



Matthew Tiessen, "Urban Loves," Oil on Canvas, 2006
91 x 122 cm (3 x 4 ft)

The theoretical work performed by this doctoral dissertation is grounded in my artistic work and experience in the art studio. My research is particularly informed by my transition, as a painter, from representational to non-representational painting at the behest of one of my professors. This shift resulted in my having to relinquish control of my paintings' direction, yielding to the forces that intersect on the canvas and attuning myself to what I regard as the "desires" of the painting itself.

University of Alberta

**CREATIVITY, RELATIONALITY, AFFECT,
ETHICS:**

**OUTLINING A MODEST
(AESTHETIC) ONTOLOGY**

by

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Department of Art and Design

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My doctoral dissertation is dedicated to Petra,
my parents, and the family and friends who supported my scholarly procession
from paintings to print.

**CREATIVITY, RELATIONALITY, AFFECT,
ETHICS:
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ABSTRACT

Are artists autonomous agents? Are they individuals? Engaging with these seemingly commonsensical questions is the objective of this doctoral dissertation. Moreover, my answer to both questions is: no. My objective herein, then, will be to develop the following argument: that because the individual elements of creative, art-producing networks are so profoundly relational, to speak of individual elements or of agents or artists *at all* is to describe an incomplete picture. After all, how can any individual action occur or individual element exist in the absence of that upon which that action is enacted, or without that action being made possible by another element or "individual"?

By engaging with these questions this dissertation challenges conventional notions of creativity, individuality, and agency by suggesting that creative forms of expression – for example: artistic, technological, social, political – are always *collective enunciations* that issue forth and come into being as *products* of interdependent relationships.

I dismantle and then recast how we think about artistic creativity by arguing that if individuals are so intertwined with their networks that their very capacities are produced by the network's relationality itself, they (individuals) might be able to be (categorically) dispensed with entirely. In other words, I begin to ponder the question: How can we think about networks without thinking – or making assumptions about – individuals? I suggest – with the help of theorists like Deleuze, Whitehead, and Spinoza – that emphasizing that

relationships are the generative actors that produce actuality compels us to rethink anthropocentric assumptions, and can lead to more open and creative ways of relating to the world around us.

I conclude by arguing that since our fate, existence, and identity as creators is inextricably linked to, and determined by, our relations with others, we must predispose ourselves *to* this co-fatedness by recalling Nietzsche's invocation that we embrace and be open to our fate by loving it – that we “*amor fati*.” In other words, in order to attune ourselves to the fullest range of possibilities in a situation – in order to be truly creative and to “become-artist” – we must become open to the creative potential of relationality itself, even if it requires that we assume a more modest view of ourselves.

PREFACE

Art does not render the visible but renders visible. The nature of graphic art leads rightly to abstraction. The shadowy and fabulous quality of the imaginary is presumed, and at the same time expresses itself with great precision. The purer the graphic work, that is, the greater the emphasis on the formal elements upon which graphic representation is based, the more defective it is for the realistic representation of visible things. (Klee, 1970, p. 10).

The above observation by painter Paul Klee, that the “nature of graphic art leads rightly to abstraction,” describes perfectly the trajectory of my research from the painting studio to the invisible abstractions of theory and philosophy. This movement towards theoretical “abstraction” is grounded in artistic practice and informed by the vibrancy of matter and creative materials (Bennett, 2010).

When I was originally planning this project on art and creativity, I imagined that it would include more imagery and that it would have more of a focus on specific artists and artworks. As the project evolved and my research continued, my original expectations began to change. The lack of imagery and minimal allusions to specific artists and artworks in this project reflects not only the theoretical focus of this investigation, but my own reluctance to have the project, and the concepts developed herein, be defined by, and potentially limited by, too great a focus on specificities. Put differently, it became increasingly clear to me that engaging with specific examples could result in the theories and concepts I was dealing with becoming merely descriptive of such and such a particularity, or becoming overly literal representations of the theories here being developed. As this project developed, the relationship between particular examples and the ontological and ethical theory I was dealing with began to diverge. Of course, this type of project *could* certainly incorporate a wide variety of examples and imagery, however I chose to focus more explicitly on art and creativity’s more (theoretically) abstract dimensions.

The Deleuzian focus of this project should also be addressed. “Deleuze-studies” has become a burgeoning area of scholarship that succeeds by crossing and confounding disciplinary boundaries. For Deleuze (and his writing partner Guattari), theory and philosophy are toolboxes that need to be put to use in combination with other disciplinary trajectories in order to begin sorting out the “complete conditions” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 159) of life and its

activities. Deleuze's interdisciplinary irreverence – as well as his Nietzschean sympathies – jibe with my own theoretical dispositions and provide an effective set of concepts and approaches for engaging academically with the experiences and questions I encounter in the studio.

During the course of writing my dissertation I have become increasingly active in the field of Deleuzian scholarship, culminating in recent publications on Deleuze in *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* (2010), *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* (2007), as well as recent and upcoming conference presentations at the annual Deleuze Studies conferences in Cologne (2009) and Amsterdam (2010). My work on Deleuze has also expanded beyond art and ethics to include recent work on debt's powers of dispossession at a conference at the University of Western Ontario entitled, "Deleuze, Nietzsche, Foucault: War in the 21st Century," sponsored by the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism. Despite this project's use of Deleuze and his interlocutors, it is my expectation that it will also be of interest to a general audience curious about the conditions of what we call "creativity" and the ethical effects of our ontological expectations.

The dissertation is divided into four primary sections, consisting also of an Introduction and a description of Research Methodology.

In Part 1, "Painting as a Parable of Creation," I begin my examination of art-making and painting by asking: "What about art is inconsequential?" This question is intended to be provocative insofar as it asks, "What components of the creative process can be judged superfluous or ineffectual?" The answer, I suggest, is that despite our ability and desire to judge this or that force or factor as of no consequence to a given creative act, our judgments tell us more about our own predilections and prejudices than they do about creative – and artistic – processes themselves. I go on to interrogate the often held theoretical notions that art is an expression of excess and that artworks are uniquely singular expressions of "the new."

In Part 2, "Non-Representation, Expressionism, Determination, and Reciprocity," I focus more explicitly on particular theorists of creativity, including: Spinoza, Deleuze, and Massumi. Using these thinkers I review Deleuze's critique of art as representation by maintaining, with Deleuze, that art creates something different and expressive. I go on to advocate for a modified version of Spinoza's causally deterministic ontology by suggesting that causal determinism does not preclude difference, nor does it preclude unknowable

complexity. In this section I argue that while newness might not exist without causes, novelty most certainly does. In the final section I emphasize the ways in which all novelty is conditioned by relational reciprocity, constituted not only by human and non-human “agents,” but by the constitutive capacity of relationality itself.

In Part 3, “Creative Determinations and Affective Ethics,” I focus specifically on Deleuze’s work on painter Francis Bacon. For Deleuze, one of art’s functions is to break free from clichés. The artist, in turn, must produce the conditions necessary for her/himself to deviate from habits (whether aesthetic habits, cultural habits, social habits, gendered habits, etc.). Deleuze notes that for Bacon, clichés and habits can be attacked using “free marks”; that is, markings of paint that are determined more by uncontrolled bodily flailings than by any deliberate choice. I go on to examine recent scholarly commentary on Deleuze’s theories of art and creativity before moving into a discussion of: Deleuze’s analysis of ethological strategies, Whitehead’s theory of novelty, Henry’s autoaffective ontology, Gibson’s affordances, and a brief description of the focus of Part 4 – what I call “modest ontologies” (Tiessen, 2010).

Part 4, “Modest Ontologies and Magnanimous Creativity,” is focused on the ethical implications of the ontological discussions of the preceding chapters. The ontologically-derived ethics in Part 4 responds to the radical forms of relationality and extended expressions of agency discussed in Parts 1-3 using Nietzsche’s theory of “amor fati” – his demand that we love our fate – as a point of entry. I argue that Nietzsche’s notion of “amor fati” can provide us with a framework for thinking about how to respond to de-anthropomorphized articulations of creativity and agency. I suggest that Nietzsche’s suggestion that we love our fate requires that we be open to what befalls us and that we become willing to experiment *artistically* with the materials and forces – both visible and invisible – of the world around us.

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In the spirit of this project I should add too that none of the friendships, encounters, or experiences that have paralleled or preceded this doctoral dissertation have been inconsequential – all of them have added immeasurably to the completion of my PhD.

CREATIVITY, RELATIONALITY, AFFECT, ETHICS: THE OUTLINES OF A MODEST (AESTHETIC) ONTOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

- I) What Can (Aesthetic) Theory Do?
- II) Newness and Other Creative Conventions
- III) Affect, Affordances, and Immanent Relations

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- I) Questioning Creation's Conditions
- II) Why Painting?
- III) Art and Becoming Sociologically Subjected
- IV) Interdisciplinarity: Avoiding a Partial Picture
- V) New Materialist Ontologies and Avoiding Abstraction

PART 1: PAINTING AS A PARABLE OF CREATION

- 1.1 What About Art is Inconsequential? The Case of Painting
- 1.2 What *Else* can (a) Painting Do?
- 1.3 Ubiquitous Excessiveness and the Problem of Determination
- 1.4 New Assumptions

PART 2: NON-REPRESENTATION, EXPRESSIONISM, DETERMINATION, AND RECIPROCITY

2.1 Non-Representational Theorizing: Spinoza, Deleuze, Massumi

2.2 Expressionism vs. Representation

2.3 Spinoza's Novel Determination

2.4 Relational Reciprocity and Creative Agential Production

PART 3: CREATIVE DETERMINATIONS AND AFFECTIVE ETHICS

3.1 Novel Creativity as Rule Rather than Exception

3.2 Deleuze, Bacon, and Creating Chaos on Response to Clichés

3.3 Free Marks and Embodying Unpredictability

3.4 Chance, Affect, and Confronting Clichés

3.5 Micro and Macro Modulations of Affect

3.6 Whitehead, Vagueness, and the Creation of Novelty

3.7 New Deleuzian Derivations

3.8 Is Art Especially Affective? Responding to O'sullivan

3.9 Aesthetic Atom Bombs: Responding to Zepke

3.10 Affect as Art vs. Art as Affect

3.11 Ethology: A Down to Earth Ontology

3.12 Ethology and the Artlessness of Activity

3.13 Mullarkey Questioning Creativity: Why Invent? Why Experiment?

3.15 Radical Immanence and Henry's Autoaffective Ontology

3.15 Affordances and the Reciprocal Limits of the New

3.17 Change, Agency, and Interdependent Affordances: Outlines of a Modest Ontology

PART 4: MODEST ONTOLOGIES AND MAGNANIMOUS CREATIVITY

- 4.1 Assuming a Modest Ontology
- 4.2 Ubiquitous Newness: Becoming is Already Becoming
- 4.3 Speculative Realism's Weird Vision of Reality
- 4.4 The Determined Givenness of Whitehead's Creativity
- 4.5 Contemporary De-Anthropomorphizational Derivations
- 4.6 *Amor Fati* and the Inevitability of Modesty
- 4.7 Thing Power, Cave Paintings, and Non-Human Creativity
- 4.8 Art Making Within an Extended Field Of Agents: The Contingent Character of Creativity
- 4.9 Nietzsche through the Back Door: Becoming-Artist and the Demands of a Modest Ontology
- 4.10 Spinoza's Self-Interested Co-Creation
- 4.11 Bicameralism and Collaborative Creativity
- 4.12 Creative Self-Fashioning and Loving Our Fate
- 4.13 Modesty, Magnanimity, Generosity, and Counterintuitive Creativity

CREATIVITY, RELATIONALITY, AFFECT, ETHICS: OUTLINING A MODEST (AESTHETIC) ONTOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

1) What Can (Art) Theory Do?

Keep your pen aloof from inspiration, which it will then attract with magnetic power. The more circumspectly you delay writing down an idea, the more maturely developed it will be on surrendering itself. Speech conquers thought, but writing commands it. (Benjamin, 2004, p. 458)

Formerly we used to represent things visible on earth, things we either liked to look at or would have liked to see. Today we reveal the reality that is behind visible things, thus expressing the belief that the visible world is merely an isolated case in relation to the universe and that there are many more other, latent realities. (Klee, 1984, p. 185)

[Witness] the vehement oscillations which upset the individual as long as he seeks only his own center and does not see the circle of which he himself is a part; for if these oscillations upset him, it is because each corresponds to an individuality *other* than that which he takes as his own from the point of view of the undiscoverable center. Hence, an identity is essentially fortuitous and a series of individualities must be traversed by each, in order that the fortuity make them completely necessary. (Klossowski in Deleuze, 1990b, p. 177)

Are artists autonomous agents? Are they individuals? Engaging with these seemingly commonsensical rather than confounding questions is the objective of this doctoral dissertation. Moreover, my answer to both questions is: no. My objective herein, then, will be to develop the following argument: that because the individual elements of creative, art-producing networks are so profoundly relational, to speak of

individual elements or of agents or artists *at all* is to describe an incomplete picture. That is, I explore in this project the aesthetic, social, and ethical implications of an ontological position that posits that everything – whether material or immaterial – relies on networks of intra-connectivity in order to exist (Barad, 2007). After all, how can any individual action occur or any individual element exist in the absence of that upon which that action is enacted, or without that action being made possible by another element or "individual"?

If we pursue these questions, individuals and their creative capacities do not precede actions. Rather, "individual" actions, as I've already suggested, are made possible by relations, and it is these relationally dependent actions that produce what we call "individuals" as an *effect*. That is, every expression of creativity or creation is an expression of, at the very least, co-creativity or co-creation. As Barad observes: "Individuals do not pre-exist their intra-relating" (2007 p. ix). Creativity and creation, when described as being initiated by relations rather than by individuals, becomes especially mysterious. Similarly, when what we typically think of as agents or individuals are re-cast as effects rather than actors, as product rather than creator, the creative process itself is transformed and our attempts to think of ourselves as creators is, as I will argue, productively thwarted.

My PhD dissertation engages broadly with two questions: (1) from where do painters – here understood as effects of relations – and other creative agents derive their creative capacities? (2) How might our answers to question 1 – answers that inevitably betray ontological commitments about how "things" come into "being" – contribute to an ethics, or to an ontologically derived ethical starting point? Ontology, of course, is the philosophical study of existence and how existence comes into being.

This project, however, has evolved. We might say that the process by which it was written, and the story it ends up telling, was and is faithful to the credo: if it's static, it's problematic. What began as an object-oriented exploration of painting – I have an Honours BA in Fine Arts (studio) – has evolved into an analysis of some of the theoretical and ontological assumptions about how paintings and other creative works ("artistic" or otherwise) come into being. As I continued my research individual categories such as *the artwork*, or *the artist*, or *the audience* became increasingly untenable, only to be overwhelmed by a logic of de-individuation

whereby the interconnectedness of things forces us to recognize that individuals exist as products or as effects of their relationships. In other words, individuals lose their agential capacities to relationships, creating a situation where it is the relationship that acts and that creates our capacities as its effects.

The radically relational ontology I describe has significant ethical implications insofar as the human is decentered and reconstituted not as agent but as effect. That is, relations do not exist *between* individuals; rather, what we call individuals exist thanks to the productive power of relations. The human, according to this account, is embedded within and determined by her/his relations and is incapable of creating images in isolation. This decentered image of the human, I will suggest, is an appropriate response to an ontologically- and experientially-informed reflexivity that redefines the human as dependent, inextricably bound, linked, and determined by intra-relationality. According to this ontological account, the human is effectively weakened and encounters powerlessness when attempting to act on its own (not that such an act would be possible to begin with). I will argue that rather than resist this relationally induced powerlessness we choose to embrace it,¹ and by doing so we enact our ability to embrace unconditionally the impotence of our individualist fantasies.

In response to the suggestion that a relationally-bound human is not only decentered but, seemingly, disempowered I suggest that this is not the case. By performing an ethics based on a new way of imagining our relationship with the world, humans benefit from ethically-derived ways of acting premised more on cooperation than domination, more on open dialogue than decisiveness. Acting ethically, then, requires that we take as a precondition of action our new, more modest, location within our worlds – worlds that rely on us *less* than we rely on them. We must resist the temptation to define and determine the capacities of things based on our rather

¹ As Lawlor explains, when faced with the inevitabilities of existence – whether our dependence on relationality or, in Lawlor's case, our impotence in the face of impermeable borders – we are still in position to embrace these conditions, to choose them and thereby re-code their meaning and significance: "We have seen that we are too weak to stop those who contaminate us from entering in and we are too weak to stop those who flee from exiting out. Yet, there is strength in our weakness. Even if we are too weak to stop entrance and to stop exit, we are also strong enough, we have enough force, to let the others in, we are strong enough to let the others out. Letting passage happen changes the manner in which the others are coded. Instead of everyone being coded, indeed, super-coded, as the enemy, now let us super-code everyone as the friend. The idea of unconditional friendship brings us to the primary definition of the friend of the outside, the mode of existence that is the reverse of the mode presented to us by the suicide bomber. The friend of the outside is defined as the one who embodies the weak force. A weak force is defined as a power to let happen, a power to be powerless, an ability to be unable" (Lawlor, 2008, p. 27).

narrow all-too-human access to them. Questions this project will address in order to further articulate what sort of ethical actions are produced by a modest relational ontology include: How does a relational ontology redefine how we imagine the natural environment? How does radical relationality transform our image of ourselves? What sort of imagery will we create in response to such a radically relational account of reality?

In a recent issue of the aesthetic theory journal *Third Text* on the future of art and aesthetic theory and criticism editor Rasheed Araeen writes that while critical art and aesthetic discourses are “fundamental to the understanding of art,” if this understanding “cannot go beyond its academic or institutional frameworks and offer a way forward into the future and affirm life – of everything on this planet – what is the point in such an exercise?” (Araeen, 2009, p. 499-500). This dissertation – written for the most part prior to Araeen’s observation – attempts to engage this very challenge, the challenge of *moving art beyond art*, and of attempting to show aesthetic theory *what it is capable of*. In what follows the destination of my post-Deleuzean ontological proposals is an ethics, an ethics that derives from a particular way of thinking about how art *becomes*, and a particular way of thinking about what it means to *become* an artist, and about whether or not the creative *individual* can be said to exist.

My suggestion is that any understanding of art, artmaking, or creativity in general is a product of more or less conscious ontological assumptions. That is, our assumptions about art, art making, artists, aesthetics, and individuals reveal a whole lot about how we assume the world works and how the world comes to exist. While our assumptions about art and creativity will determine, for instance, what we understand as art, who we consider an artist, our understanding of how art comes into existence, and what entities are or are not *relevant* to art’s becoming and to becoming an artist, our *beliefs* about these things also reveal a fair bit about what we think about free will, what can or cannot have *agency*, how individual entities come into being, and what is or is not relevant to causal processes, change, and creativity.

By working with the assumption that art is always *a collective enunciation* and an expression of unknowable forces – whether human or non-human, material or immaterial – I develop a logic that attempts to challenge the notion that artists are ever and have ever been *individuals*. Instead, I develop an ontological position from

which to argue that what we refer to as the artist is *always an expression or an effect of multiple entities and forces, of multiple trajectories and contexts*. Moreover, the artist or individual is not only a multiplicity (Deleuze, 1983, p. 24) – composed of multiple, interconnected parts² – but is at each moment granted his/her/its identifiable characteristics by unfolding and ongoing processes of relationality. It is the significance and implications of this particular ontologically-informed perspective of creative processes *in general* that has, I argue, ethical import since *how* we understand creativity has bearing on *what* we think is possible and on *how* we might assume this possibility could come about. Not only that, but how we understand the mechanics of creativity – how art comes into being, for example – already betrays our *ontological commitments* since ontologies are by definition logics we use to understand the nature of being and becoming, the nature of how reality itself *is* and *comes* into being.

As I engaged in my research I soon found myself asking whether or not newness and/or creativity even exist as we tend to understand them. I found myself absorbed by questions regarding human agency, free will, and ethics. I started wondering whether or not it makes sense to regard events, contexts, individuals, and multiplicities as *causally determined* since nothing comes into being, is created, or wills *ex nihilo* – out of nothing – although things *do* frequently exceed our predictive and explanatory powers.

