that its institutions remain subject to contestation, adaptation, and refiguration. Foucault calls this permanent critique; Deleuze, permanent revolution.[239] In any event, one insists upon a permanent right to determine

238. Genealogically speaking, counterpower derives from Lenin's concept of "dual power," which interprets the situation in Russia in 1917 after the February Revolution wherein a Bolshevik government, whose institutions were directly controlled by the Soviets, existed alongside and competed for hegemony against the bourgeois state. Resignifying counterpower to no longer gesture toward sovereign institutions or the state-form signifies a transfigurative negation of the Leninist framework wherein proletarian subjectivity no longer attains to opposing and replacing the bourgeois state, but to overcoming it through non-sovereign institutions. Cf V.I. Lenin ed. Robert C. Tucker "The Dual Power" in *The Lenin Anthology* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975) pgs. 301-305

239. In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze states, "In very general terms, we claim that there are two ways to appeal to 'necessary destructions': that of the poet, who speaks in the name of a creative power, capable of overturning

problems that compel further revolutionary transformations, and to consolidate that right in institutions that facilitate and affirm transformative encounters. Regarding insurrection, then, "The insurrectional event…must be consolidated in an institutional process of transformation that develops the multitude's capacities for democratic decision making." (Hardt and Negri 2009, 363) Democratic decision-making—for example, in assemblies, worker-owned factories, popular schools, etc.—institutionalizes the transformative work of freedom.[240] Hardt and Negri's multitude thus articulates a radical valuation of freedom that subordinates destitution to actualizing democratic forms of life.

Destituent agons devaluate freedom to the extent they remain inimical to or hostile toward constructing sustainable institutions of counterpower. At the level of *ethos*, they attain to a kind of self-harm reminiscent of willing truth. This is almost nowhere more evident than in the hostility, bravado, and bad faith of the Invisible Committee, whose equation of friendship with "fraternity in combat" rebounds into an asceticism that lives for the struggle.[241] More adequate to the contesting capitalist institutions would be a process of institutionalizing non-sovereign counterpower which can harness the capacities catalyzed by destitution—the *pathos* of insurrection, the feeling of power in fleeing alongside others, or what Hardt and Negri call "the exodus of the multitude"—to counter-actualize it in alternative, democratic institutions. And

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all orders and representations in order to affirm Difference in the state of permanent revolution which characterizes eternal return; and that of the politician, who is above all concerned to deny that which 'differs', so as to conserve or prolong an established historical order, or to establish a historical order which already calls forth in the world the forms of its representation."

240. I recall here my argument in Chapter 6 that Nietzschean affirmation involves a transvaluation of normativity, such that what I describe as an "institutionalization of the work of freedom" can be read in part as the introduction of norms to sustain and develop processes of becoming otherwise.

241. The Invisible Committee claim, "If modern 'communism' was able to imagine itself as a universal brotherhood, as a realized equality, this was only through a cavalier extrapolation from the lived experience of fraternity in combat, of friendship." (2017, 132-3) When reading passages such as this, which unironically collapse friendship with brotherhood, one cannot help but marvel at how unfriendly and inhospitable such a conception of friendship is—indeed, one marvels at how unfriendly and inhospitable "some friends" so often are.

importantly, for them to be non-sovereign and democratic, such institutions necessarily require norms of participation and engagement. These can articulate and *reproduce* the intensive *pathos* of those at the frontlines of exploitation whom thereby encounter, determine, and solve their own problems.[242] Non-sovereign, democratic institutions thus effectively position constituent subjectivities in horizontal relationships with any who "give themselves the right to question governance." They are not prescriptions, but experimental proposals; their figures are not identities, but solidarities. *Counterpower completes the critical movement of freedom in experimental, revolutionary institutions.*

b. Social Reproduction

Hardt and Negri's multitude is compelling both for its capacity to relate various kinds of struggle as well as the non-hierarchical unity it proffers for actualizing political alternatives. Unity signals agonistic affirmations of multiplicity and singularity through solidarities that resonate across a range of social and political landscapes. Nevertheless, in their own work, Hardt and Negri favor certain landscapes over others. Their eventual focus on the immaterial, communicative, and informational labor of advanced industrial societies seems to devalue, or render invisible, other types of labor in Third World economies, like the Colectivo's Bolivian garment workers, for example.[243] Questioning governance at *these* sites seems to evoke a different register of differentiation, what the Colectivo call a "social mobility," whose critical

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242. For a similar and compelling account of a Deleuzian sense of politically anarchist institutions, see Natascia Tosel "Anarchy and Institution: A New Sadean Possibility" in *Deleuze and Anarchism* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 136-152.