Due to my focus on the de-individualizing capacity of relationality I also emphasize throughout this project how novelty can exist without recourse to any sort of *absolute* newness, and that our anthropocentric emphasis on human creativity does not adequately account for the non-human components, nor the deterministic dimensions, of “creative” endeavours. To be more specific, I engage with the following question: how is our understanding of human creativity changed when we take seriously the endless ways we (if “we” can be said to exist) depend on *things*? That is, what does it mean for us when our ability to exist *would not exist* without *the*

² “Multiplicities are reality itself. They do not presuppose unity of any kind, do not add up to a totality, and do not refer to a subject. Subjectivations, totalizations, and unifications are in fact processes which are produced and appear in multiplicities. The main features of multiplicities are: their elements, which are *singularities*; their relations, which are *becomings*; their events, which are *haecceities* (in other words, subjectless individuations); their space-time, which is *smooth* spaces and times; their model of actualization, which is the *rhizome* (as opposed to the tree as model); their plane of composition, which is a *plateau* (continuous zones of intensity); and the vectors which traverse them, constituting *territories* and degrees of *detritorialization*” (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 310).

things – or better, the relationships of things – that constitute and make possible our existence? Further, what happens when we recognize that *human* creativity is just another instantiation of the co-creative processes of creation itself?

What I am assuming by asking these questions is that we, despite the sensorial and affective abilities of our bodies, suffer from radical perceptual limitations and blinding anthropocentrism. We can only ever look in one direction and be in one place at a time. Our perceptual limitations – limitations *that themselves* contribute to how we understand who we are and what we are capable of – define and limit us in multiple, and quite specific, ways. And yet, our sense of ourselves as agents, as individuals, and as uniquely creative beings is an assumption many of us feel is logical, adequate, and accurate. However, these perceptual limitations determine and come to constitute the questions we ask about ourselves, the actions we believe we can enact, and the way we live our lives. What would happen, then, if we were to think about creativity, innovation, and human agency in a way that takes seriously the determined *limits* that are *derived from* and *defined by* the causal forces that constitute us and our world?

With the contemporary academic interest in movement and mobility (Urry, 2007), networks (Harman, 2009), and materialism (Toscano, 2008) discerning *the steps in a given process* – i.e. what category or event comes 1st or 2nd or 3rd – has become increasingly important. What follows what in the creative *process*? Recent responses to this question have suggested that *affect* comes before interpretation or representation (Massumi, 2002b); *chaos* before *cohesion* (Deleuze, 1990b); *virtual potentialities* before *actuality* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 160).

As I engaged with what could be regarded as the new emphasis on *ordering* demanded by process-centric theories it became clear that what remains in this ontological account of emergence is a tacit faith in individuals, at both micro and macro scales. So, networks remain composed of individual components (which are themselves composed of ever smaller individuals), movement is achieved by individuals, processes are accomplished by individuals, etc. These individuals, in turn, are composed of other individuals operating at a variety of scales. After a while this rampant individualism became more obvious and more problematic. I began to ask, for example, why we assume individuals have agential power of their own at all? That is, how can any individual action take place without something upon which that

action is exercised, or without that action being, essentially, made possible by another “individual?” It seemed to me that *individuals* do not precede actions; rather, actions are made possible by *relations*, and it is these relationally dependent actions that *produce* individuals.

Artists, then, do not act alone. Similarly, creativity and change is not a product of individuals but is a collective enunciation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 439). In keeping with the *ordering* idea my position has become that relations precede affect, chaos, virtuality, etc. My project then became one of engaging with theorists, aestheticians, and philosophers who provide us with the scaffolding with which to construct an ontology that while beginning with process concludes with relations.

Painting – and artistic creation more generally – functions in my project as an activity and as an object of study that can be substituted with other creative activities, whether aesthetic, political, or social. Nonetheless, painting remains an activity numerous influential theorists and philosophers (particularly from France) have employed in order to think about topics such as creativity, art, and becoming. Some of the theorists who have engaged specifically with the painting problem include: Derrida (1987), Foucault (2002), Deleuze and Guattari (1994), Merleau-Ponty (1996), Nancy (1996), and Lyotard (1991). For them the significance of painting might be due to its age-old resilience as a human endeavour – the fact that painting came before alphabets and written texts, for example. Perhaps it is due to the visual, typically non-alphabetical, character of painting; perhaps, too, it is due to painting’s seemingly uncomplicated component parts – pigment, surface, applicator, and artist – being more or less consistent across time, space, and culture. For most of these theorists painting is an activity that, as painter Paul Klee once said, “Makes visible the invisible” (Klee, 1970, p. 10). This project will not engage with the work of all these theorists of painting and creative processes, but will focus instead on Deleuze, Nancy, Nietzsche, Spinoza, Whitehead and their interlocutors.

At its best painting is an activity that, for so many theorists, exemplifies creativity, that brings something new into being, and that operates at a visceral level to generate an affective response in viewer and artist alike. Indeed, works of art – like trees falling in forests – are unable to achieve their full capacity to have effects when no one is around to bare witness or to be affected. Paintings, and other things, require relationships through which their capacities can be articulated, and in order to have

capacities at all. O'Sullivan describes the necessarily reciprocal relationship between, in this case, artwork and audience as follows:

Staying with the notion of effects, we might say that signification is only one set of effects which the object, or machine, we call art produces. It is also important to remember that it is not just our art-machine that produces these effects, but our art-machine in conjunction with a subject-machine. For the signification effect, or indeed the aesthetic effect, does not come from the object, but from the object being confronted by (coupled with) a beholder, and a very particular kind of beholder, for it is not everyone who 'gets' the meaning, 'feels' the effect. Art is produced by the coupling of two very specific kinds of machine. We might note here that the subject-machine operates as very much a 'limit point' to the ever expanding circuits of effects generated by the art work and in this sense constitutes, at least in part, that very work. (O'Sullivan, 2005, p. 22)

The significance of relationships – of machinic assemblages, in Deleuzian parlance – for the enactment of an object's *being*,³ or the expression of what any individual thing is, will be crucial to our exploration of what paintings (and other things) can *do*. This prioritization of relationship – of the interdependence of things, and of the significance of this interdependence on how we think about art, creativity, and, indeed, ourselves – adds to (or perhaps undoes) the increasingly limited discourse that for so long has regarded humans as *uniquely* "creative," and as beings that impress their will(s) upon an inert, unsuspecting, and always available earth. While such anti-anthropocentrism has certainly been the name of the theoretical game since, for example, Nietzsche, too often – in my estimation – the role of non-human forces and entities has remained in place as figures that *contribute to the complexity*, but do not necessarily *challenge the authority* of our understanding of what it means to be "human." This discussion, then, will also contest what I have come to regard as a certain type of contemporary fetishistic theoretical discourse that extends the Renaissance notion of the artist-genius,⁴ and that seems intent on

³ The term "Being" here is being used in the Heideggerian (1996) sense.

⁴ "The fundamentally new element in the Renaissance conception of art is the discovery of the concept of genius, and the idea that the work of art is the creation of an autocratic personality, that this personality transcends tradition, theory and rules, even the work itself, is richer and deeper than the work and impossible to express adequately within any objective form" (Hauser, 2003, p. 120).

anthropocentrically affirming the artist as a uniquely creative individual agent (within a field of emergent flux) whose role in life is to defy the nihilistic machinations of, for example, capitalism, biologism, neo-liberalism, statism, etc. (see for example Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; 1984).

This dissertation, then, unfolds as a series of unorthodox and interdisciplinary qualitative examinations about painting and creativity. I begin with an exploration of the limits of painting and end with an ontologically-informed ethical proposal derived from this analysis of what painting can be (and what painting can do) that we will be examining along the way. To open up painting (and other forms of “creative” expression) to new forms of thought, and to show how this opening up can have ontological and ethical effects is the task this project will perform.⁵

II) Newness and Other Creative Conventions

The task of philosophy when it creates concepts, entities, is always to extract an event from things and beings, to set up the new event from things and beings, always to give them a new event: space, time, matter, thought, the possible as events. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 31)

Two of the assumptions this project attempts to challenge include: 1) the ideas that artists are artist-geniuses who operate as independent individuals and, 2) that artists have the capacity to independently create what Deleuze would describe as *the new* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 193).

The origins and evolution of the artist-genius concept is well trodden terrain we will not be dealing with explicitly (Barker et al, 1999; Nahm, 1950; Nochlin, 2003). Suffice it to say, as Nochlin reminds us, the category of “genius” tends to be thought of as “an atemporal and mysterious power somehow embedded in the person of the Great Artist” and that this category is often “intrinsic to a great deal of art-historical writing” (Nochlin, 2003, p. 231). Indeed, Nochlin seems unwittingly to endorse the

⁵ As Michael Halewood put it in a recent issue of *Theory, Culture, and Society* the task of today’s social theory is to leave behind “any nostalgia for an innocent conception of reality and, instead, recognizing the messy but fully constructed character of all existence (including rocks, experiments, poems, commodities and abstractions)” (Halewood, 2008, p. 3-4).

objectives of this very study when she observes that in light of the popularity of the artist-genius concept, it is “no accident that the crucial question of the conditions *generally* productive of great art has so rarely been investigated, or that attempts to investigate such general problems have, until fairly recently, been dismissed as unscholarly, too broad, or the province of some other discipline, like sociology”⁶ (Nochlin, 2003, p. 231). Nochlin, who is here writing an article entitled, “Why have there been no great women artists?” (2003), concludes by declaring that “art is not a free, autonomous activity of a super-endowed individual, ‘influenced’ by previous artists, and, more vaguely and superficially, by ‘social forces’”; rather, “the total situation of art making” occurs in “a social situation” that has “integral elements” that are “mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions, be they art academies, systems of patronage, mythologies of the divine creator, artist as he-man or social outcast” (2003, p. 232).⁷

The idea of the artist-genius posits the existence of something – the genius-ness itself – that resides in a mysterious whereabouts, beyond and prior to the concerns of everyday life. Geniuses, it seems, come to us from some sort of an outside in order to save us from, if nothing else, the drudgery of non-genius thoughts and ideas. Traces of a similarly emancipatory logic, I argue, can also be found in the work of Deleuze and Guattari when they write of the emancipatory potential of newness and of “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987): “If one concept is ‘better’ than an earlier one, it is because it makes us aware of new variations and unknown resonances, it carries out unforeseen cutting-out, it brings forth an Event” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 28). Indeed, working with the assumption that there is no “outside” from which things come or to which we can go, this category of the new will be regarded here with some suspicion. For Deleuze and Guattari art and newness go hand in hand. Indeed, for them to produce art is to produce the new itself. Deleuze and Guattari explain:

If there is progress in art it is because art can live only by creating new percepts and affects as so many detours, returns, dividing lines, changes of

⁶ Nochlin goes on: “To encourage a dispassionate, impersonal, sociological, and institutionally oriented approach would reveal the entire romantic, elitist, individual-glorifying, and monograph-producing substructure upon which the profession of art history is based, and which has only recently been called into question by a group of younger dissidents” (Nochlin, 2003, p. 231).

⁷ As mentioned earlier, in this project we go further than Nochlin suggests we should, calling even the category of the social – or at least what constitutes it – into question.

level and scale. From this point of view, the distinction between two states of oil painting assumes a completely different, aesthetic and no longer technical aspect – this distinction clearly does not come down to ‘representational or not,’ since no art and no sensation have ever been representational. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 193)

But rather than capitulate to the emancipatory promise of the new⁸ routinely espoused by Deleuze and Guattari, rather than attempt to articulate the ways in which artistic expression can function as a distinct source from which lines of flight emerge, producing ruptures and structure-shaking deterritorializations (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), I have found *more* persuasive ontological arguments that take seriously the significance of *limitations* and *determinations* of immanence and the relationship of each of these to *interrelations*. Limits, it should be noted, do indeed occupy an under-discussed dimension of Deleuze (and Guattari’s) work,⁹ functioning as the bulwark encountered when a body, for example, finally discovers what it is capable of. Nonetheless, it is the emancipatory resonances of Deleuze’s discussion of newness – particularly insofar as it reinforces the artist-genius narrative – that I will be critiquing.

The philosopher to whom I look as a precedent in order to begin describing the role and significance of limits – including more extreme forms of limits such as causal determinism – is Spinoza, whose work profoundly influenced both Deleuze (1990a, 1988) and Nietzsche, whose writings we will be delving into in a more sustained way later on.

III) Affect, Affordances, and Immanent Relations

⁸ Newness’ emancipatory and transformational capacities are on display in the following quote by Deleuze: “The newness of an apparatus in relation to those preceding it is what we call its currency, our currency. The new is the current. The current is not what we are but rather what we become, what we are in the process of becoming, in other words the Other, our becoming-other” (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 345)

⁹ Deleuze’s emphasis on the importance of appreciating the role played by limits is exemplified in the following passage: “[I]t is not a question of considering absolute degrees of power, but only of knowing whether a being eventually ‘leaps over’ or transcends its limits in going to the limit of what it can do, whatever its degree. ‘To the limit’, it will be argued, still presupposes a limit. Here, limit no longer refers to what maintains the thing under a law, nor to what delimits or separates it from other things. On the contrary, it refers to that on the basis of which it is deployed and deploys all its power; hubris ceases to be simply condemnable and *the smallest becomes equivalent to the largest* once it is not separated from what it can do. This enveloping measure is the same for all things, the same also for substance, quality, quantity, etc., since it forms a single maximum at which the developed diversity of all degrees touches the equality which envelops them” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 37).

[J]ust as extension is determined by no limits, so also thought is determined by no limits. Therefore, just as the human body is not extension absolutely, but only an extension determined in a certain way, according to the laws of extended nature, by motion and rest, so also the human mind, or soul, is not thought absolutely, but only a thought determined in a certain way, according to the laws of thinking nature, by ideas, a thought which, one infers, must exist when the human body begins to exist. (Spinoza in Curley, 1994, p. xix)

For Spinoza (1632-77), the ongoing, autopoietic unfolding of the world expresses the inexhaustible and eternal power of creation, or of the original creator which, for him, is God. Spinoza develops an immanent ontology that describes everything that exists as an attribute and expression of the originary creative force that, due to its omnipotence and ubiquitousness, cannot help but be creative and cannot help but be a generator of novelty. Spinoza develops an ontology that regards the multiplicitous processes and entities that populate the world as so many expressions of a single force: creation itself. He argues that these expressions of creation are always, in a non-moral and non-human way, perfect – despite our myopic tendencies to see evil intentions and transgressions all around us. In Spinoza's view the world is perfect because it unfolds precisely in accordance with its capacities, no more no less. In other words, Spinoza makes the observation that a thing, a context, an entity is only ever capable of what it is capable of as a result of its relations; entities, in his view, are in a very real sense pre-determined by their capacities that in turn are determined by relationships. The world and its goings-on are always in perfect harmony with their ability, literally, to go on becoming. These capacities, in turn, are teased out and extracted by their relationship to other things or circumstances upon which they can be expressed and through which they can be actualized. Further – and as we now take for granted – these capacities are not fixed but are always changing depending on context, and so are *always* (and are always becoming) different, novel, evolving and unique. Spinoza explains:

[A]ll the notions by which ordinary people are accustomed to explain Nature [and things] are only states of the imagination, and don't indicate the nature of anything except the imagination. [... But m]any people are accustomed to arguing in this way: "If all things have followed from the necessity of God's most perfect nature, why are there so many imperfections in Nature? Why

are things so rotten [...]? So ugly [...]? Why is there confusion, evil, and wrong-doing?" I [say] that those who argue like this are easily answered. For the perfection of things is to be judged solely [on the basis of] their nature and power; things are not more or less perfect because they please or offend [our] senses, or because they are useful or harmful to human nature (Spinoza, 2004, p. 21-2).

For Spinoza, as for contemporary theoretical physicists or complexity theorists, the world is composed in the first instance and from top to bottom of impersonal forces that operate according to the terms of interdependent relationships. While these forces constitute us (and other things), they are not necessarily interested in us (or other things). They are in relation with each other and clump together into composites – *machinic assemblages* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). This world of forces is always changing, rearranging, and differentiating, and all of its components have, depending on their relationships, a capacity to affect things, or to be *affected by* things. These are forces in tension, organizing themselves according to configurations that enhance and maximize their capacities.

This concept of affect that figures prominently in Spinoza's writing will become important in later sections of this project, since affects and percepts are what art – and painting – are created to generate (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). Affect, as it will be defined in this project, does not refer as it so often does, to emotions or feelings (although emotion and feelings can themselves affect and be affected). As Massumi explains, "you have to understand affect as something other than simply a personal feeling. By 'affect' I don't mean 'emotion' in the everyday sense" (Massumi, nd., online). Massumi points out that his use of the word affect "comes primarily from Spinoza" who speaks of the body as being defined by its relations, or by "its capacity for affecting or being affected" (Massumi, nd., online); Massumi elaborates on this Spinozist – and Deleuzian – understanding of affect as follows:

These are not two different capacities – they always go together. When you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before. You have made a transition, however slight. You have stepped over a threshold. Affect is this passing of a threshold, seen from the point of view of the change in capacity. It's crucial to remember that Spinoza

uses this to talk about the body. What a body is, he says, is what it can do as it goes along. This is a totally pragmatic definition. A body is defined by what capacities it carries from step to step. What these are exactly is changing constantly. A body's ability to affect or be affected – its charge of affect – isn't something fixed (Massumi, 2003, online).¹⁰

Affects, for Spinoza and Deleuze, are those forces that things exert on other things. These forces, in turn, become actualized so long as their requirements (their “desires,” so to speak) are satisfied and enabled by their environment and context. A composite entity like an artist – that is, an intersection of multiple forces and affective capacities – *attempts*,¹¹ in turn, – and in accordance with its “preferences” in a given situation – to maintain coherence in the face of other forces that, at each moment, threaten either to destroy it or over-determine it. Affects, for Spinoza and Deleuze, are trajectories in transition that effectively follow their collective noses, so to speak.¹²

Intent on augmenting their capacity to act, these forces enter into relations that, ideally, enlarge their capacities to do what they can do. Further, as I've been suggesting, any entity's capacity to act is dependent upon a relationship acting on it, thereby providing said entity with something to act upon. Spinoza's ontology, then, situates entities (such as humans) within an extended affective – that is, relationally defined – landscape of animate/inanimate, conscious/unconscious, material/immaterial agents. Humans, suggests Spinoza, are themselves organisms that attempt to maintain coherence within this field of forces and, notably, are prone to bestow value or heap disdain upon things that either please or displease them,

¹⁰ I want to highlight again how in this project my argument is that by prioritizing relationality the category of “individual” and of inherent capacities is being challenged. In other words, while for Massumi and Spinoza a body is defined by its capacities – its virtual potential – that it “carries from step to step” (Massumi, 2003, online), my argument is that individuals never have any inherent capacities at all, or at least that individual's capacities are always created in the moment and expressed differently depending on the relationships in which the individual finds itself.

¹¹ Here we run up against the limits of our language's conventions, conventions that prefer to ascribe agency to “subjects” (especially human subjects) rather than objects and other entities.

¹² “The issue, after sensation, perception, and memory is *affect*. ‘Relation between movement and rest’ is another way of saying ‘transition.’ For Spinoza, the body was one with its transition. Each transition is accompanied by a variation in capacity: a change in which powers to affect and be affected are addressable by a next event and how readily addressable they are – or to what degree they are present as futurities. That “degree” is a bodily intensity, and its present futurity a tendency. The Spinozist problematic of affect offers a way of weaving together concepts of movement, tendency, and intensity in a way that takes us right back to the beginning: in what sense the body coincides with its own transitions and its transitioning with its potential” (Massumi, 2002b, p. 15).

respectively, despite what for Spinoza is the ontological fact that the forces that capitulate with, or confound, our desires, when thought of as simply attempting to maximize their own capacities, are actually impersonal, unmotivated, and effectively “perfect” expressions – in their own way – of creative becoming.

Everything, for Spinoza, is at once constrained and enabled by its capacities, and its particular affective, material, and immaterial capabilities. Or conversely, as I argue in this project, all capacities come to exist as material and immaterial effects of affective relations.¹³ While such a mechanistic and deterministic (and “pragmatic,” as Massumi would say) view of the world could be regarded as misanthropic, relativistic, and even fatalistic, it can also be regarded differently. That is to say, it *can* be regarded as an ontological formulation that dissolves hierarchy (subject/object, material/immaterial, actual/virtual, etc.) and rigid identity categories, and challenges the assumptions of our anthropocentric worldview (assumptions that have historically contributed to our definition of art, artists, creativity, etc.). By foregrounding the idea that “things” are motivated by a “desire” to express their capacities and enter into mutually beneficial configurations, the contours of an ethics begin to be visible, one that prioritizes interconnectedness, that regards the world as expressing a sort of interdependent form of distributed agency,¹⁴ and that, by exposing the arbitrariness and impersonal nature of “good” and “evil,” encourages us to live, as Spinoza would say, harmoniously with nature, ourselves, and each other. In his view, by attending to the requirements of others (human or other-others) the ethical (and he would say “rational”) individual also serves her or himself. Spinoza explains: “[W]hat is needed is for [people] to help one another to get what is needed for the support of life” (Spinoza, 2004, p. 118). He goes on:

[T]here is nothing more useful to a [person] than [another person]. [For, people] can wish for nothing more helpful to their staying in existence than

¹³ While my argument is that relationality actually produces capacities prior to their becoming characteristics of “individuals,” it should be clear that there is a strong affinity between my *extension* or *tweaking* of Deleuze or Spinoza’s theories and the original theories themselves.

¹⁴ The significance of distributing agency across living and non-living entities is explained by Nigel Thrift as follows: “Behaviour can no longer be localised in individuals conceived as preformed homunculi; but has to be treated epigenetically as a function of complex material systems which cut across individuals (assemblages) and which transverse phyletic lineages and organismic boundaries (rhizomes). This requires the articulation of a distributed conception of agency. The challenge is to show that nature consists of a field of multiplicities, assemblages of heterogeneous components (human, animal, viral, molecular, etc.) in which ‘creative evolution’ can be shown to involve blocks of becoming.” (Ansell-Pearson, 1999, p. 171) (Thrift, 2000, p. 36).

that [everyone] should be in such harmony that the minds and bodies of them all would be like one mind and one body; that all together should try as hard as they can to stay in existence; and that all together should seek for themselves the common advantage of all. From this it follows that [those] who are governed by reason [...] to seek their own advantage [...] want nothing for themselves that they don't [also] want [for others]. (Spinoza, 2004, p. 93)

But what does this line of inquiry have to do with how we understand painting? Quite a lot, I would like to argue. Most notably, it forces us to take seriously the *relationship* between art and artist and, crucially, has the potential to reconstruct our understanding of artistic agency, locating the agent not in the individual artist, nor in the artwork, but in the relationship that brings them both into being, bestowing upon them their respective capacities. Spinoza's attempts, then, to take seriously the ways bodies, environments, and emergent processes pursue, in essence, paths of least resistance that accord, at once, with their capacities and with their attempts to maintain coherence, produce a flat ontology that recognizes and attends to the fact that things (whether individuals or collectivities) have, according to their capacities to affect and be affected, particular agent-like dispositions and orientations that are afforded by contexts and environments. Psychologist James Jerome Gibson (1904–1979) describes these changing sets of capacities and limitations as “affordances” (Gibson, 1986):

An important fact about the affordances of the environment is that they are in a sense objective, real, and physical, unlike values and meanings, which are often supposed to be subjective, phenomenal, and mental. But, actually, an affordance is neither an objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like. An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behaviour. It is both physical and psychical, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer. (Gibson, 1986, p. 129)

Gibson suggests that an affordance is whatever one entity allows another entity to do. For example, I might perceive that one of the affordances of this viscous pigment is that it can be smeared onto a canvas (it is smear-able), or diluted (it is dilute-able), or

mixed with a different pigment (it is mix-able).¹⁵ Similarly, individuals manifest affordances, events and contexts manifest affordances, ideas, ideologies and concepts manifest affordances.

When one thinks about things in terms of affordances one is thinking about things in terms of relationships and in terms of potential. An object's affordances, for example, are brought into being, so to speak, by the individual (or assemblage, etc.) with which the object doing the affording is in a relation (and vice versa). For example, were it not for *my* desire to make a painting today that paintbrush would not have, in essence, offered itself – afforded itself – to me as a tool with which to make a painting. Once the paintbrush combines with my desire to make a painting a situation emerges where the paintbrush, in collaboration with me, threatens to do all sorts of unpredictable things to the painting.

Affordances, then, are not so much a function of the inherent capacities of objects, but are brought to the surface by the ways objects are in a relation. So the capacities of things – whether paintbrushes or sandwiches – are brought into being by entering into collaboration with other things through the *medium* of relation. In Spinozist terms the paintbrush and the artist, for example, are affecting and being affected by *one another*, affording one another the opportunity to actualize potentials that had, until that fruitful moment of their encounter, not existed. There are, then, no latent potentials – or capacities of things. Capacities do not, I argue, hide out in objects waiting to be actualized – as Graham Harman suggests in his ambitious object-oriented philosophy (2005)¹⁶ – but are produced *in the moment by the relationship* entered into by the objects involved in the interaction. Here, of course, we potentially have a situation of infinite regress wherein the object's capacity to have a capacity, or a capacity to enter into relations in the first place, is itself a hidden – or latent – capacity housed deep within its essence. This capacity – for change – is, we could imagine, not itself a capacity so much as it is a condition, an *a priori* state of affairs that affords capacities the conditions for their existence (this distinction, however, seems tenuous at best).

This interconnection of so-called *objects* and *subjects*, this blurring of the lines between *acting* and *being acted upon* (when I make a painting is the paintbrush self-

¹⁵ I examine Gibson's affordances in more detail later in the text.

¹⁶ Harman will be discussed at greater length in later sections.

actualizing or am I?) objectifies the degree to which we are, in effect, *created* by the world we live in, by its affordances, capacities, and propensities. Moreover, our creative acts too are expressions of multiplicities rather than of individuals. We encounter and experience the world as an evolving set of enabling constraints wherein the capacities of things, and of ourselves, are constantly producing one another and adapting one to the other.

What is becoming increasingly apparent is that a project on creativity, ontology, art, affect, and ethics can, when the boundaries and definitions are poked and prodded, quickly become quite complex. When agency and creativity are thought of as being distributed across a world already predisposed to particular capacities to affect and be affected, what it means to be an artist, what it means to be creative, what it means to be “human” is called into question.

Before closing this introductory section I’d like to stress that while my description of the artist and the human agent will here, in some senses, be challenged by this ontology of relationality, affordances, and distributed agency, they will also, at the same time, be expanded. By asking, with Spinoza, “How do things work?” or, “What are things capable of?” the autopoietic unfolding of existence itself becomes coloured by a creative – agent-like – hue. By examining the interconnected production of affordances taking place all the time, and at all scales, the capacities – actual and virtual – of inert objects *in relation* can themselves come to be regarded as creative. Finally, my sense is that attempting to articulate the degree to which we are embedded within and a product of our environments, is *itself* an ethical task that deserves further expression.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I) Questioning

Creation's Conditions

Philosophy does not consist in knowing and is not inspired by truth. Rather, it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that determine success or failure. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 82)

As described above, this project's primary objective is to trace artistic and other forms of creativity backwards towards their conditions of possibility, not so as to enumerate or list these conditions, but in order to be able to appreciate that the conditions of possibility of all creative acts are immeasurably broad and complex, extending beyond the social or environmental milieu in which a painting ends up finding itself towards a zone of pure potential, a pre-individuated zone of productive and responsive relationality.

This regression functions to distill the creative process to its three most basic elements: difference, repetition, and relationality. Paradoxically, relationally-produced difference – insofar as it is *the* condition of possibility – is the one thing that consistently repeats; nonetheless, as Deleuze reminds us, this repetitive process of differentiation differs from itself with each repetition (Deleuze, 1994).¹⁷

¹⁷ Deleuze on the significance of difference and repetition for moving beyond binary modes of thought: "Whenever we think difference, we tend to subordinate it to identity (from the point of view of the concept or the subject: for example, specific difference presupposes a genus as the concept of identity). We also tend to subordinate it to resemblance (from the point of view of perception), to opposition (from the point of view of predicates), and to the analogous (from the point of view of judgment). In other words, we never think difference in itself. Philosophy, in Aristotle's work, managed to develop an organic representation of difference, not to mention an orgiastic, infinite representation in the work of Leibniz and Hegel. But it had still yet to break through to difference in itself.

"Repetition has perhaps fared no better. Though in a different way, we also tend to think of repetition in terms of the identical, the similar, the equal, or the opposite. In this case, we create difference without a concept: one thing is a repetition of another whenever they differ though they have the same concept. From then on, whatever arrives on the scene to vary the repetition seems at the same time to cover or hide it. Again, as with difference, a concept of repetition has eluded our grasp. But could it be that we adequately formulate a concept of repetition when we perceive that variation is not something extra added to repetition, only to conceal it, but rather its condition or constitutive element – interiority par excellence? Disguise belongs no more to repetition than

Significantly, it is this differentiation that makes new, creative pursuits – such as painting – possible.

The methodological strategy for performing a theoretically-driven project that places relationality at its center will, from the outset, be suspicious of fixed categories, stable identities, and rigid disciplinary boundaries. Indeed, it is only by not taking fixity for granted that thinking differently – or relationally – can begin. Since rigid categories are in question, one of the methodological tactics employed in this dissertation is to move away from a focus on finished products and towards an openness to emergent processes. That is, my focus is on the ever-changing *conditions* of creation rather than on conditioned creations, for it is precisely by being open to the contingent and contextual nature of things that we can become aware of the complex dependencies and processes that produce what we come to regard as completed determinations or products.

When we start backing up our thinking to the pre-individuated conditions of possibility we can start to unfold our thinking to the ways in which creative acts come into being (or become actual). When we are thinking purely in terms of what potential characteristics, relationships, or affects are concealed within a system that includes, but is not limited to, an artist, a paintbrush, some wood, some canvas, some pigment, an audience, a context we can begin to identify the singular characteristics and propensities of the materials and contexts themselves, as well as the interconnected relationships that *produce* the paintbrush and the artist, the artist and his context, the canvas and the wood, the context and the audience, the audience and the paintbrush, etc.

It is these potentials and relationships – their very multitudinousness – and their effects that my dissertation will be describing. Again, not to enumerate or compartmentalize them, but to observe that theoretical paradigms that describe paintings in terms of their resemblance to such and such, or that enumerate painting's temporal existence purely in accordance with conventional notions of chronological order, or that limit the conditions out of which a painting emerges, or that attempt to ascertain what such and such a painting *is*, don't tell the whole story.

displacement does to difference: a common transport, diaphora. Taking this to the limit, could we speak of a single power, whether of difference or of repetition, which would make itself felt only in the multiple and would determine multiplicities?" (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 301-302)

Certainly, my aim is not to tell this story – or a part of this story – in a way that completes it, but in a way that opens it up to more of its potential. This dissertation posits a point from which to begin, rather than a location that marks an end. Similarly, my engagement with art and painting need not limit the potential sites where the theories described in my dissertation might be deployed. Rather, by using artmaking as my object of study my aim is also to describe processes of becoming more generally. Moreover, this dissertation sidesteps many aesthetic lines of inheritance – Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytic, semiotic/structuralist¹⁸ – in order to tease out links between aesthetics, ontology, and ways of doing ethics that, at once, draw inspiration from and build upon the aesthetic, ontological, and ethical theories of, for example, Deleuze (1994), Connolly (2005), and Nietzsche (1974) and speculative realists like Harman (2005).

Creative acts like painting are expressions of complexly entangled interconnectedness. Entangled interconnections, in turn, create assemblages wherein individual entities are always dependent upon, and products of, other entities. Individuals, in such a scenario, lose their ability to be defined by firm identities, becoming instead products of their environment and their relationships. Interconnected processes of production never stop changing long enough to be adequately defined; rather, they continue to spin off new potentials, affects, relationships, and intensities (DeLanda, 2000). This unending process is its own condition of possibility and insofar as it is a process that is produced by and, in turn, produces difference, at every moment defining and re-defining the conditions of, in this case, painting's possibility.

My dissertation is a qualitative exploration of the resonances that can exist among: painting and creativity, ontology, affect, and ethics. In it I develop a new way to understand and study the processes and products of painting, not as the product of individual artists, but as the effect of complex and continually changing relationships

¹⁸ Harris describes the “new art history” that emerged during the 1980s: “By the mid-1980s, however, the phrase ‘the new art history’ was the one being most commonly used to name a range of developments in academic art history related to issues of disciplinary methods and approaches, theories, and objects of study. This set was usually identified as comprising: (a) Marxist historical, political, and social theory, (b) feminist critiques of patriarchy and the place of women within historical and contemporary societies, (c) psychoanalytic accounts of visual representations and their role in ‘constructing’ social and sexual identity, and (d) semiotic (in Britain, ‘semiological’) and structuralist concepts and methods of analyzing signs and meanings. In contrast, the terms ‘radical art history’ and ‘critical art history’ had been used prior to the mid-1980s to designate *only* forms of art-historical analysis linked directly to political motivations, critique, and activism *outside* of the university” (Harris, 2001, p. 7).

(Tiessen, 2010). I argue that relationality itself is actively productive, producing the *conditions* for the forces – whether actual or virtual, visible or invisible, material or immaterial, human or nonhuman – that create the conditions for painting (and other creative activities).

Painter, painting, and audience, as described in my dissertation, function on a tripartite continuum wherein events and identities emerge and change in time and in a context in which conventional notions of human agency, progress, history and narrative are challenged by an ontology that conceives of entities and systems as being produced as much by propensities and self-organization as by transcendent or reified wholes (i.e. the social, nature, genius, will, the human) (see Jullien, 1995; DeLanda, 2002b, 1997; Hayles, 1999; Pollan, 2001). The ontological presupposition this dissertation articulates is one that argues that “things” are not “other” than their becoming (Ansell-Pearson, 1999), that these becomings are dependent upon relationships, and that what we call things or individuals aren’t so much “produced by” such and such, as they are themselves a continuing process of production (de Beistegui, 2004).

To bring the tools of creativity-research, ontology, affect, and ethics to a sociology of art and to the practice of painting is to make explicit connections that are only now emerging in academia (Grosz, 2008; O’Sullivan, 2005). An exploration such as the one I propose here, by “opening up” new avenues for theoretical, aesthetic and practical inquiry – rather than compartmentalizing complex systems – will demonstrate that the practice of “undisciplined” (or postdisciplinary) social research (Sayer, 2003) – a sort of “mobile sociology” (Urry, 2000) or even “fiction” (Agger, 2002) – is not only a productive research methodology, but a necessary one, one that objectifies the arbitrary imperatives of more conventionally “disciplined” academic approaches. Social science precedents for the kind of research I propose to undertake here include: Baudrillard (1994), Deleuze and Guattari (2004), Doyle (2003), Durkheim (2003), Foucault (1995), Haraway (2004), Ingold (2000), Latour (1998), Massumi (2002b), Thrift (2008), Virilio (2000), Whitehead (1978) and others – many of whose work will be invoked in my dissertation. This project also fits comfortably alongside the study of visual culture, which as Mitchell has argued, is an “indiscipline” that functions as a site of “turbulence or incoherence at the inner and outer boundaries of disciplines” (Mitchell, 1995, p. 541). As Mitchell explains: “If a discipline is a way of insuring the continuity of a set of collective practices (technical,

social, professional, etc.), ‘indiscipline’ is a moment of breakage or rupture, when the continuity is broken and the practice comes into question” (Mitchell, 1995, p. 541). Indeed, Mitchell’s argument that “there are no visual media”¹⁹ bolsters the thrust of my position throughout this project, namely that our understanding of visual and other form of creation is always informed, in large part, by our not-necessarily-visual ontological commitments .

My interest in the conditions of painting and creativity begins with my own work as an artist and painter. During my third year of undergraduate work in Fine Arts (Studio) one of my professors presented me with what was a rather bewildering aesthetic/existential problem. Aware that I was relying on my representational drawing skills to successfully navigate the demands of the Fine Arts program, this professor – when faced with yet another one of my skillfully rendered, though easily achieved, charcoal drawings – decided to challenge me: “Doing these drawings is easy for you, isn’t it?” “Yes it is, I suppose,” I said (or something less articulate). “Well,” said my professor, “Why don’t you do something you can’t do!”

Faced with the project of having to destroy my own clichés, habits, and crutches under the watchful eye of my professors and fellow art students, I decided to make the shift from representational to non-representational painting. This shift, I learned along the way, was also a shift from my doing art according to teleological objectives and to my having art done to me, so to speak. That is, since I had been made self-conscious about my own artistic objectives I had to listen to what the process of artmaking was saying to me, to what the art media required of me in pursuit of its own objectives.

¹⁹ Mitchell describes the way visual and all other form of media (and presumably, identity and subjectivity, etc.) are never pure and always mixed: “From the standpoint of art history in the wake of postmodernism, it seems clear that the last half-century has undermined decisively any notion of purely visual art. Installations, mixed media, performance art, conceptual art, site- specific art, minimalism and the often-remarked return to pictorial representation has rendered the notion of pure opticality a mirage that is retreating in the rear-view mirror. For art historians today, the safest conclusion would be that the notion of a purely visual work of art was a temporary anomaly, a deviation from the much more durable tradition of mixed and hybrid media.

Of course this argument can go so far that it seems to defeat itself. How, you will object, can there be any mixed media or multimedia productions unless there are elemental, pure, distinct media out there to go into the mix? If all media are always and already mixed media, then the notion of mixed media is rendered empty of importance, since it would not distinguish any specific mixture from any purely elemental instance. Here I think we must take hold of the conundrum from both ends and recognize that one corollary of the claim that ‘there are no visual media’ is that *all media are mixed media*. That is, the very notion of a medium and of mediation already entails some mixture of sensory, perceptual and semiotic elements” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 260).

My relinquishing control of the painting process to the paint itself, responding to what the colours and textures were “saying” rather than trying to speak *myself* through the materials, produced a categorically different relationship between me and the once non-agential, but now very much active, materials of painting. It was this experience of relinquishing control and becoming more open that initially prompted me to ask: “Who is it that paints a painting, or creates a creation?” Similarly, it prompted me to begin wondering about what was *inconsequential* to painting and other creative processes?

Early on in this project I anticipated that it would involve my making paintings or drawings as part of the process. I opted not to follow this route because making more paintings would not necessarily illumine my initial observation when confronted with the task of doing something I couldn’t do, and with the experience of becoming open to painting in order to allow painting to do what it can do through me. That is, to reflect on my experience of painting required that painting itself not define what was, for me, a theoretical or philosophical problem, namely: What about painting is inconsequential? And, what relationship does an answer to this question – an answer that expresses ontological commitments – contribute to our understand of creativity, agency, and ethics?

So, as my dissertation research developed it became clear that what I was exploring was a theoretical problem about art, rather than an artistic problem about theory. As such, I began placing greater emphasis on the role of ontology for how we think about things and how we think about things in the making. This interest in the ontological assumptions that ground our understanding of creative processes is not an interest that is catered to very effectively by conventional, disciplinarily-defined academic methods, nor is it able to be communicated efficiently through artistic projects since such projects are, effectively, the objects being explored (so to speak). New, postdisciplinary modes of inquiry were required that would allow me to move past less flexible methodological strategies – strategies bent more on reaching achievable goals or conclusive results.

In this project the methodological perspectives I engage critically – more implicitly than explicitly – are those found in sociological and art historical projects whose ontological sympathies find its authors deploying generalized, reified, or

transcendent categories.²⁰ That is, my critique is enacted by performing an alternative ontology, rather than engaging those paradigms under critique directly. In other words, in order to critique sociological, theoretical, or historical methods of research on art I turn to ontology. My argument on this front is that there is nothing artistic about artistic criticism, rather art scholarship always enacts and expresses something ontological (and even ethical).²¹ This requires that art, occasionally, be considered from a non-artistic point of view in the same way that other categories – politics, for example – must, for greater clarity, be considered from a non-political perspective (de Beistegui, 2007).

As DeLanda explains, in an immanent ontology – let alone an ontology premised upon the productive power of shifting relationality as such – “there is no room for reified totalities” (DeLanda, 2002b, p. 153).²² Conversely, more conventional sociological or art historical project have tended to limit the aesthetic or social causes of art production by relying on ostensibly objective (Agger, 2002), linear narratives of resemblance and repetition in order to postulate (an artwork’s) identity, meaning, or point of genesis. I will be critiquing those ontologies that attempt to discern what something (i.e. a painting, an object) is in order to provide it with a relatively stable identity. This project, then, is about generating questions rather than answers, and about pursuing openings rather than closings. Following de Beistegui: “Questioning, here, needs to be understood as a mode of Being, as the mode of Being in which we find ourselves when turning to that which, from the start and always, has turned itself towards us, summoned us, called upon us” (de Beistegui, 2007, p. 102).

²⁰ While recent developments in art theory and the sociology of art have introduced theories of “difference” and linguistics into contemporary discourses of art (see, for example, Bal, 1999; Bryson, 1990), my research focuses less on the meanings of art, than on how art affects and is affected. My work—not confined to language, defining meanings, or social dynamics/structures—focuses on the tendencies and propensities that are inherent to materials, time, affect, the human in order to articulate an ontology that gives rise to a way of doing ethics. I am interested in the forces that precede the meanings and social strata that follow, and add to, this network of visible and invisible forces.

²¹ This recalls Heidegger’s observation that the essence of technology is not technological: “Technology is not equivalent to the essence of technology. When we are seeking the essence of ‘tree,’ we have to become aware that that which pervades every tree, as tree, is not itself a tree that can be encountered among all the other trees. Likewise, the essence of technology is by no means anything technological” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 279).