243. For example, in *Empire* (2000) Hardt and Negri argue that the global economy is tending toward informationalization, or toward prioritizing service economies rather than industrial production. "Today," they claim, "information and communication have come to play a foundational role in the production process." (289) Note, however, they do not suggest that industry is thereby done away with or discarded. Rather, "Just as the process of industrialization transformed agriculture and made it more productive, so to the informational revolution will transform industry by redefining and rejuvenating manufacturing processes." (285)

thrust offers lean toward different figurations of counterpower. Now, because counterpower integrates deconstructions of sovereignty, which includes those of a "dialectical conception of totality," into its composition, the question becomes how to relay and amplify variegated figurations of counterpower—how to build solidarities across them. This does not mean enveloping more sites of resistance into the ambit of the multitude, so as to ultimately subtitute one totality for, or against, another. It means linking possibilities of freedom by connecting localized sites of resistance, and this through instituting a diagnoses of shared problematics which gleans not recognition or shared identity, but a kind of mutual aid and solidarity.

Consider Silvia Federici's critiques of Hardt and Negri. Similar to how the classical Marxist figure of the English factory worker foregrounds the white, male, heterosexual workers of early industrial capitalism, Federici claims Hardt and Negri similarly center workers of advanced capitalist countries whose reproduction actually—quite *materially*—relies on the *socially reproductive labor* performed primarily by women in the Third World.[244] Socially reproductive labor comprises all the activities that reproduce human social life, including the conditions for the labor that produces commodities. Women whose housework, subservience, and care reproduces individual male wage earners is a classic example. Similarly, in an international regard, the laborer expropriated at the margins of 'developing' economies, typically indebted to the World Bank and the IMF, reproduces flows of labor toward and within advanced capitalist economies:

> If it is true that the remittances sent by immigrants constitute the main international monetary flow after the revenues of the oil companies, then the most important

244. Federici says, "Moreover, with its emphasis on science, knowledge production and information, [Hardt and Negri's] theory skirts the question of the reproduction of everyday life." (2012, 142)

> commodity that the 'Third World' today exports to the 'First' is labor. In other words, as in the past, today as well, capitalist accumulation is above all the accumulation of workers, a process that occurs primarily through immigration. This means that a significant part of the work necessary to reproduce the metropolitan workforce is now performed by women in Africa, Asia, Latin America or the former socialist countries, the main points of origin of the contemporary migratory movements. (Federici 2012, 71)

Federici argues that possibilities "enabling us to resist dependence on wage labor and subordination to capitalist relations" exist primarily at these sites of socially reproductive labor. For example, she describes how women "from Cambodia to Senegal" created "credit associations that function as money commons" to democratically organize access to the means of reproduction. (143) Similarly, there were the Chilean and Peruvian "ola communes" in the 1980s. Such "commons," as she describes them, "shape a collective identity, constitute a counterpower in the home and the community, and open a process of self-valorization and self-determination from which we have much to learn." (2012, 144) Counterpower here describes the potential for the localized constitution of a collectivity whose self-valorization is socially reproductive. Like the multitude, then, it figures a constitutive alternative. And yet, because on Federici's view socially reproductive labor in the "Third World" is the exploitative premise of immaterial labor, one may rightfully question the extent of that resonance. The problem, at the level of *ethos*, thus calls for developing a concept of power that foregrounds the constituent capabilities of women-led efforts to collectivize socially reproductive labor in a way that reciprocally augments similar efforts at the sites of immaterial labor. Any constituent project, any project of giving form to the work of freedom, has to respond accordingly.