²² DeLanda goes on: “In particular, there is no room for entities like ‘society’ or ‘culture’ in general. Institutional organizations, urban centres or nation states are, in this ontology, not abstract totalities but concrete *social individuals*, with the same ontological status as individual human beings but operating at larger spatio-temporal scales” (DeLanda, 2002b, p. 153).

So, the ontology I will be proposing is one that attempts to be open to what a painting can do or can be. Theories that promote the merits of openendedness are articulated in contemporary research on, for example, complexity, emergence, non-linear dynamics, and systems theory (Prigogine, 1984), as well as the theoretical work of, for example, de Beistegui (2004), DeLanda (2002b), Deleuze (1994), and Massumi (2002b), and Mullarkey (2007b). The ontological assumption that underpins these theories is that identities are mutable and do not correspond to resemblances; rather, it is change that “defines” an object’s, individual’s, artwork’s, or event’s identity and such change occurs on a plane of immanence (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 44).

While my project begins with an ontology of immanent differentiation (Deleuze, 1994) and process (Whitehead, 1978), I go on to suggest that objects and individuals are not only driven by process but are products of the innumerable individual relations that afford “individuals” their existence. That is, since objects and individuals cannot exist outside of or separately from their relations it is more appropriate to think of the relations themselves as the individuals and of “individuals” as the *effects* of relations. This seemingly counterintuitive ontology, I argue, by regarding “the human” (and any other entity) as an effect demands an ethical stance responsive to the productive power of relations rather than one that caters to a world populated by individuals with (inherent) capacities that enter into, rather than are defined by, relations.

My focus, then, will not be to revisit and reapply much-rehearsed and researched sociological definitions of art, but to add to the discussion by articulating a post-Deleuzean ontology of how paintings come into being, how their production, for example, is as much a result of the affordances of materials as it is a function of a social habitus (Massumi, 1992, p. 10), how the agency and propensities of the artist are matched, in the painting’s creation, by the “agency” and “propensities” of the painting itself. Again, however, artist and artwork should not be thought of as independent individuals but as continuously being co-constituted by the interdependent effects of relations.

II) Why Painting?

Art thinks no less than philosophy, but it thinks through affects and percepts.
(Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 66)

Painting has been with us, scholars suggest, six times as long as written language; longer, too, than concepts such as “the social,” “the artist,” and “the aesthetic.” The cave paintings at la Grotte Chauvet in France date back about 32,000 years (Aujoulat, 2005, p. 57). Temporally, then, painting has a long, and ongoing, history, and yet the magic of painting remains, despite the occasional declaration of its demise, as in 1839 when academic painter Paul Delaroche saw his first photograph and declared, “From today, painting is dead!” (qtd. in Mirzoeff, 1999, p. 66). Painting has routinely been embraced by philosophers and theorists as a primordial object of study worthy of epistemological and ontological investigation. These critics are attracted by painting’s longevity, its materiality, and its unflappable ability to enable new forms of aesthetic and affective expression. It’s as though painting’s very longevity can be regarded as paralleling the development of humanity, operating as a sort of barometer for measuring what it means to be human, what it means to be creative, what it means to communicate, and what it means to be artistic. Indeed, in these respects we can see that painting’s significance goes beyond the surface of the image, exceeding the bounds of the materiality of any given work.

Pierre Bourdieu once wrote that sociology and art “do not make good bedfellows” (1993a, p. 139). Although Bourdieu’s admonition still applies to some extent today, developments in the study of sociology and art (as well as in the humanities more generally) have found these disciplines expanding their respective horizons of inquiry by opening up to an ever-widening range of influences (Seidman, 2004, p. 280-82). My dissertation furthers this opening up of academic inquiry. Indeed, my methodological approach for this project has been less focused on whether inter/multi/trans-disciplinarity is worth pursuing, and more on what new fields and planes of inquiry can be discovered by investigating and applying an ever proliferating network of knowledges to as ancient a practice as painting and to its intersections with the “socius”? (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 67).

My approach here diverges in a productive way from a “sociology of art” as conducted by such sociological luminaries as Griselda Pollock – whose focus is art’s gendered –

i.e. masculine – proclivities (Pollock, 1996, 1999, 2003); Janet Wolff – for whom art production is bound up with the social at the expense of the aesthetic (Wolff, 1993); and Howard Becker – who limits art’s production to socially produced “art worlds” (Becker, 1982, 1976). In some senses my project could be regarded as an extension of our understanding of the potentials afforded us by Bourdieu’s social field or *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1993a), for it focuses on the ontological and ethical implications for the way we understand how paintings and other creations come into being.

By drawing on the methodological tactics of a constellation of theorists from the worlds of sociological theory, art theory, and philosophy (who, at the same time, are not held captive by any one of these disciplines) – theorists such as, but not limited to, Gilles Deleuze (1994), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1996), Keith Ansell Pearson (2002), Brian Massumi (2002b), Manuel DeLanda (2002b), Michel Henry (2003) – this dissertation looks at painting and creativity from an ontological perspective, whose lines of inheritance can be traced to such intellectuals as Spinoza (2006), Schopenhauer (1969), Nietzsche (2001), Bergson (1988), and Whitehead (1978). My method, as Rob Shields has suggested, enacts an iterative theoretical methodology – insofar as it extends my ongoing work in interdisciplinarity, theory, and art creation – in an effort to re-evaluate methods and modes of ontological interpretation in accordance with emerging appreciation for theories that regard – and reconsider – reality as something that continuously moves and twists, as something wherein connections and networks take precedence over identities, subjects and objects. Painting, when seen through such a post-disciplinary lens (Urry, 2007, p. 18), comes to be regarded as something other than its materiality.

The mobile nature of my method reflects the mobile nature of my object of research: painting and creative events conceived as objects whose boundaries are fluid and whose effects exceed our ability to account for them. My work is also informed by my engagement with theories of technology, visual, and digital culture and by my travels. To this end my research trips to Europe, the UK, the US, and throughout Canada are significant modes of research.

My interest in theories of art and aesthetics also recalls my growing up in a Mennonite household that was continuously being criss-crossed by Mennonite academics, artists, painters and writers (my parents are both professors – my father in film studies and English literature, my mother in literature and peace and conflict

studies; they have published a number of books on Mennonite art and culture and throughout my childhood hosted dozens of Mennonite writers and artists from across Canada and the United States). I also paint, draw, exhibit and sell my own artwork, and my research here is complexly informed by the multivalent experiences afforded by this process of material (and affective) production.

III) Art and Becoming Sociologically Subjected

The origin of all aesthetic themes is found in symmetry. Before man can bring an idea, meaning, harmony into things, he must first form them symmetrically. The various parts of the whole must be balanced against one another, and arranged evenly around a center. (Simmel, 2003, p. 55)

The sociology of art [...] in its ordinary form in fact forgets what is essential, namely the universe of artistic production, a social universe having its own traditions, its own laws of functioning and recruitment, and therefore its own history. The autonomy of art and the artist, which the hagiographic tradition accepts as self-evident in the name of the ideology of the work of art as ‘creation’ and the artist as uncreated creator, is nothing other than the (relative) autonomy of what I call a *field*, an autonomy that is established step by step, and under certain conditions, in the course of history. (Bourdieu in Tanner, 2003, p. 97)

Since the late 19th century the “status, definition and meaning” of art in the west has been perpetually in crisis (Banham, 2002, p. 5). The sociological community largely responded to this crisis in terms of its own governing codes. As Tanner argues, the conventional tack taken by sociologists has been to “decentre” and “desacralize” the role of the artist in order to expose the prosaic underpinnings that support the “ideology” (Tanner, 2003, p. 106) of the creative artist, such as: the integrated relationship between fine-art and contemporary capitalism, the social conditions of the artist’s “art worlds” (Becker, 1982), and the totalising analysis of Bourdieu’s “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1993b). In Tanner’s view, sociologists have too frequently given in to the temptation to view art production as emerging largely as a product of human

society, of the collective or institutional “life processes of a community” (Tanner, 2003, p. 11).

The historical sociological approach to art production, then, frequently finds art being interpreted as an expression of “class interests or ideals” (Tanner, 2003, p. 210) – the relative merits of a given artwork being less a function of any apparent aesthetic value it might hold, however provisionally, than a reflection of the economic and political gatekeepers who either bestowed or withheld institutional approval regarding what was, and what was not, to be classified as aesthetically valuable (Tanner, 2003, p. 207). This “production of culture perspective” (Tanner, 2003, p. 207) stands against that espoused by art history, which places a much greater emphasis on the category of the aesthetic, at the expense of the so-called social categories that gave rise to this so-called aesthetic conception in the first place.

The notion of artistic genius often held in the west was not dealt with kindly by a sociological establishment not content to privilege the idea of the isolated creator whose works were conventionally thought by the art community to be manifestations or expressions of a “unique and individual aesthetic vision” (Tanner, 2003, p. 69). The emphasis, instead, was on the artist-genius as not so much isolated from the social; rather, it was on the artist as integrated with a social collectivity that, in turn, shaped and contributed to the suddenly less than innovative artwork. The artist as conceived by sociology became a site of social forces, the aesthetic object’s value becoming a reflection primarily of the artist’s position *vis a vis* the social networks he or she is subject to (Tanner, 2003, p. 69).

Recent efforts to broaden the purview of sociological studies of art have produced a flurry of anthologies on the topic: Harrington’s *Art and Social Theory* (2004); Alexander’s *Sociology of the Arts: Exploring Fine and Popular Forms* (2003); and Tanner’s *The Sociology of Art: A Reader* (2003). These recent books, in their respective ways, attempt to span the breadth and plumb the depth of contemporary developments in the sociology of art. If anything, such a confluence of texts presents the sociologist of art with an opportune moment to take stock of this shifting discipline. Nick Prior, writing in *The Sociological Review*, attempts just that.

Prior observes that, at the very least, the “productive tension” existing between sociology, art, and aesthetics illuminates some of the “dilemmas” facing sociology as

it strives to “‘sociologise’ its subject” (Prior, 2004, p. 586). Prior observes, however, that the “noble sociologist,” armed with “critical theories, tools of deconstruction and data sets on the demographics of arts consumption” is bound to encounter a host of “pitfalls” (Prior, p. 586-87). The first pitfall, he suggests, arises when sociology, as it “cuts a swathe” through its object by identifying “the social construction of x,” fails to capture that which is “distinct” about the object, content instead with the knowledge that once “x has been revealed to be subject to power, ideology, discourse and so on, sociology’s job is done”; the second pitfall is the age-old conundrum about what constitutes “art” in the first place? (Prior, p. 587). A further point of contention regarding the sociologist’s capacity to account for art objects and their sites of emergence surrounds issues of artistic evaluation; that is, once we have discerned what is and what isn’t art, how do we go about deciding what is good art and what is bad? Is sociology capable of identifying art that is truly unique? Unprecedented? Valuable? Transformative? Worthless? (Prior, p. 587). Furthermore, in order for the sociology of art to be able to describe how “x” is subject to “power, ideology, discourse and so on” the sociologist is compelled to assume that there exists such an “object” in the first place in a more or less stable configuration – stable enough, at least, to be subject to a variety of categories of control, etc. Moreover, as my research describes, emphasis on the social dimension of art and creativity overlooks or ignores the integral role played by non-human actors and agents (Latour, 2005, p. 72).

Prior concludes by seeking to reconcile the art/sociology encounter as one that finds the two disciplines existing in a dialectical relationship akin to “sparring partners” – their respective tasks being to keep the other “critically self-aware.” He stresses that if pressed to evaluate standards of aesthetic value, sociology risks “diluting” its own efforts, “producing second-rate aesthetics rather than first-rate social science” (Prior, 2004, p. 592). The conclusion arrived at in the end of Prior’s text is that in the presence of the burgeoning literature expounding upon the relationship between art and sociology one is left with the sense that the process reveals “the limits of the sociological enterprise itself” (Prior, p. 592).

IV) Interdisciplinarity: Avoiding a Partial Picture

Social theory and the philosophy of social science have long discussed, dismissed and returned to a certain series of questions. Central among these are disputes as to what constitutes the subject matter of any inquiry which terms itself 'social.' Subsequently, there arises the question of how such investigations can be justified and some kind of certainty attained. In this respect, ontology and epistemology have both been fundamental and ongoing concerns of investigations into the social and the cultural. Running through the sometimes tortured history of such disputes is the understanding that the ontological status of that which is investigated will (or should) influence the manner of that investigation: what the world is really like will shape the method and modes of our research. (Halewood, 2008, p. 1)

While this dissertation was written within an institutionalized interdisciplinary framework – in this case incorporating departments of Sociology (Social Theory) and Art and Design (Visual Culture) – it is worth recalling again what function interdisciplinary – and even profoundly post-disciplinary research – can serve in the pursuit academic innovation.

Gary Genosko, writing on Guattari's espousal of postdisciplinary methods, observes that university systems remain "closeted and largely ignorant of one another" despite "much fanfare" about the novelties of interdisciplinarity. He adds that "little effort [has been] expended at the level of method to realize [interdisciplinarity's] implications" (Genosko, 2003, p. 136). Genosko notes that there is a risk, identified by Guattari, that "interdisciplinary" might come to function merely as a "magic word" that encourages a certain breadth and disciplinary transgression while, methodologically, "changing nothing" (Genosko, 2003, p. 136). For Genosko, the task of a truly interdisciplinary academy (i.e. post-disciplinary – having no disciplines or transdisciplinary – having no disciplinary boundaries) becomes "the elaboration of a genuine metamethodology that would upset existing power/knowledge formations" and function as a "challenge to the status quo" (Genosko, 2003, p. 136). Genosko delineates eight conditions put forward by Guattari and his collaborator Sergio Vilar and argues that these could be incorporated into any transdisciplinary methodology:

1. call into question a given discipline's ability to understand the globality within which it finds itself
2. adopt a humble attitude in the face of the immense field of knowledge of the real
3. open one's own assemblages towards heterogeneous fields of dialogue and other forms of mutual exchange
4. do not abandon specialization as an ideological principle but, rather, proceed irreversibly by fluctuation and bifurcation towards transdisciplinarity, each discipline according to its own speed and willingness to make sacrifices or suffer "amputations"
5. certain theoretical approaches will need to be deconstructed, but hopefully not in an anarchic way so that existing disciplines may see the confluence of concepts and problems from a new theoretico-pragmatic and virtual perspective
6. the creation of numerous cross-references is not heresy but has always existed to some extent
7. from a critical interdisciplinary perspective, certain scientific positions of alleged self-sufficiency and omnipotence will be subject to definitive critique (no more queen of the sciences, no more pure [higher] and applied [lower], etc.)
8. intradisciplinary graspings of the virtualities of heterogeneous, evolving fields will have repercussions for the movement towards transdisciplinarity. (Genosko, 2003, p. 136-37)

Trans- or post-disciplinary methodologies become particularly important when existence comes to be regarded as consisting of interconnected networks that confound attempts rigidly to delineate subjects and objects, actors and things acted upon. When what were once regarded as stable wholes are revealed to consist of multiple, interconnected parts, rigid disciplinary boundaries are revealed to be unable to account for reality's complexity. Moreover, once the rhizomatic flows and permutations of a non-hierarchical and inter/post-disciplinary ontology are put in motion there is no telling where one might end up. Nor is it possible to predict in advance what sort of disciplinary paradigm is required to deal with new innovations. Researchers, then, are best served by being able to pursue other, as Deleuze and Guattari would say, "lines of flight" (2004). Sayer notes that while all disciplines ask

important questions, to understand “concrete (i.e. many-sided) situations” an interdisciplinary, “or better, postdisciplinary approach” is preferable (and more effective) insofar as it can follow “arguments and processes wherever they lead” rather than feeling disciplinary pressures to stop “at conventional disciplinary boundaries, subordinating intellectual exploration to parochial institutional demands” (Sayer, 2003, p. 1-2). Such a postdisciplinary methodology enables researchers to “follow connections” (p. 5) and to generate new concepts that would, in turn, generate new concepts, etc.

Interdisciplinarity, of course, is a key component not only to this dissertation, but to the work of the theorists this dissertation deploys. Breaking free of conventional disciplinary boundaries requires that researches be driven by questions such as: What *aren't* we looking at when we look at our objects of study? In other words, what exists *beyond* our abilities of capture? What realities *exceed* the purview of our conventions? What are the *implications* of these unforeseeables (assuming they exist)? What *ontological modes* do they express or demand? What sort of ethical and aesthetic stance do painting's (or whatever conglomeration of force's) excesses compel us toward? I ask these questions while keeping in mind Foucault's insistence that the role of the intellectual is not “to place him[/her]self ‘somewhat ahead and to the side’ in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity,” but rather to “struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of ‘knowledge,’ ‘truth,’ ‘consciousness,’ and ‘discourse’” (Foucault, 1977, p. 207-8). Theories here are used aggressively with the assumption, as Deleuze reminds us, that they are “exactly like a box of tools” which, in order to be effective, “must be useful” (Deleuze in Foucault, 1977, p. 208). Such uses of the “toolbox,” Deleuze insists, do not totalize but instead multiply. A theory is “an instrument for multiplication and it also multiplies itself” (p. 208).

Insofar as my project is an interdisciplinary and ontologically-driven cultural analysis, it engages with its “field” with the assumption that the significance of paintings and artmaking goes far beyond their respective surface.²³ In this project I also try to demonstrate how research in one area – painting or artmaking – can be extended to other (unforeseeable) areas – ontology, ethics, or discussions of creativity more generally. Significantly, such an understanding will serve to challenge

²³ “The painter's action never stays within the frame; it leaves the frame and does not begin with it” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 188).

the notion that a painting's presence is based merely on its materiality, let alone its relation to the history of art (or whatever). In order to connect the dots that contribute to a "becoming-painting" – not to mention the dots that allow painting to become-ethical – I follow Mieke Bal's observation that the boundaries and "traditional delimitations" of more conventional academic areas (art history, art theory, philosophy, sociology) "must be suspended" since "by selecting an object, you *question* a field" (Bal, 2002, p. 4). That is, in order to adequately engage our object – painting and artmaking – multiple disciplinary methods and a plurality of perspectives must be deployed. Experimentation, then, is the objective, as opposed to any *particular* objective being the objective. As Bal observes, when multiple methodologies confront the object in concert they can become "a new, not firmly delineated field" in their own right (Bal, 2002, p. 4). The methodology of this dissertation, then, becomes not so much an elaboration of any particular method as an experimental articulation of a toolbox of concepts (Bal, 2002, p. 5). As Bal noted in a keynote address at which I was present at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (2006), innovative work – whether academic, artistic, or otherwise – does not emerge from *research* (with emphasis on the "re"). Rather, innovative work emerges from *search* (without the "re"). Rather than *rehash* conventional rules of the game, searching has a nose for the unexplored and the undefined. This sort of academic work involves asking question rather than pursuing answers, it involves letting go of something so that something else can happen.

My methodological strategy is adequately described by Spanish philosopher Eugenio Trías. Trías outlines a methodology that is not "a conspicuous, visible methodology" but is "more or less identifiably critical" insofar as it "traces a given phenomenon" to examine "the condition that makes possible the phenomenon's existence and the principle that determines its historical reality. The goal is to identify that original, previously existing space within which immediate, everyday phenomena become meaningful" (Trías, 1982, p. 5).

We'll work with the assumption, then, that our object, painting, is unknowable, but that the unknowability of what objects can do is ontologically and ethically significant. For example, our encounter with painting produces unpredictable and innumerable affective responses and experiences. These experiences, in turn, have lingering effects on who we are away from the painting. A work of art is, Deleuze and

Guattari suggest, “a bloc of sensations” or “a compound of percepts and affects” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 164).

So what is produced in the production of the painting is a set of relationships that give rise to new relationships – new relationships that are, from our vantage point at least, novel and unexpected. But what I’ve so far described is merely the relationship between two entities: person and painting. Yet very often more than one person sees a painting. Sometimes, a painting is seen by millions. The multiplicity of relationships that can emerge are endless. Likewise, the potential permutations of these relationships (say, for instance, the painting’s viewer tells a friend about a painting that so moved her, or the painting’s viewer was moved enough to create his own painting as a sort of inspired or critical response). The relationships and effects of that first painting are continually compounded in ways we can’t predict in advance. If enough persons form their own singular relationships with a painting it might, for example, be reproduced in countless and varied incarnations, or become a cultural icon or symbol, or it might fetch a record-setting auction price, in turn re-igniting a stagnant art market, in turn resulting potentially in more artists producing more paintings prepared to paint more paintings. Again, the way these intersecting forces interrelate is all rather unknowable (for us) while being, nonetheless, profoundly reciprocally determined.

Theorists have often attempted to capture the interdependent painting-person encounter by declaring that painting *is* such and such, or *is* representative of this or that, or *is* valuable because of its relationship to such and such. Such an effort to frame the painting – to capture it – within a set of boundaries is an attempt to limit the painting and so fit it into this or that set of categories in order to fulfill (or maintain, or coax) certain desired outcomes. For example, Simmel once commented, as quoted above, that the “origin of all aesthetic themes is found in symmetry,” since “[b]efore man [or woman] can bring an idea, meaning, harmony into things, [s]he must first form them symmetrically. The various parts of the whole must be balanced against one another, and arranged evenly around a center” (Simmel, 2003, p. 55). Simmel observed, prior to Foucault’s famous description of the panopticon (1995, p. 200), that symmetrical organization facilitates “the ruling of many from a single point” (Simmel, 2003, p. 56). But, he argues, as “aesthetic values” continue along a path of refinement “man returns to the irregular and asymmetrical.” Life and society, argues Simmel, are engaged in a dialectical skirmish wherein asymmetrical aesthetics

can only be realized within and from out of the “symmetrical formations” from which “rationalism first emerges.” Such a chaos-from-order-from-chaos mode of artistic emergence is necessary, Simmel suggests, so long as life remains “instinctive, affective and irrational”; that is, it is only after “intelligence, reckoning, [and] balance” have won out that “the aesthetic” is able “once again” to change “into its opposite” exemplified by its becoming, once again, “irrational and its external form, the asymmetrical” (Simmel, 2003, p. 55).

The dialectical rigidity of Simmel’s categories is *not* incorrect, and yet his observations eliminate alternatives, other modes of theoretical exploration. To paraphrase Brian Massumi in one of his discussions of human “bodies,” too often paintings and works of art are defined by the position they occupy after having been pinned “to the [metaphorical] grid” (Massumi, 2002b, p. 2). That is, too often the ways we describe things do not allow for, or acknowledge the reality of, change and complexity. While occupied “sites” on a grid (here the grid-metaphor functions to describe the structuring processes of systems of “knowledge,” and/or power) may be multiple, they cause Massumi to wonder: “But aren’t they still combinatorial permutations on an overarching definitional framework?” (2002b, p. 3). Is a painting’s relative position on a bounded “grid” anything other than “a local embodiment of ideology?” (2002b, p. 3). Simmel, in fact, concurs, noting that the tendency “to organize all of society symmetrically [...] is shared by all despotic forms of social organization” (2003, p. 56). Massumi, reminding us of statements already referred to by Bal, continues:

Where has the potential for change gone? How does a body [or, perhaps, a painting] perform its way out of a definitional framework that is not only responsible for its very ‘construction,’ but seems to prescript every possible signifying and countersignifying move as a selection from a repertoire of possible permutations on a limited set of predetermined terms? How can the grid itself change? (Massumi, 2002b, p. 3)

Simmel’s theory, then, is limited not so much by the notion that asymmetry follows rigidity, as by the restrictiveness of his before-and-after chronological teleology, as though the symmetrical “space” is *pure* until it is infiltrated by the similarly pure asymmetrical space. My argument, with Massumi, is that the state of social and

aesthetic becoming is much messier: asymmetry and irrational permutations don't necessarily wait their turn, nor do they tell the whole story.

Attempts, then, to place painting, to position it within the bounds of what Deleuze and Guattari have termed a striated space (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 474-500), and to endow it with a sense it seems to otherwise lack, inevitably results in a partial picture. Further, any such effort will be exceeded in time by the return of smooth spaces since, recalling Simmel, rigid structures or striations dissolve, melt, wash away in time; they take wing, Deleuze and Guattari might say, on a "line of flight" – "movements of deterritorialization and destratification" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 3). The striated and smooth spaces described here refer to mental spaces, perspectives of meaning, ontologies, contexts, etc. They are also, of course, bound up with relations of power insofar as those who are able to arbitrate and determine meaning – those who are able to determine *where* the painting is positioned on the grid – will be in position to define the painting's meaning and determine its social, cultural, or aesthetic value. Deleuze and Guattari, however, remind us that processes of striation are inevitably faced with forces of destratification and deterritorialization. Inevitably there is a crack in the grid's armour where, to paraphrase badly Leonard Cohen, the line of flight gets in.²⁴ The striated and the smooth, like the painting and the viewer, or the painting and the painter, are in relation one to the other, mutually granting one another existence: "the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 474). The painting is always in a process of escaping capture.

²⁴ See also Deleuze and Guattari: "In a violently poetic text, [D. H.] Lawrence describes what produces poetry: people are constantly putting up an umbrella that shelters them and on the underside of which they draw a firmament and write their conventions and opinions. But poets, artists, make a slit in the umbrella, they tear open the firmament itself, to let in a bit of free and windy chaos and to frame in a sudden light a vision that appears through the rent—Wordsworth's spring or Cezanne's apple. Then come the crowd of imitators who repair the umbrella with something vaguely resembling the vision, and the crowd of commentators who patch over the rent with opinions: communication. Other artists are always needed to make other slits, to carry out necessary and perhaps ever-greater destructions, thereby restoring to their predecessors the incommunicable novelty that we could no longer see. This is to say that artists struggle less against chaos (that, in a certain manner, all their wishes summon forth) than against the 'clichés' of opinion. The painter does not paint on an empty canvas, and neither does the writer write on a blank page; but the page or canvas is already so covered with preexisting, preestablished clichés that it is first necessary to erase, to clean, to flatten, even to shred, so as to let in a breath of air form the chaos that brings us the vision" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 203-204).

The frames, boundaries or borders (i.e. meanings and evaluations) sometimes constructed around a painting are not always problematic,²⁵ though they do tend to “[subtract] movement from the picture” (Massumi, 2002b, p. 3). Striation emerges from smooth, as smooth emerges from striated. Indeed, it is the very porousness of the grid – of the boundaries so often in place – that reveal to us a painting’s fluidity and the fact that a painting, despite its apparent materiality, despite the fact that our galleries are filled with paintings centuries or millennia old, is an object that is in a perpetual state of becoming and a constant state of flow (Shields, 1997).²⁶

V) New Materialist Ontologies and Avoiding Abstraction

The *field* of cultural analysis is not delimited because the traditional delimitations must be suspended; by selecting an object, you *question* a field. Nor are its *methods* sitting in a toolbox waiting to be applied; they, too, are part of the exploration. You don’t apply one method; you conduct a meeting between several, a meeting in which the object participates, so that, together, object and methods can become a new, not firmly delineated, field. (Bal, 2002, p. 4)

Since the advent of modernism at the beginning of the twentieth century there has been a perpetual crisis about the status, definition and meaning of art. (Banham, 2002, p. 5)

²⁵ “When positioning of any kind comes a determining first, movement comes a problematic second. After all is signified and sited, there is the nagging problem of how to add movement back into the picture. But adding movement to stasis is about as easy as multiplying a number by zero and getting a positive product. Of course, a body occupying one position on the grid might succeed in making a move to occupy another position. In fact, certain normative progressions, such as that from child to adult, are coded in. But this doesn’t change the fact that what defines the body is not the movement itself, only its beginning and endpoints. Movement is entirely subordinated to the positions it connects. There are predefined. Adding movement like this adds nothing at all. You just get two successive states: multiples of zero” (Massumi, 2002b, p. 3).

²⁶ “The virtual rebounds on the material and the abstract, changing the Enlightenment tradition of simple dualisms not only of here and there, inside and outside, but of concrete and abstract, ideal and actual, real and fake, transcendent and immanent. The either-or model is shifted in a tangible and everyday manner into a system of hybrids of the old dualisms which are best understood as intensities and flows” (Shields, 2003, p. 14).

No art and no sensation have ever been representational. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 193)

In order to paint a picture of painting and other emergent forms of creativity as co-constituted effects of relations the reified abstractions²⁷ often used by, for example, sociology or art history (e.g. “the social,” “the artist,” “the genius,” “identity,” “society,” “community,” etc.) struggle to tell the whole story – as if a “whole story” even exists. These categories fail to identify adequately the particular singularities that constitute, for example, the social. The singularities most notably ignored include the contributions to events produced by such things as time, immaterial or non-human forces, and the “affordances” provided to us by the restrictions and potentialities of our own bodies and the world we tend to think of as “out there.” An ontology that places value on representation/resemblance, or on abstract umbrella-like categories, tends to be structured so as to be in position to judge. At the same time, such a structure risks becoming closed to difference and the non-assimilated. The dangers of excessive abstraction come under sustained critique in the work of A. N. Whitehead. For Whitehead, abstractions are generalizations – often structured around dualism and binary thinking – that compel us to think “in a groove” (Whitehead, 1967, p. 197). He suggests that while compartmentalizing knowledge and thinking might lead to progress, this is “progress in its own groove” (Whitehead, 1967, p. 197). As Whitehead sees it, to think in a groove is to spend too much time contemplating “a given set of abstractions”:

The groove prevents straying across country, and the abstraction abstracts from something to which no further attention is paid. But there is no groove of abstractions which is adequate for the comprehension of human life. Thus in the modern world, the celibacy of the medieval learned class has been replaced by a celibacy of the intellect which is divorced from the concrete contemplation of the complete facts. (Whitehead, 1967, p. 197)

Or as Halewood explains in a recent issue of *Theory, Culture, and Society* devoted to Whitehead’s significance for social theory, for Whitehead:

²⁷ “In a flat ontology of individuals [...] there is no room for entities like ‘society’ or ‘culture’ in general. Institutional organizations, urban centres or nation states are, in this ontology, not abstract totalities but concrete *social individuals*, with the same ontological status as individual human beings but operating at larger spatio-temporal scales. Like organisms or species these larger social individuals are products of concrete historical processes, having a date of birth and, at least potentially, a date of death or extinction” (Delanda, 2002b, p. 153).

dualisms are mistaken, at the metaphysical level. And such mistakes are all the more serious because of this. [Whitehead] states that ‘Wherever a vicious dualism appears, it is by reason of mistaking an abstraction for a final concrete fact’ (Whitehead, 1933: 244-5). [W]hat is important is Whitehead’s contention that such dualisms are examples of what he terms the ‘fallacy of misplaced concreteness’ (Whitehead, 1978, p. 7, 18, 93). That is, something is asserted to be a concrete entity which subtends experience rather than being considered as the abstraction that it really is. It is clear that the implications of Whitehead’s identification of the ‘bifurcation of nature’ as permeating, influencing and insinuating our experience and concepts could have a significant impact on a wide range of issues in social theory. (Halewood, 2008, p. 3)

It is well known that contemporary theory has exposed the difficulties that arise when we attempt to think things in terms of transcendent and/or universal categories. The category of *the social* is just one such universal. Current research in social theory, responding to the challenges put forth against the category of the social, has been left with the task of re-defining the boundaries of the social; as one commentator has observed: “The question has been raised as to whether it is desirable, or even possible, to continue to think in sociological terms” (Toews, 2003, p. 81). Ulrich Beck puts it more strongly in a recent article in *The British Journal of Sociology* when he suggests that “all the different forms of public and non-public sociology are in danger of becoming museum pieces” (2005, p. 335).

What has emerged in response to the degradation of the social – that realm wherein “many fragments [orbit] one great crumbling leviathan” (Toews, 2003, p. 85) – is a re-reading of modernity as constituted by a “continuous series of social constitutions without a central subject” (p. 85). Contemporary “social” life, then, has come to be regarded as a complex network, a flow of forces. Moreover, as Latour (2005) and others have shown, social life needn’t be restricted to human beings (Barad, 2003; Braidotti, 2006). Such a reconceptualization of the social functions to reconstitute sociologists’ ontology, in turn demanding a reconsideration of conventional sociological methodologies (and any ethical or ontological readjustments these methodologies objectify). It is the methodological implication of ontological

reassessments that interest me here; and it is an enactment of an explicitly ontologically-informed methodology that this dissertation seeks to perform.

Deleuzian techno-theorist Manuel DeLanda makes the case for ontological reflection as a necessary precursor to sociological thinking when he suggests that the social sciences require a “new ontology” (2000) in order to remain effective in an increasingly complex, networked, and interconnected world. DeLanda turns to the philosophy of science and to the writings of Deleuze in order to articulate a new materialism composed, in the first instance, of emergent *singularities* (as opposed to rigid, reified, or overly general categories). In DeLanda’s ontology, the material world has as much “agency” as the human one; the nonhuman world acts and reacts according to its dispositions, and we act and react with it in an ongoing reciprocal relationship. According to DeLanda, humans occupy an emergent and shifting landscape determined by the material forces and immaterial contexts in which they exist. As Deleuze and Guattari would say, the human – and by extension the social – cannot be separated from the material and immaterial world; indeed, this state of co-dependency can be thought of as operating mechanistically – or autopoietically (Protevi, 2006) – as a sort of “machinic assemblage” premised on adaptive change (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 79). For DeLanda it is crucial for sociologists, anthropologists, historians and economists to be very clear about “the types of entities which their theories postulate as existing” (DeLanda, 2000, p. 1). His concern is focused on the potent implications of the “ontological commitments” of totalizing theories of society (DeLanda, 2000, p. 1). DeLanda draws on the philosophy of science, as well as disciplines like physics and biology, to show us how we might bring a greater breadth of knowledges together in order to propose theories and analyses adequate to the problems they’re attempting to address.

DeLanda tells us that the first task required in order to enact a fully materialist ontology –focused on how parts define wholes rather than on how wholes define parts – is to identify generalities that function as “transcendental essences” or “eternal archetypes existing in disembodied form in some Platonic heaven” (DeLanda, 2000, p. 1). Here, of course, DeLanda’s description recalls Whitehead’s, outlined earlier. Transcendental essences, DeLanda observes, may be rather unobjectionably rejected in light of the prevailing anti-essentialism espoused over the course of “the last few decades in many intellectual circles” (DeLanda, 2000, p. 1). However, DeLanda is also keen to eliminate general categories or “abstract classes”

(DeLanda, 2000, p. 1). All steps must be taken to “oppose the reification of [...] categories into actual beings, as opposed to considering them merely useful conceptual devices playing a legitimate role in practices of classification” (DeLanda, 2000, p. 1), despite the fact that in social life these sorts of reifications are often the way we make sense of things. DeLanda’s point, then, is that we have to be wary of too casually incorporating reified abstractions and transcendental categories into our assumptions about how things work. In other words, we have to be conscious of how our ontological assumptions and methods of categorization shape our reality and the (academic) assumptions we impose upon this reality.

In order to circumvent this problem DeLanda develops an ontology that states that the universe consists exclusively of “historically constituted individual entities operating at different spatio-temporal scales, forming a nested set in which smaller entities are embedded, and form the working parts, of larger ones” (DeLanda, 2000, p. 4). This first principal is meant to disallow transcendental reifications. In DeLanda’s ontology wholes are constituted by an emergent host of interconnected and historically determined entities. Notably, these entities routinely or even predominantly operate beyond the bounds of human awareness. DeLanda’s objective is to establish as much as possible an ontology that engages with historical, objective processes that “yield as their product” particular “individual entities with a more or less well defined identity, as well as the objective processes which maintain this identity through time” (DeLanda, 2000, p. 5). Such a “flat ontology,” DeLanda argues, has no space for reified entities like “‘society’ or ‘culture’ in general” (DeLanda, 2000, p. 5). How then can we speak of society or institutions or social organizations? DeLanda urges us to do so by focusing on the interactions among *individuals* that result in the emergence, over time, of a given assemblage such as an institution, a city, a nation, an ideology, a painting. It is not on account of the social that such assemblages come into being; it is on account of individual but interconnected and emergent historical processes wherein a nexus of singularities coalesce to bring forth a given product. Once new relationships have been formed they immediately feed back to the entities “serving as [their] substratum” (DeLanda, 2000, p. 5), either enabling or constraining further potentialities.

DeLanda’s materialist ontology is a bottom-up ontology, concerned more with how entities and events are produced from below than with identifying macro, top-down process operating from above. In this thesis I will be subscribing to many of

DeLanda's ontological observations. Flat or immanent ontologies like DeLanda's – and Deleuze's – are positioned over and against top-down ways of understanding “what is” that suggest that generalizable wholes (or ideas, or forms) define and determine their parts, rather than the other way around (DeLanda, 2000, p. 6). One of the main disadvantage of top-down theories is that their assumed universality often struggles to account for anomalies that don't fit within their preconceived structures (think, for example, of Duchamp's ready-mades and how they challenged the reified concept of the artist). One of the advantages of a bottom-up ontology is that it is not significantly disturbed by heterogeneity; instead, differences are simply incorporated as new components of a given set (DeLanda, 2000, p. 6).

DeLanda observes that ontologies that prioritize individual entities permit “different social actors, persons, institutions, cities and so on” to co-exist “on the same ontological plane, capable of interacting with each other despite the fact that each has its own historical rhythm” (DeLanda, 2000, p. 9). He continues:

this coexistence of entities evolving at different speeds also extends to other social entities which I have not mentioned [...]: local dialects and global standard languages; different species of technological artifacts, such as clockworks, motors and networks; enduring rituals and passing fads. Grasping human history as composed of multiple temporal flows may reduce the temptation to periodize it in a simple manner, as well as the tendency to view these periods as forming a teleological succession of ages. We may acknowledge, for example, the importance of the steam motor at the start of the nineteenth century or of computer networks at the end of the twentieth, without being tempted to speak of the Industrial Age or the Information Age. Instead, we should examine how motors, computers and other technologies emerged in a world already populated by older artifacts and how instead of replacing them they added themselves to an already complex mixture, changing and being changed by their interactions with older technologies. (p. 9-10)

DeLanda's “new ontology for the social sciences” describes some of the methodological requirements necessary for doing innovative inter- and post-disciplinary (Sayer, 2003) work in social and aesthetic theory. Moreover, DeLanda's ontology dovetails nicely with other current research in network theory, theories of

emergence,²⁸ and complexity theory.²⁹ My method here, then, is to actively disregard disciplinary boundaries, thereby being in better position to tease out something new from my objects of study. The potential for such a post-disciplinary methodology to produce new work that extends academic inquiry beyond the confines of disciplinary convention is echoed by Félix Guattari who argues that:

the organization of human culture by disciplines belongs to the past, although to a certain degree it is a necessary point of departure in the advance towards domains of knowledge that involve new practices and changing styles of individual and collective life. (Guattari quoted in Genosko, 2003, p. 136)

Worth mentioning, as this methodological section comes to a close, is that by incorporating multiple academic areas into this study I am more adequately equipped to address the interrelatedness that I'm arguing is so important to creative processes. Indeed, by embracing the world's multiplicitousness from a variety of perspectives we begin to approximate – conceptually – how we encounter the world sensually, namely as a being whose senses are themselves interlinked and relational, and even whose vision is itself a multiplicity insofar as it is, at the very least, binocular (Crary, 1988).

²⁸ John Protevi describes emergence – as used by emergence theorists – as “the (diachronic) construction of functional structures in complex systems that achieve a (synchronic) focus of systematic behaviour as they constrain the behaviour of individual components” (2006, p. 19).

²⁹ John Protevi describes complexity theory as follows: “complexity theory models material systems using the techniques of nonlinear dynamics, which, by means of showing the topological features of manifolds (the distribution of singularities) affecting a series of trajectories in a phase space, reveals the patterns (shown by attractors in the models), thresholds (bifurcators in the models), and the necessary intensity of triggers (events that move systems to a threshold activating a pattern) of these systems. By showing the spontaneous appearance of indicators of patterns and thresholds in the models of the behaviour of complex systems, complexity theory enables us to think material systems in terms of their powers of immanent self-organization” (2006, p. 19-20).