What Federici calls “commoning” provides a clue for constructing a response. Federici interprets commoning as a creative act. “Indeed,” she says, “if ‘commoning’ has any meaning, it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject.” (2012, 145) The common subject she envisions is led by women whose reproductive labor remains at the frontlines of capitalist and colonial violence. “This time,” she says, “it is women who must build the new commons, so that they do not remain transient spaces or temporary autonomous zones, but become the foundation of new forms of social reproduction.” (2012, 147) Notice that she describes these new commons as “the *foundation*” of new forms of social reproduction. This is because the ongoing premise of “developed” labor in advanced capitalist economies is the hyper-exploitation of socially reproductive labor, such that its commoning inverts the structural hierarchy. Commoning socially reproductive labor thus generates a feminist figure of revolutionary subjectivity that inflects—that critically develops and yet is not in strict opposition to—what Hardt and Negri seem to propose in the multitude. Instead of foregrounding intellectual or communicative labor, which risks repeating the structure of transnational capitalist exploitation, it foregrounds socially reproductive labor.

This has several consequences for a concept of counterpower. First, like the multitude, a feminist, revolutionary subjectivity is a creative act that follows from, but does not vacillate in, the destituent act of fleeing institutions. Granting this, the question becomes how to build solidarity across different sites of commoning, such that a “constitutive alternative” does not resort to either dialectical totality nor sovereignty. How can commoning immaterial labor, for example, reciprocally amplify the constituent power of commoning socially reproductive labor? Can we conceive of institutions that sustain and articulate that reciprocity? If both immaterial

and socially reproductive commons designate *non-sovereign* institutions, their counterpower cannot mediate different struggles through a shared identity, nor substitute one for another. Its unity must be horizontal, relating different responses to more or less shared problematics—*unity through solidarity.* We need to counter-actualize such that whatever experimental institutions we conceive of build transnational counterpower.

c. Transversal Counterpower

Transnational counterpower resonates strongly with what co-founder of the Colectivo Situaciones Verónica Gago (2018) calls (following Deleuze and Guattari) a "vector of transversality." Reflecting on 2017's International Women's Strike she says,

> This transversality can be synthesized in four features. First it connects the spheres of production and reproduction in a nonhierarchical way. Second, it recognizes the labor of the informal and popular economies, which are politically marginalized as part of a heterogeneous composition of the labor force in which reproductive and non-waged tasks are fundamental and in which women play a key role. Third, it demonstrates a force that is nourished by international resonance and coordination. Finally, it updates a genealogy that, in Argentina, is connected to experiences of the radicalization of two issues: the struggles of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo against the last military dictatorship and the politicization of human rights that they led, and later, the movement of unemployed workers in the midst of the social and political crisis of 2001, which challenged the subordinated inclusion of the unemployed as the "excluded," which condemned them to be marginal or a surplus population. (2018, 665)

Transversality offers a way for conceiving how different struggles can augment each other without covering over what situates each. It signifies the possibility of connecting, "in a nonhierarchical way," vectors of differentiation to contest violent capture by oppressive social, political, and economic institutions. And importantly, as Gago argues in *Feminist International* (2020), it "creates a common horizon that functions as a practical catalyst." (208) That "practical catalyst" expresses what she calls "the desire to change everything," a desire that is "productive, constituting subjects and relations." (2020, 12) In the terms I have set forth, it expresses the *composition of a unity from the* pathos *of the event*, wherein freedom can be actualized through experimental unities.

For Gago, transversality links different iterations of questioning violence. "Drawing connections between different forms of violence," she claims, "gives us a shared perspective that is both specific and expansive, critical but not paralyzing, that links experiences." (2020, 61) Transversal experiences incline toward unification in what Deleuze and Guattari call a "revolutionary war machine" that joins singularity with universality and refuses assimilation to the state-form *at the same time* as it generates consistency for the work of freedom.[245] Like an inflection of Foucault's right to question governance, Gago's feminist transversality joins critically questioning violence with a "multiform antagonism at various scales," that is, a shared articulation of situated antagonisms with state, capitalist, and institutional violence. (2020, 91)

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245. In "Three Group Problems" Deleuze, reviewing Guattari, states, "The problem therefore has to do with the nature of unification which must operate transversally, throughout a multiplicity, and not vertically so as to avoid crushing the multiplicity proper to desire. That is to say in the first place that the unification must be that of *a war machine, and not a State machinery* (a Red Army stops being a war machine to the extent that it becomes a more or less determinant cog in the State machinery." (1977, 105) As for "consistency," here I am thinking of Thomas Nail's understanding of consistency as a kind of counterweight, if you will, for tendencies toward deterritorialization. Nail writes, "So the real question is not simply that of deterritorialisation over reterritorialisation or creative life verses the dead hand of capital, but rather the *constructive* ways revolutionary action takes on a consistency, a commitment and an organisation, and what forms of antagonism and relation it produces in a specific struggle." (2015, 19)

Transversal struggles against violence directly contest the unending assault of international capitalist institutions: the IMF's austerity measures, immigrant labor reproduced through the expropriation of reproductive labor, or the "progressive" Latin American governmentality that the Colectivo Situaciones problematize in 2014.[246] They thereby form what Gago calls a *constituent force* (2020, 186) whose feminist "*potencia*" inclines toward experimental, non-sovereign forms of counterpower.

Gago's analysis critically reworks revolutionary counterpower in a manner that connects Federici's insistence on socially reproductive labor to other contestations without subordinating one to the other. What Hardt and Negri call "the multitude" gives way to a diagrammatic figure of transversal struggles whose conjunction signifies non-sovereign, constituent unities—common horizons for singular events. Transversal unity is not unity in the concept, but a unity of movements—*unities in struggle that reconnect destitution to the organization of multiplicity.* Critical resistance inflects toward ways of life capable not of replacing one state with another, like another sovereign on the same throne, but of constituting alternatives. Counterpower articulates transfigurative negations whose relations form figures of non-sovereign, non-capitalist futures: communist futures, feminist futures.

246. We might compare Gago's insistence on transversal internationalism with Deleuze and Guattari's description of the "isomorphy" of international capitalism. Isomorphy, they claim, designates how capitalist institutions integrate heterogeneous social formations without necessarily "homogenizing" them. "To the extent that capitalism constitutes an axiomatic (production for the market)," they say, "all States and all social formations tend to become *isomorphic* in their capacity as models of realization: there is but one centered world market, the capitalist one, in which even the so-called socialist countries participate. Worldwide organization thus ceases to pass "between" heterogeneous formations since it assures the isomorphy of those formations. But it would be wrong to confuse isomorphy with homogeneity." (1987 436) What is isomorphic about global capitalism can be contested by what is transversal about international struggle.

II. Communist CounterPower

What might this look like on the ground? For an example, we can look at contemporary activist group "CounterPower." CounterPower (2020) offer a model for revolutionary struggle and a vision of communist society that articulates what they call "autonomy within solidarity." Autonomy within solidarity expresses what they describe, citing Asad Haider, as an "insurgent universality:" "a maxim that calls unconditionally for the freedom of those who are not like us," and, echoing Marx, "that the condition for the free development of each is the free development of all." (2020, 7) In affirmation of a transversal consistency of different struggles, CounterPower propose forming a revolutionary subjectivity by relating different struggles against oppressive power.[247] In their words, "It is the solidarity of this multitude of autonomous liberation struggles —from Indigenous self-determination to Black liberation, transfeminism to proletarian autonomy —that defines a revolutionary people." (2020, 11) While a "revolutionary people" might seem to invoke tropes of popular sovereignty, its function here is rather to signify *unity through solidarity.* Additionally, CounterPower's use of "multitude," indebted to Hardt and Negri, indicates the potential of actualizing solidarity with "those who are not like us." Singularity, in the universal mode, links situated liberatory projects to each other in an image of international communism: *complete affirmation*.

CounterPower's sense of communism articulates transversal, grassroots counterpower. It "aims for radical transformations on the terrain of social reproduction, creating a new *molecular* basis for the ongoing material reproduction of everyday life rooted in the principle of autonomy within solidarity." (2020, 84; my emphasis) What this means is that the sites of social

247. In their terms, "As a collective revolutionary subject, the people *exceeds* the class category of the proletariat, linking itself to indigenist, decolonial, antiracist, feminist, democratic, and ecological struggles." (12)

reproduction, from the home to the expropriated reproductive labor in Latin America, are principal sites for developing freedom through institutionalizing counterpower. Its molecular basis signifies an affirmation of desire for which CounterPower also mobilize queer and trans perspectives against subjecting reproductive labor to heteronormative discipline and control. Places such as "communal kitchens, restaurants, laundromats, clothing repair centers, housekeeping collectives, and childcare" all become sites for queer relationalities to resist heteronormativity and the patriarchal family, effectively abolishing them through "new forms of communal living." Again, the work of freedom is doubly affirmative: horizontal, transversal, and *sustainable* institutions repeat the *pathos* of freedom, its "molecular" and Dionysian matrix, in complete and ampliative circuits of counterpower.