PART 1:

PAINTING AS A PARABLE OF CREATION

1.1 What About Art is Inconsequential? The Case of Painting

Art is a parable of creation; it is an example, as the terrestrial is an example of the cosmos. (Klee, 1962, p. 155)

The chief danger to philosophy is narrowness in the selection of evidence. This narrowness arises from the idiosyncrasies and timidities of particular authors, of particular social groups, of particular schools of thought, of particular epochs in the history of civilization. The evidence relied upon is arbitrarily biased by the temperaments of individuals, by the provincialities of groups, and by the limitations of schemes of thought. (Whitehead, 1978, p. 337)

We begin this inquiry into the relationship between creativity and ethics via painting with a question: What about painting is inconsequential? That is, what is *not* a contributing factor in a painting's coming into existence? What about painting can be left out – ignored – in our attempts to ascertain how a particular painting, in the sense of a particular product, came into being? What is being brought to the canvas when I apply my brush: potentials, thoughts, concepts, materials, affects? What connections are irrelevant? What forces are necessary or unnecessary? Are there aspects of painting that, in terms of any era's conventional presuppositions with respect to what we might call questions of value, are irrelevant, useless, or worth ignoring? If so, are there procedures that might best discern what is of value in a painting, and what isn't? Further, can we comprehensively determine or delineate stakeholders affected by or, indeed, affecting such a procedure? If we can, who would adjudicate borders, limits, concepts, and categories? Can we determine a set of criteria that might be open to us in measuring those aspects of painting that I am here identifying – what I am calling the irrelevant, the useless? Can we identify a paradigm, or paradigms, that we might use in such an investigation? Are there yardsticks that might provide us with a significant option to facilitate what would in

effect become some form of measurement in questions of values such as those on which I am focusing? In any such investigation as I am here proposing, how might we identify and contest the prejudices that might limit our investigation, or tilt it too narrowly toward a particular social or political bias, or a particular ideological or, indeed, aesthetic agenda? Let's not forget that investigating where a work comes from does not exhaust what a work can do or be. Moreover, is there a limit to the questions we can ask of/about painting? Further, is there a limit to the potential "answers" painting can provide? Should we bracket our responses to these questions by suggesting that they apply to the human alone, rather than to the non-human world? On what grounds would we base such a distinction? Such questions, we might presume, are liable to produce greater vagueness and obscurity in our efforts to discern what about painting is inconsequential. To this I want to respond: on the contrary.

In this dissertation I will be arguing that muddying the waters of painting – what it is, what it can do – moves us towards greater precision, towards a more accurate accounting of the unaccountable. As I have already suggested, painting here functions as a micro-example of a macro-phenomenon, namely creativity in general and human creativeness in particular. Moreover, this project on how ontological assumptions about creative processes have ethical implications functions as a macro-analysis of a much smaller and more specific object – painting. That is, my sense is that thinking about creativity helps us think about painting, and thinking about painting helps us think about creativity (and thinking about how we think about both of them reveals ontological commitments with ethical consequences).

As I engage with the questions outlined above painting itself will inevitably become increasingly incidental to the connections being made, the concepts being put into play, and the ontological and ethical urgencies I will be exploring. Nevertheless, insofar as we *are* and will be absorbed by the topic of painting – for illustrative purposes at least – we are faced with an initial question: "What 'painting' is being discussed: painting as an act of production, or painting as a product?" My answer is, "both ... and" After all, the processes through which paintings are articulated and articulate themselves is one that need not stop when the paint dries, so to speak. What follows – an examination of how paintings *become* as an *effect* of creative processes of relationality – is necessary, in part, in order to respond to the not-at-first-troubling fact that paintings – and other forms of creativity – *become* in time: a

time that exists ahead of us and behind us, and a time we pass through on the effervescent cusp of the unceasing, or ever-repeating, present. This time – and its constitutive presents – presents us with a paradox, on the one hand the present is both at once product and producer; on the other hand, however, the creative events – the procession of the present – is a process of repetitiveness and sameness. As Leonard Lawlor points out, the becoming of time (and of things *in time*) presents creativity in general – and human creativity in particular – with a confoundingly paradoxical problem insofar as the present is *different and the same* at the same time. This is the case because while the *now* repeats persistently, the repetition of nowness – in the form of the present – is never the same. As Deleuze has explained, creation happens thanks to a perpetual repetition of difference (Deleuze, 1994). Lawlor explains:

If we reflect on experience in general, what we cannot deny is that experience is conditioned by time. Every experience, necessarily, takes place in the present. In the present experience, there is the kernel or point of the now [...]. What is happening right now, however, must be described as an event, different from every other now ever experienced; there is alteration. Yet, also in the present, the recent past is remembered and what is about to happen is anticipated. (Lawlor, 2008, p. 23)

Moreover, the nows that continue to happen are “not different from every other now ever experienced” (Lawlor, 2008, p. 23). However, he continues, each now is a unique event, “and it is not an event because it is repeatable”; furthermore, insofar as each present experience is novel, or an alteration, “it is not alteration because there is continuity” (Lawlor, 2008, p. 23). We are presented, then, with an existential paradox that inhabits each present – each now – in perpetuity. Lawlor notes that it is this paradoxical simultaneity that is “the crux of the matter”; he goes on:

The conclusion that we must draw is that we can have no experience that does not essentially contain these two forces of event and repeatability in a relation of disunity and inseparability. They necessarily pass into one another with the result that we can say that the absolute is passage. (Lawlor, 2008, p. 23)

What Lawlor means when he says that the absolute “is passage” is that absolute becoming – absolute creativity – is never *absolutely* new, but *is* always confounding

attempts to capture it – whether temporally or categorically. That is, because creative events are always conditioned by the temporal repetitiveness of the now and the eventful unfolding of novelty they are always dependent on what must be described as their opposite. In other words, creativity is always an expression of determined sameness (the inevitability of now and its determinants) *and* emergent forms of creation (novelty). We are faced, then, with categorical slippage, with conceptual porousness. That is, nows – creative events – are always *determined* but *different*. We encounter a similar conundrum when we try to separate the individual from relation, or the production of painting (for example) from the determining and repetitive conditions of its production.

What is significant about these ontological observations, in my view, is the necessity of conjoined opposites, of the mutually-reinforcing interdependence required for creative events to occur. Significant also is how the illusion of our individual independence belies the fact that we are, as Lawlor points out, *powerless* on our own, that all instances of creation are enactments of contradiction, that we are unable to free ourselves from the contradictory dimensions of becoming itself – a becoming both determined and novel, deliberate and unpredictable, seemingly individual, but necessarily collective. The significance of our inability to create in a vacuum, of our profound powerlessness, leads me – as this project progresses – to propose an ethical stance built upon an artistically-inflected self-understanding that reflects an ontologically-induced sense of modesty responsive to what we might call the confounding conditions of creativity. In so doing, I attempt to re-articulate what it can mean to be creative, what attitudes are required of a Deleuzean/Nietzschean form of becoming-artistic, and what ontological position is responsive both to creativity's facts and potential.

One of the premises I will be unpacking, then, suggests that creativity and such adjunct categories as “the new,” the novel, or “lines of flight,” objectify our own myopic predilections more than they do any ontologically significant reality impinging on a world of stasis and repetition. That is, what *we* describe as “creative” or as “new” must always be qualified or understood as meaning *new for us*. In so doing we objectify our powerlessness and myopia rather than our capacity to identify absolute newness (which, I will argue, must either be nonexistent or ubiquitous). In other words, in our perspectively-determined efforts to understand and account for creative events we exclude from view the ways newness is bound by repetition and

determinations. Such a premise, informed as it is by Nietzschean perspectivism, is one that in this case complicates popular notions not only of creativity, but of “what art is” and “where art comes from,” thereby challenges not only popular notions of subjectivity (the artist as individual creator), but also conventional understandings of human freedom or agency.

The intent here is to confront these conventions by re-deploying their own tools – namely rational thought and argument. My sense is that more radical forms of rational thinking do not sit comfortably alongside conventional readings of subjectivity and creativity. The threats posed by this radical re-rationalization give rise to a set of challenges that on the surface might seem to disparage and undermine what we’ve come to understand as, for instance, “the artist.” My hope, however, is that by articulating an alternative ontology about how paintings and creative events come into being we might begin to develop an expanded appreciation of what being creative and artistic can mean.

Any attempt to articulate a set of novel observations about painting (and creativity) demands a clear articulation of the problem to be addressed, and a clear description of what we’ll be talking about when we talk about painting. Deleuze, responding to questions about his book on painter Francis Bacon, suggests that writing about painting is full of potential pitfalls. He feared that any attempt at describing how a painting comes into being, or how a painting does what it does, is at risk of articulating a misreading or misunderstanding. When asked, “Did you find any special pleasure in writing about painting?” Deleuze acknowledges his anxiety as follows:

It frightened me. It seemed genuinely difficult. There are two dangers: either you describe the painting, and then a real painting is no longer necessary [...]. Or you fall into indeterminacy, emotional gushing or applied metaphysics. The problem specific to painting is found in lines and colors. It is hard to extract scientific concepts that are not mathematical or physical, and that are not just literature superimposed on painting either, but that are almost carved in and through painting. (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 183)

In order to avoid as much as possible the “emotional gushing” feared by Deleuze, this project does not focus too intently on any specific painting or painter, but on painting

in general as a particular – but not particularly special – manifestation of creativity. In other words, the *painting* I will be describing here will be of an unembellished sort – “lines and colors,” as Deleuze would say.³⁰ At the most rudimentary level, here the word “painting” will have two meanings:

1) Painting, here, describes a noun, an *object* or *thing*. This thing, for our purposes, is a relatively flat sort of thing upon which a fluid, semi-liquid-like pigment is spread or splattered using some sort of a tool (often, but certainly not always, a brush or a palette knife). This combination – flat surface and gooey pigment – when joined together become a painting. As Deleuze says, when people ask, “What is painting?” the simplest answer is that painting is what happens when someone “creates lines and colors (even if lines and colors already exist in nature)” (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 176). Of course, such a simple definition doesn’t comprehensively account for the innumerable forms paintings *can* take, the unforeseen effects paintings can have, nor does it address the variety of materials and media that, when combined, can today, without any problem, fall under the umbrella of painting-ness. Nonetheless, this preliminary equation (paintings = surface + pigment) suffices for our purposes since it objectifies how these two components – when they inter-relate – can give rise to an uncountable number of permutations.

2) Secondly, painting is a verb, an *act* or *activity* that produces an object: the painting. It is by painting that a painting becomes what it is (lines of pigment on a surface).

Painting, then, is at once simple and complex. While it can be broken down into its component parts through a process of generalization and categorization, these component parts can produce a panoply of effects. When faced with painting’s unlimited potential to produce the unexpected it is tempting to simplify things by resorting to reductive categories or by seeking simplistic conclusions. However, we must avoid this knee-jerk response if we are to understand how painting works, and

³⁰ “When people ask: What is painting? The answer is relatively simple. A painter is someone who creates lines and colors (even if lines and colors already exist in nature). Well, a philosopher is no different. It’s someone who creates concepts, someone who invents new concepts. Of course, thought already exists outside of philosophy, but not in this special form: the concept. Concepts are singularities that have an impact on ordinary life, on the flows of ordinary or day-to-day thinking. *A Thousand Plateaus* tries to invent numerous concepts: rhizome, smooth space, haecceity, animal-becoming, abstract machine, diagram, etc. Guattari is always inventing concepts, and my conception of philosophy is the same” (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 176).

how painters are able to paint. Excessively simplifying the processes and effects of painting might seem necessary when a *definitive* meaning of a painting is sought, or, perhaps, when decisively attempting to ascertain a painting's value or cultural significance. But to pursue such conclusions is to disavow the notion that paintings are always doing more than we can perceive. It is this – our myopia or inability to account for the forces that contribute to creative processes – that is of interest to us here. Indeed, our inability to adequately account for what a painting is is revealed by how easily reductive definitions can be transgressed as paintings (and other creative expressions) continue to change and pursue novel and variegated forms of expression.³¹

While it may seem at first that moving away from definitive meanings or conclusions or definitions sets us up for a situation rife with seemingly imprecise or relativistic vagueness, I would suggest that the reality is quite the opposite; that is, by foregrounding our myopia and by recognizing that creative events cannot be captured we are able to reflect more accurately upon the unknowable interrelatedness that gives rise to individual acts of creativity – whether paintings or not.

My intention, then, is to explore the porous boundaries of what a painting and the act of painting are, not in order to innumerate exhaustively sets of qualities, but more precisely to express the innumerable capacities (and individuals) that are bound up in relations. In this case the object is painting. Painting is actually an ideal point of focus for a study of how individual creative events are products of interrelatedness given its history as one of – if not the – oldest forms of human expression (consider, for instance, the over 30000 year-old cave paintings in France). Indeed, the aura that continues to surround painting(s) (despite declarations of painting's demise (Danto, 1998)) and artists (insofar as they are regarded as a breed apart able to channel auratic forces) is stale enough that an expansion of the *other forces* that contribute to the production of paintings is necessary. The objective here, then, is to shed new light on our object of study in order to move beyond ponderous old prejudices. Rather than dwelling on the question, "What is painting?" or "What is a creative event?" my interest is in asking, "What *else* is painting?" or "What *else* can a painting *do*?"

By now it should be clear that in this project I intend to resist efforts to limit what painting(s) can be and do. Moreover, this project's implicit objective is to critique

³¹ "The world does not exist outside of its expressions" (Deleuze, 1993, p. 132)

efforts to capture the repercussions, consequences, and implications of painting, efforts that arbitrarily limit what we take to be its capacities. The meanings of paintings when bounded in this way are not necessarily false or wrong; rather, when paintings are defined through a particular lens or in accordance with a particular theoretical or aesthetic perspective they really *can* and *do* mean or make manifest the intended meaning, they really can be controlled and limited. For example, Monet's "Impression: Sunrise" really *is* about light and really *is* a response to the beginnings of the photographic era. But "Impression: Sunrise" is also this... and it's about that... and means this... and contributed to this... and reaffirms that... and caused this... and evokes that.... and has this or that unintended effect. Its effects are multiple and *not* inconsequential. They are real and significant abilities of the painting, examples of what the painting can do. Additionally, the artificial limits placed on painting – or art in general – can themselves be "read" through various critical lenses so that the goals or intentions they serve could be narrowly articulated and critiqued.³²

1.2 What *Else* Can (a) Painting *Do*?

As for painting, any discourse on it, beside it or above, always strikes me as silly, both didactic and incantory, programmed, worked by the compulsion of mastery, be it poetical or philosophical, always, and the more so when it is pertinent, in the position of chitchat, unequal and unproductive in the sight of what, at a stroke [...], does without or goes beyond this language, remaining heterogeneous to it or denying it any overview. (Derrida, 1987, p. 155)

What *else* is painting? Deleuze addresses the potential of such a question – such a methodological tactic – each time he refers to Spinoza's oft-cited observation that we are not aware what our bodies are capable of: "[Spinoza] said that we do not even know what a body *can do*, we talk about consciousness and spirit and chatter on about it all, but we do not know what a body is capable of, what forces belong to it, or what they are preparing for" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 39).³³ This statement by Deleuze and Spinoza, that we don't know what X is capable of, objectifies both the unlimited

³² This is not my intention here. Rather, as suggested earlier, my goal is to pursue painting's potentials and, perhaps more importantly, to examine the potentials that gave rise to painting.

³³ See also: Deleuze, G. (1989). *Cinema: The Time Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

creativity of things (with relations here being defined as a thing), *and* our own limited capacity to grasp this very unlimitedness.

Spinoza was a philosopher who recognized that individuals are defined by their relations, and that these relations are in a persistent state of flux that redefines, at once, the relations and the individuals the relations are producing. For Spinoza, the world is immanent and full of potential³⁴ and is defined by forces that affect and are affected. Affective exchanges, in turn, are not predictable, just as the constituents that participate *in* these exchanges are always being affected differently. How, after all, can we predict what will happen in a minute, when the present is redefining the terms of the question?

Spinoza's observation about our ignorance of the capacities of bodies is an implicit challenge to us to experiment with these "bodies" – to engage them in new relationships, to open them up to outsides, to test them in an attempt to exhaust and expose their abilities through new encounters. Like Spinoza, Deleuze too isn't interested in coming to definitive closure about what bodies and forces and relations are capable of, preferring instead to prioritize *potential* in order to encourage us to be open to "what lies beneath and beyond the old dualities" (Mullarkey, 2006, p. 17). Indeed, the bodies described by Spinoza and Deleuze are not even human bodies since a body can be and become many things, and is what it is as an effect of its relations with other bodies. Deleuze asks: "What is a body?" He answers: a body is not a "medium fought over by a plurality of forces" because there is no "medium,' no field of forces or battle" since, after all, there is "no quantity of reality" since "all reality is *already* quantity of force" (emphasis added; p. 39-40). Moreover, every force constituting the reality Deleuze describes is "related." Further, what we tend to describe as bodies or entities are two or more forces that have entered into relationship. Bodies, then, are constituted by the collision of forces, and because bodies are composed of a plurality of "irreducible forces" they are apparently unified phenomena that are nonetheless "multiple" – a "unity of domination" (p. 40).

³⁴ As Deleuze explains: "Why write about Spinoza? Here again, let us take him by the middle and not by the first principle (a single substance for all the attributes). The soul AND the body; no one has ever had such an original feeling for the conjunction 'and.' Each individual, body and soul, possesses an infinity of parts which belong to him in a more or less complex relationship. Each individual is also himself composed of individuals of a lower order and enters into the composition of individuals of a higher order" (Deleuze, 2006a, p. 44-5).

Like a machine with many related components, a body's "unity" is always a multiplicity (Deleuze, 1994, p. 182). Paintings can be thought of as bodies since they too are manifestations of qualities and quantities – of forces. Deleuze even suggests that painting's "eternal object" is "to paint forces" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 182). And despite their apparent stability – stretched as they often are on canvas over a wood frame – paintings are in fact multiplicities in a perpetual state of play, they are expressions of "determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions ..." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 8). Again it must be emphasized that multiplicities are not exceptions to the rule, but the rule itself; all entities are multiplicitous – both in terms of their being component in relation and in terms of what they can do. Indeed, as Deleuze insists, multiplicities "are reality itself" (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 310).

In his effort to counter ontologies that regard *this* world as merely an imperfect manifestation of a more perfect and transcendent world of eternal ideas or forms, Deleuze argues counter-intuitively that *unities* are *multiplicities* – that *multiplicity* is the *only unifier*.³⁵ Multiplicities, however, do not "add up to a totality"; rather totalizations and unifications are "processes which are produced and appear in multiplicities" (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 310). The multiplicities Deleuze describes consist of singularities, relations, becomings, events, space-time, modes of actualization, and the "vectors which traverse them" (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 310). That entities and events are always multiple is necessary for Deleuze. Thinking in terms of multiples – in terms of things-as-relations – allows him to develop an ontology wherein entities are never stable insofar as they are always giving and receiving across intra-relationships. Indeed, describing entities as multiplicities – or individuals as effects of relation, as I am arguing – is necessary in order to be able to account for the ways things change as they come into being.

³⁵ "Multiplicity,' which replaces the one no less than the multiple, is the true substantive, substance itself. The variable multiplicity is the how many, the how and each of the cases. Everything is a multiplicity insofar as it incarnates an Idea. Even the many is a multiplicity; even the one is a multiplicity. That the one is *a* multiplicity (as Bergson and Husserl showed) is enough to reject back-to-back adjectival propositions of the one-many and many-one type. Everywhere the differences between multiplicities and the differences within multiplicities replace schematic and crude oppositions. Instead of the enormous opposition between the one and the many, there is only the variety of multiplicity – in other words, difference. It is, perhaps, ironic to say that everything is multiplicity, even the one, even the many. However, irony itself is a multiplicity – or rather, the art of multiplicities; the art of grasping the Ideas and the problems they incarnate in things, and of grasping things as incarnations, as cases of solutions for the problem of Ideas" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 182).

1.3 Ubiquitous Excessiveness and the Problem of Determination

There is something that cannot be seen in painting: so the painting does not represent that thing. But the thing is given to us along with what the painting represents: so it is part of the painting's representational content. (Wollheim, 1990, p. 101)

But excess itself is a given of the mind of man. This given is conceived by this mind, it is conceived by its limits. [...] In theory, the mind conceives unlimited excess. But how so? I remind it of an excess that it is not quite capable of conceiving. (Bataille, 2004, p. 231)

It goes without saying that the more prudent were shocked by an excess taken to extremes. (Bataille, 1994, p. 52)

Where, then, does this change come from? How is it generated? Who or what produces change and, for the purposes of our examination of artistic creativity, creation itself? In order to engage with these questions it is first of all very important to acknowledge that much of the change going on around us – and much of the “stuff” that contributes to and determines change's emergence – is unknowable to us. In other words, when it comes to our ability to adequately account for the relationships that contribute to the individuations and creations we experience we are very much in the dark. Indeed, my own sense is that we must bracket off human experience of creation and change from creation and change in general by foregrounding our own perspectively limited myopia and by noting that how we experience the world reflects the way we make the world useful for ourselves. That is, we must recognize that the majority of forces that contribute to the production of this *us* we're experiencing are unknowable *by us*. In other words, our methods of interpretation should be regarded as modest contributions to the question of creativity, as solutions to the problem of the human, but not necessarily as human solutions to the problem of creation as such. As Deleuze explains: “An organism is nothing if not the solution to a problem, as are each of its differentiated organs, such as the eye which solves a light ‘problem’” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 211).