CounterPower offer a compellingly affirmative example of counterpower that, rather than valorizing radical disruption, interruption, or escape, composes a revolutionary unity wherein escape, like negation, is folded between two affirmations of freedom: of resistance, and of communism. Echoing the temporality of eternal return, "organs of counterpower" both respond to the present and figure a future: "These organs of counterpower—exemplified historically in the form of autonomous action committees, assemblies, and councils—are *simultaneously* instruments of struggle against the imperialist world-system and embodiments of a communist alternative." (2020, 146; my emphasis) Working through examples like the industrial unionism of the IWW and the Salvadoran *Asociacion de Mujeres de El Salvador* (Women's Association of El Salvador), CounterPower argue that as these organs coalesce they advance a network of counterpower for contesting capitalist and imperialist institutions *without thereby repeating their*

threat of sovereign violence.[248] Prefiguring the future, they are as "untimely" as the concepts created by the philosopher-artist.

Institutions of counterpower can also reproduce the *pathos* of the event—*courage for the work of freedom*—for those conducting resistance.[249] The experience of collective power, not just in refusal and escape, but in the construction and defense of institutions that reproduce everyday life in turn facilitates trust, commitment, and conviction. When we solve problems together, we enter into and develop becoming-revolutionary. For example, Hilary Klein (2015) describes how Zapatista women, compelled by the "courage to organize," learned of their own capabilities by participating in armed struggle and taking on responsibilities that were otherwise traditionally reserved for men:

> In addition to a more equal division of labor, the act of picking up a weapon and learning self-defense also opened the door for a profound shift in how these women carried themselves and interacted with the world around them. As has often been the case historically for women in liberation movements, participating in armed struggle was an empowering experience ... Egalitarian relationships between men and women insurgents translated into more egalitarian relationships in the villages. And as the EZLN stepped into the international spotlight, former women insurgents brought a deeper level of

248. One should note the different between the Invisible Committee's imperative to "destitute everything" and CounterPower's framing of insurrection as an event that follows from and further develops revolutionary institutions. In the former, while there are certainly institutional elements at work in whatever organizing is required for the insurrectionary action, they are often minimized in favor of the intensive event: fraternity in combat rather than solidarity through everyday praxis. My proposal of counterpower in terms of double affirmation rather envelops, or folds, the destituent act within the reproduction of autonomy as an affirmative valuation of creativity, difference, and freedom.

249. "Courage for the work of freedom" recalls Foucault's late characterization of *parrhesia* as courage for truth-telling. Here, I am thinking that when Foucault argues, regarding modernity, that "Revolutionary discourse plays the role of parrhesiastic discourse when it takes the form of a critique of existing society," he indicates a possibility for subjectivation that is untimely inasmuch as it speaks truth, as critique, to figure freedom in the future. Interestingly, Foucault describes the "prophetic" function of parrhesiastic discourse as relating to a future that "up to a point, already has the form of fate."

> commitment, sharper political skills, and greater leadership capacity to the developing Zapatista communities. (Klein 2015, 49)

Notice how learning, and self- and world- transformation, are related. By learning and developing capacities for self-defense and autonomy, Indigenous Zapatista women attain to a qualitative transformation of both self and world. Their stories offer vivid encounters with violence and the courage to question it, to make it a problem and pursue the work of freedom. The figure of the indigenous Zapatista woman exemplifies the "insurgent universality" of those who will freedom, again and again.[250]

III. Last Words

Of course, these are only examples. Their tenacity will have to be assessed and developed in real struggle. And as with destituent power, so too with transversal counterpower: there is no *necessary* purchase on possibility, on what the future will look like. It remains unwritten. But at the level of *ethos*, and agonistically speaking, if the way in which we articulate the problems of the present—if our manner of asserting a right to question governance—vacillates between diminishment and escape then, with nothing else to say, there's nothing else to be. One says "This is the last time—once and for all!" only to return again tomorrow—last words like a last call. Freedom, in this perspective, is a death-drive. Completing its nihilistic movement requires we not let the experiment become an escape. For without a *sense or figure* of the future to strive toward, the transition is not a transition at all: its suicidal collapse. And beyond it there will always remain the possibility of healing, empowering, revolutionary and catalytic unities—

250. Klein also relates stories from Zapatista women that describe how problems of patriarchy and misogyny still persist in the autonomous villages. Men often still try and deny the participation of women at the local level. Similar to the story above, however, she also notes that women who have learned and demonstrated their own power, in both unarmed and armed resistance, insist upon their own capacities back within their localities, often instigating shifts in attitudes amongst men as well. Cf. Klein 2015, especially pages 129 – 133.

affirmative figures forever expressing that “we are all stronger than everything they told us that we should fear.”[251]

251. Against Me! “Reinventing Axl Rose” on *Reinventing Axl Rose* (Plan-it-X Records, 2002)

Conclusion

This project was, is, largely experimental. This is not simply a methodological point. My aim is not only to align it with claims about celebrating becoming, creativity, and finitude. To be sure, I did not know where it would end, what results I might achieve (if any), what value they might be. And it is surely fragile: I know I walk fine lines between nihilism and affirmation, between destituent effects and constituent ambitions. The further I went, the more fragile I felt it became. I've returned time and again to its words, sensing here and there that a slight change, a subtle shift in its semantics, could either perfect it or cause it to crumble. But alongside its experimental methodology and its relatively fragile conditions there is a more intimate, existential project at work. I had to see what my sense of affirmation could do, what effects it could produce for radical valuations of freedom and the language of insurrection and revolution. Whether those effects have been worth it is an evaluation I yield to the reader.

The idea, though, I sincerely consider to be simple. Nietzsche's robust, agonistic image of affirmation addresses certain inadequacies in radical political concepts of power. Ontologies of power abound, and yet, somehow, somewhere, figures of radical disruption, of world-ending destruction and the absolution of self-annihilation, have come to stand in for projects that restore a relationship with the earth. Their moral tenor is hard to deny, to be sure. But if the powers we contest operate by separating us from what we can do, siphoning our possibilities into institutions that reproduce that separation, then we have to re-constitute *unities with life* in order to contest and overcome them. We cannot, and will not, do so through the language and politics of disruption and destitution. Such gestures are to my mind largely unhelpful for theorizing radical creativity. They smack of ascetic revenge.

We can, however, do so by giving form to radical relations of power, and reproducing them through institutions that augment and sustain us. Affirmative unities are possible. *This life is what we make it.* Celebrating and redeeming finitude can generate *figures of unity* that augment radical potentials which contest reactive, reactionary organizations. Transversal, grassroots counterpower can be organized so as to return to and repeat itself in new configurations: we can construct non-sovereign institutions that ramify solidarity into expansive networks of counterpower. We ought to exercise great care for the possibility of doing so. Saying "Yes" to the future, guaranteeing it, in Nietzsche's language, demands as much. (EH "Why I Am So Wise" 8)

Cogitanda

Nevertheless, some problems persist, like signs of difference in excess of my creative efforts. In an effort to sustain affirmative critique, and at the risk of exposing shortcomings of the project, allow me to conclude by proposing lines of further creative development.

What to make of the call for normativity? In one sense, I take normativity to be a problem that must be returned to, time and again. Norms ought to be constantly, perhaps relentlessly, revisited and re-figured. Now, in my view, affirmative transvaluation does not provide explicit norms of conduct or criteria for success. Insofar as conditions of willing and growth are singular, presenting norms that hold for all who aspire to affirm is almost a practical contradiction. Almost. But that is not to say that normativity is something the one who wills freedom can do without. The introduction of limits is crucial for experimentation. We will not reproduce ourselves from day to day without them. And so, in tension with the hyper-normativity of a Christian-moral interpretation of existence and the possibility of radical creativity, affirmative

transvaluation requires taking authorship over our norms in a way that enables the reproduction of singular conditions of growth and becoming. That is, it requires reproducing our differences, as it were. Like a hard *ascesis* within the ontological contours of earthly being, norms ought to hold us to conditions for a new world. Locating, determining, and caring for them is no simple task, but it is one I take it we have to rise to.