When faced with complexities that expose our perspectival limitations we're too often tempted to regard them as superfluous, as not offering relevant data, or as excessive trivialities able to be ignored. Social scientists, for instance, can be overly enamored of linear causal relations, thereby externalizing complex realities and non-linear dynamics (Byrne, 1998). Arguably, however, the unaccountable and invisible dimensions of existence are those that are *most* significant, insofar as they produce the conditions for *our* being able to become a "problem," as Deleuze would say, to be solved in the first place. The unknowable dimension of existence is too often disavowed or regarded as superfluous or excessive. Indeed, the unknowable contributors to existence might be regarded as getting in the way of our efforts to understand ourselves and our worlds. In other words, insofar as our explanatory paradigms only tell partial stories we could say that we tend to regard as excessive those dimensions of existence that don't fit our models.³⁶ Evidence is discarded in order to conceal our generalized perceptual inadequacy. But we needn't extend our minds too far to be able to acknowledge that innumerable factors produce the conditions within which an artist becomes an artist. It is not a stretch of the imagination to imagine that artists do not become artists alone. Indeed, it even seems plausible to believe that artists are *able* to become artistic thanks to innumerable sets of relations that produce artists as effects. But I want to point out that we are reluctant to think of ourselves as effects, as determinations, preferring instead to ignore the conditions necessary for our own creative capacities to become possible.

Nonetheless, the unknowable conditions of creation remain crucial to our self-understanding, not to mention to the conditions that create the conditions for our experience *of* self-understanding itself. The unknowable realm of potential, then, demands to be thought. In order to more adequately understand ourselves and our creative capacities we must take seriously the conditions that produced us and that continue to produce us (whether we regard the "us" as an effect – as I am arguing – or not).

For Deleuze and Guattari the unknowable and unperceivable dimension of existence is a fundamental contributor to reality insofar as it conditions all actualizations. They call this unactualized dimension of existence the "virtual" realm. The virtual, for

³⁶ Bataille, for example, regards excess as a fundamental character of existence itself: "On the surface of the globe, for living matter in general, energy is always in excess; the question is always posed in terms of extravagance. The choice is limited to how the wealth is to be squandered" (Bataille, 1988, p. 23).

Deleuze and Guattari, is the unactualized zone of potential that generates the conditions necessary for actualization and that exists in a sort of feedback-loop-relationship with the actual: “the virtual must be defined as strictly a part of the real object – as though the object had one part of itself in the virtual into which it plunged as though into an objective dimension” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 209). The virtual, for Deleuze, is – like the actual and in support of an immanent ontology – fully real. As Deleuze explains: “The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. *The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual*” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 209).

The virtual, then, can be understood as the engine of the actual; additionally, the actual and virtual realms can be thought of as responding to one another in a problem/solution sort of way, such that the virtual realm responds to and creates the problems that define the actual (and vice versa). Deleuze and Guattari explain that the virtual “possesses the reality of a task to be performed or a problem to be solved: it is the problem which orientates, conditions, and engenders solutions” but that these solutions “not resemble the conditions of the problem” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 212).

For Deleuze and Guattari, then, it is unknowable virtual forces that generate or *make possible* both the problems and the solutions that compose our everyday lives. Moreover, the virtual dimension of existence can be thought to exceed the actual one insofar as it is a realm of pure potential that needn’t correspond to any particular situation, entity or set of circumstances since, as pure potential, it is always in the process of, literally, exceeding and differentiating itself from the discrete sets of possibles that have just now been actualized.³⁷ That is, as far as Deleuze and Guattari are concerned, virtualities – as potential – are never exhausted. Indeed, most of them never contribute to anything actual, always exceeding those potentials that are actualized, occupying a space immanent to but distinct from the actual world. Deleuze describes the virtual as a realm of pure creativity, as an engine of production, as the inexhaustible fount into which the actual plunges (1994, p. 209) in order to extract its solutions to its problems. And although actual entities never resemble the

³⁷ “The only danger in all this is that the virtual could be confused with the possible. The possible is opposed to the real; the process undergone by the possible is therefore a ‘realisation.’ By contrast, the virtual is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself. The process it undergoes is that of actualization. It would be wrong to see only a verbal dispute here: it is a question of existence itself” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 211).

potential they actualize in any recognizable way³⁸: “it is on the basis of [the virtual’s] reality that existence is produced” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 211).

We might say that the virtual realm does not *exceed* the actual realm; rather, the virtual realm can be thought of as being *adequate* to the actual realm and to the actual realm’s requirements, presenting the actual realm with all the virtualities it will ever need. In other words, for the actual realm to manifest the change required to keep itself moving, the virtual realm of potential must be capable of serving up a multiplicity of potential options, a multiplicity that inevitably exceeds any particular actualization. This, then, is an excessiveness adequate to particular actual manifestations.

According to this logic the actual realm is never excessive since actualizations are determinations – solutions to the problems posed by the virtual. That is, actualities are never excessive since were this to be the case said actual instantiation would necessitate that a given actual thing exceed that of which it is capable. Excess, then, is not an appropriate ontological category for thinking the actual (whether the actual we’re thinking about is breakfast or a painting). If we follow Deleuze, however, excess is a useful category to help us think about change and potential. As such, a given thing’s *virtual* dimension *could* be said to be excessive insofar as the virtual dimension of being exists as an uncountable field of inexhaustibly creative potential. “There is creation, properly speaking,” Deleuze says, “only insofar as we make use of excess in order to invent new forms of life rather than separating life from what it can do” (Deleuze, Nietzsche, 1985, p. 185).

But let’s not pretend that while the actual realm is determined by the virtual, the virtual realm isn’t at the same time determined by the actual. That is, it is important to recognize that the virtual – while manifesting excessive potentials – is granted these potentials by the conditions of the actual. Deleuze explains:

The reality of the virtual consists of the differential elements and relations along with the singular points which correspond to them. The reality of the

³⁸ “The actualization of the virtual, on the contrary, always takes place by difference, divergence, or differentiation. Actualization breaks with resemblance as a process no less than it does with identity as a principle. Actual terms never resemble the singularities they incarnate. In this sense, actualization or differentiation is always a genuine creation. It does not result from any limitation of a pre-existing possibility” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 212).

virtual is structure. We must avoid giving the elements and relations which form a structure an actuality which they do not have, and withdrawing from them a reality which they have. We have seen that a double process of reciprocal determination and complete determination defined that reality: far from being undetermined, the virtual is completely determined. When it is claimed that works of art are immersed in a virtuality, what is being invoked is not some confused determination but the completely determined structure formed by its genetic differential elements, its 'virtual' or 'embryonic' elements. The elements, varieties of relations and singular points coexist in the work or the object, in the virtual part of the work or object, without it being possible to designate a point of view privileged over others, a centre which would unify the other centres. [...] What the complete determination lacks is the whole set of relations belonging to actual existence. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 209)

In other words, the reciprocal determinations produced by the virtual and actual realms are not so much excessive as they are necessary. He writes: "Everything is necessary, either from its essence or from its cause: Necessity is the only affection of Being, the only modality" (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 38-9).

Deleuze's ontology, then, is premised upon virtuality's relative excessiveness preceding and determining all expressions of actuality.³⁹ For him, it is thanks to virtuality's excessiveness that entities have the *potential* to be, make, and become an effectively infinite – though determined – number of things (in accordance with their capacities).

Such pronouncements undermine conventional definitions of excess insofar as excessiveness is recast – at once – as a necessity, as determined, and as determining. But, how can something be both excessive and determined at the same time? Moreover, can determinism and creativity co-exist? The specter (and paradox) of determinism will continue to haunt us as we continue. Indeed, as we proceed I will suggest that determinism needn't be as restrictive or problematic a concept for thinking creativity as some might assume, nor does determinism get in the way of our ability to encounter novelty, creativity, or what we typically describe as "the new."

³⁹ For a thorough articulation of the problems of privileging the virtual over the actual see Badiou, 2000.

Deleuze identifies two general tactics people tend to use upon encountering the excessive – and unknowable – conditions of creative potential. On the one hand they try to categorize, limit, and control the world – they attempt to limit excess; on the other hand they engage excess by opening it up, attacking it, and playing with it – they experiment with excess in pursuit of something new and interesting. Deleuze and Guattari observe, however, that these two options are not equally plausible for everyone, since attempts to exceed “the signifier [i.e. the normative] or [pass] beneath it will [inevitably] be marked with a negative value” and be placed “under a curse” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 116). In other words, those who attempt to acknowledge ambiguity and encounter excess on its own terms – that is, without attempt to annul its ambiguousness – often end up becoming excessive themselves, at least relative to the system that can no longer accommodate them. Deleuze, of course, is a fan of being open to potential. With Nietzsche he implores us to *embrace* and *enjoy* excess, to affirm it, to unburden ourselves by embracing the options excess – as virtual potential – makes available. He writes:

There is creation, properly speaking, only insofar as we make use of excess in order to invent new forms of life rather than separating life from what it can do. (Deleuze, 1983, p. 185)

To embrace excess is, for Deleuze, the best way to be creative. Indeed, to become open to excess one must become-artist, to give oneself over to creative processes, rather than condition creation according to one’s necessarily clichéd criteria. Of course, to throw ourselves headlong into excessiveness and to open ourselves to exploration and potential is, notes Deleuze and Guattari, a “dangerous exercise” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 41). Indeed, to embrace excess is to embrace the very conditions of creativity that exist prior to “world” and prior too to philosophy. These pre-conditions are “prephilosophical,” as Deleuze and Guattari say, not easily accounted for “with concepts” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 41). Indeed, to embrace excess is to imply “a sort of groping experimentation” requiring measures that are not very “respectable, rational, or reasonable” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 41). For Deleuze and Guattari, these measures belong to “the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness, and excess. We head for the horizon, on the plane of immanence, and we return with bloodshot eyes, yet they

are the eyes of the mind” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 41) – a mind made aware of the possibilities of creative thought.

When viewed through a Deleuzian lens of excessiveness, painting can be read as an activity that continually, in its own way, extracts its capacities from an unlimited field of virtual potential (but that does so in accordance with the range of abilities available to it). “In a sense every being, each moment, does all it can” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 269). The product, however, is always *being* and *doing* more than meets the eye. Painting, of course, is not unique in this regard. It is not alone in its capacity to channel and make manifest innumerable potentials (in keeping with particular constraints). Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari would argue that *everything is this way*. And like everything, the “excesses” of painting are inherent to painting itself; excesses (thought of as potential) are always already in process, and are always present in new ways and in response to new (emergent) situations. Paintings, from a Deleuzian point of view, can be understood as both expression and expressor of excessive potentialities. Excesses are the norm, not the exception. The excesses expressed through painting do not emerge in particular instants, but at all times. That is, paintings participate in *the* excess that produces all entities, the excess that both poses problems and provides solutions (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 81; Deleuze, 1980, p. 121-23).

The excesses of the virtual – of potential – are not excesses that need to be squandered or spent – as they are in Bataille – since each creation or actualization generates new potential (i.e. new virtual excessiveness). The excess Deleuze describes, then, is not a *particular* excess, but a *perpetual* excess: “an absolutely immanent pure causality” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 233). That is, for Deleuze creation itself is excessive insofar as it perpetually exceeds *itself*. Further, the entities that become actualized (in turn producing time⁴⁰ as the effect of their actualization⁴¹) are expressions of excesses throughout their duration. These excesses exist within a

⁴⁰ Peter Hallward observes: “Absolutely creative time [...] can only be thought as both empty and full. It is full, naturally, because it creates all there is. But it must also be empty, if each new act of creation is to be fully creative, i.e. unhindered by any previous creation. Since only the creatures get in the way of creation, creative time will be creatureless; since only the present interrupts or divides time, creative time will be presentless” (Hallward, 2006, p. 148).

⁴¹ As Hallward notes, for Deleuze and Bergson “Events come first, and their occurring produces time as a dimension of their occurring [...] Events no longer punctuate a regular, orderly time, and their time is not measured and linked according to the regularity of movement. Instead, the immediate occurring of singular events generates an aberrant time as the dimension of their impossible coordination” (Hallward, 2006, p. 146-47).

feedback loop wherein the virtual is actualized and the actual virtualized. The virtual, of course, cannot be encountered directly; rather, what we encounter or experience is the actual (the virtual – like time, perhaps⁴² – only being encountered through its effects [Shields, 2003]).

For Deleuze, then, the virtual exists as a “productive power of difference [...] which denotes neither a deficient nor an inadequate mode of being” (Ansell Pearson, 2002, p. 1). That is, although an object’s or situation’s or person’s virtual multiplicities can *potentially* be actualized, they need not be in order comfortably to co-exist with the actual or the material. In fact, it is precisely the non-actualized virtualities that create spaces *for* actualization; that is, their *not* becoming actual makes any *particular* actuality possible. Virtualities condition events without defining them. An excess of potential need not determine actualized events.

The excesses of Deleuze – virtual excesses, excesses of potential and of creativity – demand further exploration. Do excesses really exist? How does excess generate and express particular instantiations of itself? Does it make sense to speak of excesses in a world that is, as Deleuze states on occasion, “completely determined” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 209)? Would it not be more accurate to describe any given actualization – a painting, for instance – as a product of precise (though unanticipated) sets of *enabling constraints*?

As we move forward, the ontological paradigm developed by Deleuze that sees virtual excessiveness providing the potential that produces actual entities and events will increasingly be challenged. For instance, it seems rather implausible to believe that potentials pre-exist events at all, insofar as any given event is only actualizable – is only possible – at the very moment of its actualization (when conditions warrant its emergence). Moreover, I would like to propose that any given potential manifested by a given individual is produced by its relations at the moment of their relating, rather than being inherent in some mysterious recess waiting to be actualized.

⁴² Derrida, describing the imperceptible nature of time, opines that time gives us “nothing to see,” being: “at the very least the element of invisibility itself. It withdraws whatever could give itself to be seen. It itself withdraws itself from visibility. One can only be blind to time, to the essential disappearance of time even as, nevertheless, in a certain manner nothing appears that does not require and take time” (Derrida, 1992, p. 6).

In other words, as I suggested earlier, I'd like to suggest that it's not potentiality that produces, nor does a virtual realm co-exist alongside the actual one. Rather, what *produces* are relations themselves – contemporaneously with their emergence. This seems logical to me because to suggest that the “virtual potential” of individuals – or of sets of circumstances – somehow generates actualities overlooks the radical relationality all individualities require in order to make manifest whatever capabilities they end up manifesting. That is, what we think of as individuals are merely bit-players in a universal state of affairs – a state of affairs defined and determined by the productivity of its relations. Of course, relations themselves, like Deleuze's virtual, cannot be known directly and are only encountered through their effects. Indeed, we could go so far as to re-assign Deleuze's virtual, away from the quasi-transcendent realm of virtuality, to the absolutely immanent zone of relationality. Such a re-assignment of virtuality would allow it to maintain its ineffability and, more importantly, its efficacy while disabusing us of the notion that creativity requires the existence of more potential than that which is inherent to the present moment and its relationally-driven generative potential. According to this ontological paradigm, expressions of creativity – a painting, for example – occur as both a solution to the problems posed, and the solutions created, by relationships. Each creative expression emerges according to its own *particular* set of relations and its own material and immaterial propensities. Excessiveness, from this perspective, is not the most appropriate paradigm for thinking creativity after all. This prospect compels us to ask: what happens when we view the world as a sequence of creative responses to *limits*⁴³ rather than to excessiveness? What happens when we interpret entities and events as having been constituted as the effects of relational *affordances* or *inclinations* that, while determined to a greater or lesser extent, remain (as far as we're concerned) unpredictable, novel, and even new?

⁴³ Massumi, on the topic of qualifying our understanding of “freedom” by emphasizing the reality of life's constraints or limits observes that “freedom, or the ability to move forward and to transit through life, isn't necessarily about escaping from constraints. There are always constraints. When we walk, we're dealing with the constraint of gravity. There's also the constraint of balance, and a need for equilibrium. But, at the same time, to walk you need to throw off the equilibrium, you have to let yourself go into a fall, then you cut it off and regain the balance. You move forward by playing with the constraints, not avoiding them. There's an openness of movement, even though there's no escaping constraint” (Massumi, 2003).

1.4 New Assumptions

[W]e produce something new only on condition that we repeat – once in the mode which constitutes the past, and once more in the present of metamorphosis. Moreover, what is produced, the absolutely new itself, is in turn nothing but repetition: the third repetition, this time by excess, the repetition of the future as eternal return. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 90)

Eternal return affects only the new, what is produced under the condition of default and by the intermediary of metamorphosis. However, it causes neither the *condition* nor the *agent* to return: on the contrary, it repudiates these and expels them with all its centrifugal force. It constitutes the autonomy of the product, the independence of the work. It is repetition by excess which leaves intact nothing of the default or the becoming-equal. It is itself the new, complete novelty. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 90)

When newness and novelty are thought of as being inextricably linked to their immanent conditions of emergence – in this case conditions dependent upon each moment of relationally-determined succession – newness and novelty are not only inseparable from the reality that just preceeded them, but from the constitutive capacity of relationality itself. Each new new – determined or conditioned by relation itself – is manifested as relation's effects. Individuals, from this perspective, lose all creative power (which they never had in the first place), relinquishing power, as such, to the immaterial and contingent capacities of relations. The question is no longer: What are individuals – or even networks of individuals – capable of? Rather, the question becomes: What will relationality produce next? What new creative expressions will relationality actualize? (It should be mentioned that disempowering individual actors [who had no independent power to begin with] objectifies the assumptions of theories of probability which, according to the relational ontology I'm developing here, measure the wrong thing, namely those individual entities and actors that are relations' effects. My suggestion is that it might make more sense to produce probability data by measuring the generative capacities of relations, but then no two relations have exact same characteristics. The best that can be said about probabilities, we must assume, is that they provide us with generalities at the expense of specificities.)

For Deleuze, as mentioned already, each absolute expression of the new is “nothing but repetition” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 90). “Newness,” then, is – insofar as it’s perpetually repeated – always determined *and* always the same. That is, while newness repeats it always repeats in new ways. The new, we might say, is always the same *and* always different. Regardless, a certain type of newness occupies a special place in Deleuze’s ontology, and its significance in Deleuze’s writing is fairly consistent. For Deleuze, the *truly* new ruptures convention, undermines rigid power structures, and exceeds interpretive conventions. *This* new functions as an objective to be pursued for its own sake. This newness, in Deleuze’s (and Guattari’s) work, takes the form of “lines of flight” or of rupture (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 11) or of deterritorializations (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 88). They write: “There is nothing imaginary, nothing symbolic about a line of flight. There is nothing more active than a line of flight, among animals or humans. [...] It is on lines of flight that new weapons are invented, to be turned against the heavy arms of the state” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 204). The truly new, then, for Deleuze ruptures dreaded “state apparatus”; in other words, the truly new is a new worth waiting for.

Deleuze gives less emphasis to the tension that exists in his philosophy between the new that repeats and the new that ruptures – namely, those lines of flight. What are the criteria that allow for this inconsistency? Is newness in general different – or less valuable – than *particular* eruptions of newness? Is it not the case that both operate within and across sets of relationships with other entities and that their respective newnesses are always expressions of those particular capacities that were possible in particular relationships? Are eruptions of newness not *determined* by relations that, while effectively innumerable and routinely unpredictable (from our perspective), remain expressions of an in-the-end-inevitable articulation of causes and effects? Should we conclude that Deleuze’s bivalent newness is a sort of ontological obfuscation insofar as newness’ more valuable form – newness-as-rupture – implies that events can outrun their own limitations?

The questions of the new in Deleuze are further compounded when Deleuze goes to some length to describe the *non*-newness of the new. That is, when he foregrounds newness’ relationship to the limits of human knowing, or better: newness as a human category or mode of understanding related more to convention, habit, and (non)repetition than to any sort of newness that might rupture more than human habits:

The new, with its power of beginning and beginning again, remains forever new, just as the established was always established from the outset, even if a certain amount of empirical time was necessary for this to be recognised. *What becomes established with the new is precisely not the new. For the new – in other words, difference – calls forth forces in thought which are not the forces of recognition, today or tomorrow, but the powers of a completely other model, from an unrecognised and unrecognisable terra incognita.* What forces does this new bring to bear upon thought, from what central bad nature and ill will does it spring, from what central ungrounding which strips thought of its ‘innateness’, and treats it every time as something which has not always existed, but begins, forced and under constraint? (Deleuze, 1994, p. 136, emphasis added)

Here Deleuzian newness is linked again to differentiation. But is the world not continually – in an absolute sense – becoming unrecognizable and differentiating? Isn’t everything always becoming “new”? Why then devise a category of the new distinctive from those instances of differentiation always already at work? How is one new different than another? What is the difference between newness, an event, novelty, and difference? Does what is *newness for us* have ontological significance? Is it worth pursuing as a teleological objective or imperative?