Have I conflated critique with political action? Is there not a categorical distinction between historico-philosophical critique and the arts of the street? When the Colectivo Situciones describe being "in situation" as "a simultaneity of acting and interpreting," I take them to rightly challenge that distinction. Indeed, such an easy separation is reminiscent of that between "theory" and "practice," which virtually always terminates in bad politics, on every side. Certainly, there are institutions modeled on such a distinction, separating thought from its possibilities, and separating us from thought. But that institutionalization belies the reality it distorts, wherein thought unites with life in movements of freedom. We fight where we think, act, and live. And yet, is it the case that every movement for freedom requires historico-philosophical critique, or that all historico-philosophical critique is part of movements of freedom? I think the question of their categorical relationship compels us to consider how we can maintain an ampliative reciprocity between the conduct of philosophical critique and concrete projects of freedom—how we can integrate them, without reducing either to the other. This follows from the concept of affirmative unities as dynamic compositions. In more straightforward language, this is unity through solidarity. And I think much more can be said in this regard, surely more than I have offered here.

What constitutes the "counter" of counterpower? One could imagine other powers "countering" the present, and less hospitable ones at that. Are there reactionary counterpowers? In more classically Marxist terms, counterpower contrasts with couterrevolution—and these would derive from the broader opposition between proletarian and capitalist classes. Proletarian counterpower opposes capitalist hegemony, and this through proletarian institutions. What I have set forth somewhat leaves this framing behind. I maintain that counterpower is an immanent concept of power; it (en)counters the problems we determine it in terms of, which correspond to governance, violence, and oppression. Counterpower under capitalist is consequently communist, just as much as counterpower under patriarchy is feminist. Additionally, as I claim in Chapter Seven, counterpower is a disposed toward building institutions we can exploit for transfigurative ends. And so, to the extent the work of freedom we engage in requires introducing and sustaining alternative relationships that can generate solidarity, contest capitalist institutions, and serve as conditions for unwritten, non-capitalist futures, counterpower seems crucial. I do not, however, think all possible resistance, all possible radical politics, or all life, needs to be modeled on institutionalizing counterpower. This would be to iterate a hegemonic concept theorists of destituent power, for example, rightly critique. So, exploring the limits of my conception of counterpower, and tracing where it might open onto other ideas—other transversal organizations, perhaps—and arrangements of life, I leave for future work.

"Once More!"

I should say that there was a time when figures of radical disruption and the semantics of nihilism had very much so appealed to me. I'm a lifelong punk, forever caught in a final waltz to the world's end. With that being said, I think I've learned to connect those energies to more

restorative projects and pursuits (like this dissertation). And aside from that, I have witnessed where the dance of destruction leads, and what needs to be true of those who otherwise so glibly call for us to join it. They are lessons written into my skin. In the words of Laura Jane Grace, "they don't know nothing about redemption. They don't know nothing about recovery."[252] I close with these thoughts because they express truths I have held onto as I wrote this, from conception to conclusion. It is my relationship to them that shapes the contours of my arguments. It is by way of those relationships that what I have written here has become what it was, is, and will have been. Past tense, future perfect.

252. Against Me! "Thrash Unreal" on *New Wave*.

I can't remember
that one September.
All the frontiers through which I crept
well the displaced, we forget.
But the dope and the girls and the wine
oh hell, they were so fine.
What a wonderful, wonderful,
wonderful, wonderful world.
It's hard to remember
ah hell, any December.
It just seemed I was always leaving.
Maybe you know that feeling?
But I never forgot my lines,
I still hear them all the time.
What a wonderful, wonderful,
wonderful, wonderful world.
The dope and the wine and the stage,
They gave back to me what I gave
What a wonderful, wonderful,
wonderful, wonderful world.

- Jack Terricloth
The World/Inferno Friendship Society
"Heart Attack '64"

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