In a macro sense, every instance and entity exists as a *new* instance and entity, as a result, consequence, or most recent permutation of an unbroken sequence of events that themselves evolved immanently according to their capacities (rather than being impacted from a beyond). The eventful newness described by Deleuze, then, seems to be an expression of a more prosaic inclination to *change* rather than an instance of newness, as we might be inclined to understand it. As Smith observes, in Deleuze’s work, assessing “what is singular and what is ordinary in any given multiplicity is a complex task” (Smith, 2007, p. 12).

Indeed, Deleuze’s suggestion above that newness produces and is itself produced by non-recognition can be regarded as false since our encounter with newness – with the present’s emergence – is in fact a moment of *recognition*, a moment of recognition wherein we recognize what something – that which produced the new – is capable of doing. Indeed, we can observe that the capacities of things are produced

at each moment *in* that moment in relation to a relation; that is capacities *rely upon relation* for their creation.

Regardless, Deleuze agrees that creativity (or difference or the new) issues forth from *present* and *determining* capacities that *themselves* derive from relations. As he says: “Far from having perception presuppose an object capable of affecting us, and conditions in which we would be apt to be affected, the reciprocal determination of the differentials [...] brings about the complete determination of the object as a perception, and the determinability of space-time as a condition” (Deleuze, 1993, p. 89).⁴⁴

Eventful newness, according to this description, is tied to perception and interpretation. This is a newness that becomes new upon being identified as such. Newness here is not that which is unrecognizable, but is instead that which has been recognized. What is *new* is always what *has been* revealed; the new is the moment when a thing’s capacities become actual for *us* to view, or interact with. Newness only ever qualifies as truly new because *we* do not recognize its relationship to what came before, to the ways newness is reciprocally determined and constituted by forces of which we are unaware. Moreover, this process of determination is never linear since the conditions through which the new is determined are changing as much as that which it is producing. In other words, the process of problematizing changes as quickly as the procession of solutions – one determines the other, in fact.

The relationship between capacities, relationships, and determination is an ontologically significant one. To ignore this relationship is to ignore its broader and much more significant implications. If what transpires in the present and in the future has an intimate relationship with the capacities of the present and the future, and if we nonetheless experience the present as – for the most part – novel and unexpected, the implication of so banal an observation demands not that we theorize an outside from where novelty and “the new” comes, but rather that we re-focus on the specific capacities, factors, and potentialities of entities, contexts, and contingencies (Meillassoux, 2008). Such a bottom-up mode of theorizing takes materiality, reality, immanence, and relationality seriously. It is also a mode of

⁴⁴ As Smith explains: “This is what Deleuze means when he says that conditions of real experience must be determined at the same time as what they are conditioning. Space and time here are not the pre-given conditions of perception, but are themselves constituted in a plurality of space and times *along with* perception” (Smith, 2007, p. 13).

thought that regards that which is deemed creative to depend on the context and relations from which it emerged such that, in a sense, a given creative act could not have been otherwise.

To sum up, the present and future, insofar as they are expressions of immanent capacities, reveal a causal sequencing that is at once more simple and more complex than many more conventional explanations would suggest. There is no magic to creation (despite our perceptions), there are only relationships of production and consumption, creation and destruction. The present's, past's, and future's relationship to one another is not exceptional or special; rather, through time, materials, situations and affects relations express precisely that which they are *able* to express – they express precisely what they are capable of. Most significantly, it is precisely the infiniteness of the capacities and propensities of relations that is, I would like to suggest, most worthy of exploration. Again, I am pursuing an ontological approach that foregrounds *relationships* because of my assumption that what we call entities (however large or small) *cannot* exist in isolation; indeed, even entities that appear not to change exist within an endlessly changing context that is in a constant state of becoming – though we are not in position to observe them comprehensively.⁴⁵ In fact, it is thanks to relation that there are any capacities at all since the capacity to act necessitates that *actions are only ever able to be exercised* when there is something else that is able to be *acted upon*. Likewise, the *capacities* of entities granted by relation never exist in isolation but always in relation, *and* the relational conditions that give rise to entities-as-effects themselves change from moment to moment.

My intention in this section has not been to put forward an argument for or against causal determinism (since even if causal determinism were the case we would not be in position to put such a state of affairs to good use, let alone to predict the future); rather, my intention has been to begin to outline an ontology that increases our sensitivity to the importance of capacities, to the necessity of contingency, to the open-ended-determinism of becoming, to the idea that it is relations that are the productive actors of creation, and to the notion individuals cannot be said to actually exist without also enacting ontological blindspots. Such an ontology does not work

⁴⁵ As Leibniz explains: “For the most part, however, and particularly when the analysis is long, we do not intuit simultaneously the whole nature of the thing; rather, we use signs instead of things, and for brevity’s sake usually omit explaining them in the present chain of thoughts, knowing or believing that to give the explanation is in our power” (Leibniz, 1965, p. 5).

according to binaries – subject/object, mind/body, virtual/actual – since it posits that *the binary* does not define a difference but reveals a relation. That is, the binary does not articulate difference, it is the product of a single individual. Deleuze and Guattari critique binary thinking as follows:

one can always come up with binary oppositions . . . and bi-univocal relations . . . But that's stupid as long as one doesn't see where the system is coming from and going to, how it becomes, and what element is going to play the role of heterogeneity, a saturating body that makes the whole assembly float away and that breaks the symbolic structure, no less than it breaks hermeneutic interpretation, the ordinary association of ideas, and the imaginary archetype. (1986, p. 7)

The world being described here consists of systems in play, of feedback loops, and of unpredictable novelty that emerges *in the moment* and that *creates individuals as products of relations*. This determined world is rife with an unknowable panoply of capacities – as many capacities as there are potential permutations. Or, we could say that the world as it unfolds in time is capable of an infinite number of potential computations while, at each moment, generating the only possible result that – at that time – was possible. Endless differentiation, then, need not mean open-endedness. Massumi explains the potential dynamism of determinism I'm trying describe as follows:

Determination is a necessary concept for the theory of expression: its problem is how determinate being, or being-determinate, serially emerges. What makes it a theory of change was announced at the beginning: the insistence that what emerges does not conform or correspond to anything outside it, nor to its own conditions of emergence. A determination of being is not a tracing. Determination is a differing. Emergence is always of the different: every genesis a heterogenesis. A thing's form does not reflect its formation. It inflects it. (Massumi, 2002a, p. xxxii-xxxiii)

That relations and things have or are given capacities is obvious, at what point these capacities *emerge* is far less obvious, but it seems that *in the moment* might be a reasonable answer (rather than prior to the conditions of their emergence). Additionally, that these capacities are unexpected and exceed our conceptual and

material conventions and expectations is significant. To recognize that the capacities of capacities are what we – after the fact – *recognize as* novelty and newness and that what we describe as creative becomings bubble up from *within* relations (rather than strike like a bolt out of the blue) allows us to think differently – to think anew – about what we mean when we talk about creativity, art, artists, innovation, change, etc.

So if the present reveals what the former present – the recent past – was capable of, the present is our most recent encounter with the threshold of becoming. Painting, for philosophers, has been an ideal object for exploring, describing, and accessing unforeseen, invisible, immaterial forces of becoming. Paintings, for them, can be thought of as distillations of creativity or evocations of the invisible. According to Deleuze and Guattari paintings (like all art) achieve this by creating affects – physical and emotional sensations that are received by our bodies and evoke subsequent cognitive and physical responses (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). It is this capacity of painting, its ability to gesture towards – to perhaps foreshadow – the not-yet-thought or the not-yet-experienced or the not-yet-felt at the level of affectivity – painting’s capacity, always, to move us or evoke in us the unexpected and, crucially, the unforeseen, that is significant for us as we move forward. These “not-yets,” as we’ve been describing above, do not come to us from nowhere – are not a break with the past – but are teased out in painting through immanent processes that grow out of relationships of colour, form, texture, size, imagery, etc. These processes produce novelty and newness but also are native to the capacities inherent in painting and in painting’s materiality and immateriality – the capacities of paint, canvas, wood, image, etc. Though we can never know these capacities completely, nor predict their effects – and affects – with consistency, we *can* be open to, responsive to these unexpected and immanent processes of becoming.

The capacity of paintings to produce new affects and meanings is dependent upon *our capacity* to be receptive to the ways paintings *can* create these effects *in us*. That is, painting’s capacity to *become* something new and creative hinges on our modes of interpretation and depends on our own choices about how we will or won’t relate to it, what we will or won’t allow painting to become. (Although painting’s unforeseen becomings often emerge on their own terms, often over a period of time – the time required for us to be released from rigid habituations. Expressionism is a good example here: once scorned it has now become such a loved period of painting that it can barely resist performing clichés.)

We *can*, of course, evaluate a work of art – interpret a set of affects – according to past conventions and memories. But this method, Deleuze warns, places limits on what a painting can be since its becoming can be stunted by our invocation of those paintings and interpretations that have preceeded it. This method of interpretation regards painting too narrowly as representation. He warns that this process of compartmentalization through representation is endemic and pervasive. Its processes and effects go unnoticed and are too often taken for granted. It yields an image of thought that relies too heavily on convention and in which new and unforeseen events and interpretations face many obstacles. As Ansell-Pearson explains, representational forms of thought are a target for Deleuze and Guattari since they conceal “a culturalism and a moralism that upholds the unique irreducibility of the human form and order” (Ansell-Pearson, 1999, p. 179-81). Better, instead, to regard the act, the painting, and the painting’s reception as an unfolding process of expression, as an expression of the forces inherent to the components that come together to produce the duration of the painting event.

The following section will describe how these processes can be understood to work, how they are mobilized, as well as the effects they engender. Using, first, Spinoza’s *Ethics* and then by considering the work of Deleuze and his interlocutors, we will consider in more detail the implications of an ontology that favours representation, compartmentalization, and that produces, as a result, rigidification and an all too narrow ontological account of capacity’s limitations in order to outline the relationship between ontologies and understandings of creativity before delving more deeply, in later sections, into the ways these critiques can contribute to the development of an aesthetically-derived, modest ontological framework for doing ethics.

PART 2: NON-REPRESENTATIONAL EXPRESSIONISM, DETERMINATION, AND RECIPROCITY

2.1 Non-Representational Theorizing: Spinoza, Deleuze, Massumi

Artifice is fully a part of nature. (Deleuze, 1988, p. 124)

The history of the long error is the history of representation, the history of the icons (Deleuze, 1994, p. 301)

The transition appears to be as follows: if every substance is unlimited, we must recognize that each is in its genus or form infinitely perfect; there is thus *equality* between all forms or all genera of being; no form is inferior to any other, none is superior. (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 69)

Deleuze suggests that representational ontologies and interpretations of, for example, artworks function according to a set of binary assumptions. These Plato-inspired assumptions cause those who subscribe to representational ontologies to regard the world as consisting of two general kinds of entities: imitations and originals. Imitations are regarded as *imperfect examples* of “real” (i.e. abstract) categories. So, tables are manifestations of tableness and paintings are examples of paintingness; similarly, when artistic works are understood through a representational lens they come to be judged according to how well they approximate some sort of original object, intention, artistic objective, etc. This logic produces a system of thought that – troublingly – regards real instantiations of things merely as facsimiles or substitutes for an even *more* real “reality.”

Representation becomes a problematic method of interpretation when we appreciate that the vast majority of the capacities of things are unable to be known, that these capacities do not pre-exist their emergence, and that since the typical limits placed on what things can do or mean are effectively arbitrary they deserve to be explored,

interrogated, and expanded. This exploration and expansion of boundaries – this exploration of the conditions of immanence – is necessary in order better to grasp the contours, qualities, and attributes of the ways entities are produced. Representation-as-mode-of-interpretation works in the following way: X can be *represented* by Y; therefore Y is *like* X; indeed, we *can* understand X to be merely a modification of Y – a poor copy, a simulation. Note how the *potential* of X gets limited in this example. The qualities of X get determined in a pre-emptive way – defined and neutralized by their being represented by Y.

So, representational modes of thinking separate originals from copies. Novelty and creation become secondary to resemblance and hierarchy. As John Protevi notes, too often philosophers who operate according to a representational paradigm regard *thought* or *reality* as “what happens when things are recognized as instances of pre-existing categories” (Protevi, 2009, p. 275). Brian Massumi – who promotes an ontology of affect and emergence over and against ontologies of representation – states that paradigms that privilege representation as a method for meaning-making are in error because their object – that which is being represented – is not recognized adequately as a shifting, changing, and emerging entity, but as an instantiation of a more perfect and stable original. He argues that: “Models of mirroring or moulding – in a word, representational models – see the basic task of expression as faithfully reflecting a state of things. They focus on the ‘as is,’ as it is taken up by language”; on the other hand, he notes, the critical ideology practiced by Deleuze (and Massumi himself) focuses on the “‘what might be.’ Its preoccupation is change”; he writes that non-representational ontologies “open the way for change,” they “break the symmetry between the saying and the said” and they do this by “transforming the content-expression correspondence into an asymmetry, as subject-object polarity” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xvi; see also Thrift, 2008).⁴⁶

Representation, as used here, must not be interpreted as being simply synonymous with resemblance. Instead, representation is regarded by “anti-representation”

⁴⁶ Massumi continues: “Ultimately, the postmodern absurdity is to retain the true in order, repeatedly, to lampoon it by bracketing its objective anchoring. Why not just be done with it? From a Deleuzian perspective, parody and irony protest too much. The way in which they performatively foreground the signifying virtuosity of the speaking or writing subject seem distinctly to manifest a personal desire for a certain kind (a cynical kind) of masterful presence. The ‘nostalgia’ their postmodern practitioners have sometimes been accused of may have betokened, even more than a residual attachment to the truth, an investment in manifestation: a nostalgia for the master-subject whose ‘death’ postmodernism manifestly announced” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xvi).

theorists as much more insidious. For non-representationalists, to suggest that one entity “resembles” another merely describes external criteria that does not impinge upon the entity in question’s identity. Representation, on the other hand, suggests that something is *standing-in* or *substituting* for an original, it draws an evaluative comparison, it creates a relationship of subservience wherein the characteristics of one entity are used to evaluate those of another.

Deleuze, and other theorists of non-representational ontologies, would argue instead that there is no such thing as *representation*, there are only unique presentations, each one novel and different, and each worthy of being evaluated according to its own merits and – insofar as this is possible – independently. Representation, as a method of evaluation, sets up a closed loop between represented and representation, a sort of comparative cage in which neither is able to be defined by *new* concepts beyond those conducive to a representational schema: *this is/is not like that*.

Language and words, for instance, are not necessarily regarded by Deleuze as mere markers that represent, or simply refer, to some object or subject or other; rather, for Deleuze, language and words “do not refer to things but *are* things in verbal form. Propositions do not describe things, they are the verbal actualization of those same things” (Hallward, 2006, p. 76); language-based “representations,” then, are expanded articulations (or interpretations), further expressions of the thing’s thingness, of its capacity to produce, in this case, words. From this perspective, a *description* of a thing becomes an *attribute* of a thing, not a comprehensive representation of a thing. All entities for Deleuze, insofar as their expressions, result from ongoing, emergent creative process, are expressive rather than merely representational. Deleuze and Guattari’s motto could be summed up as the following: If it’s static, it’s problematic. Exposing the heterogeneous and contingent forces at work in emergent becoming is what they are interested in examining.

Examining *things in the making* – things *in* process and things *as* process – is of paramount importance. Let’s recall again the question with which we began this dissertation: what about painting is inconsequential? Insofar as a representational schema is concerned, the inconsequential is that which does not correspond to the representational assumptions at work in the dominant ontology (for example, if paintings are evaluated using a representational paradigm the weather may not be

regarded as important to their production; similarly, the artist's mood might be thought of as unimportant when considering an artist's use of colour, etc.).

While it is certainly not the case that what *is* of consequence to a painting could ever be fully elaborated and described, the assumptions and restrictions performed by representational discourses, discourses intent on fixing identities in accordance with what came before and according to reductive boundaries placed on potential, are too eager to fix entities in place rather than to attend to the (ongoing) reality of their unique and ongoing permutations. William James emphasizes the importance of instability when thinking things in the making when he insists that what really exists are not "things made but things in the making"; James urges us to put ourselves *in* the making by "a stroke of intuitive sympathy with the thing" in order to discover "the whole range of possible decompositions" that come "at once into your possession"; he goes on:

you are no longer troubled with the question which of them is the more absolutely true. Reality *falls* in passing into conceptual analysis; it *mounts* in living its own undivided life – it buds and burgeons, changes and creates. [...] Philosophy should seek this kind of living understanding of the movement of reality, not follow science in vainly patching together fragments of its dead results. (James, 1996, p. 263-64)

The restrictive relations generated by ontologies of representation – ontologies that define what can *be* based on what has *been* – are the target of Deleuzian ire when he declares that: "The task of modern philosophy has been defined: to overturn [the representational thought of] Platonism" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 59). Representational thought, as Deleuze reminds us, has a long history of critics which include, significantly: Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson, as well as Deleuze. Their critiques foreground the perils of an ontology that privileges correspondence and resemblance as adequate tools for sense-making in a world defined by process, novelty, and change. Their criticisms are not focused on representational thought's *conclusions* so much as on *the modes of thought* that brought the conclusions into being (not to mention the values and priorities that emerge, become, and, ultimately, *limit* becoming as a result). For his part, Deleuze suggests that entities – and the concomitant "machinic assemblages" that these entities comprise – do *not* represent other more "real" or "original" assemblages; rather, these machines, "represent

nothing, signify nothing, mean nothing, and are exactly what one makes of them, what is made with them, what they make in themselves” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 288). For Deleuze and Guattari process trumps product, action overshadows result, becoming replaces being. The world, for Deleuze and Nietzsche, has never consisted of representations but of productions, expressions, assemblages – each adequately real, unique, and expressive of difference.

Deleuze – like a good Nietzschean – regards any worldview that impoverishes this world in favour of a realm of more pure, stable, or original ideas or forms – any worldview that evaluates and assesses the merits of *this* world against another more perfect and transcendent one – is a worldview that is dangerously escapist and that ultimately impoverishes the creative processes of life. Deleuze observes that such ontologies require that entities correspond with representational *others* due to their lacking the inherent completeness required of something that needs no further explanation or explication.

Elizabeth Grosz, speaking to the issue of immanence versus transcendent representational categories – asserts that “things” have not enjoyed pride of place in the history of Western philosophy, having been consistently conceived of as the “passive, inert, unresisting other or counterpart to the subject, consciousness, or mind,” merely as “matter, substance, or noumena”; Grosz notes that within conventional binary modes of ontological evaluation – i.e. *this* is like *that* – “things” function as the inert other “against which mind is understood” (Grosz, 2000, p. 156). She argues that thinking things according to the binary schemas of representation – whether paintings or otherwise – limits and instrumentalizes the world by “whittling down [...] the plethora of the world’s interpenetrating qualities into objects amenable to our action” (Grosz, 2000, p. 157). This is, for Grosz, a “fundamentally constructive process” in the sense that the world we create through this understanding fabricates a world ready for assimilation. Of course, in many respects the process of simplifying the world into a sort of binary code – making it useful, as Bergson would say – is *necessary* since we have to simplify complexities (through our modes of interpretation, whether representational or otherwise) “in order to live in the world” (Grosz, 2000, p. 157). Indeed, the fashioning of the world is regarded by Nietzsche, for instance, as our highest calling when, as Grosz notes, he proclaims that we must “live in the world artistically, as *homo faber*” (Grosz, 2000, p. 157). The question

remains, however, is what creative methods will we use to build our world and our understanding of it?

Representational ontological strategies reflect our all too human attempts to minimize change and confusion, to attain stability, to produce a set of criteria that allows us to operate according to more fixed categories and identities. But, for Deleuze – as Grosz explains – it is crucial to recognize that thinking about the creation of objects – *things* – does not necessitate that we think of objects as manifestations of “clearly delimitable and determinable relations,” nor of objects that exist as “solids” (Grosz, 2000, p. 157). We succumb to this way of thinking, for example, when we observe that things remain fundamental particles even as we observe them at “more and more minute” scales and in light of “more and more minute fundamental particles” (Grosz, 2000, p. 157). Grosz observes that even contemporary physics is keen to reveal the solidity of the most minute particles, being “incapable of understanding what is fluid, innumerable, outside calculation” without this “reduction” (Grosz, 2000, p. 157). But, she goes on, it is precisely this “flux” that, while occasionally being identified by philosophy, “provides the condition of the generation of new things from old things” (Grosz, 2000, p. 157), and it is an attunement to the reality and propensities of the flux that generates material and immaterial entities alike that will permit, enable, our “‘artisticness,’ as Nietzsche puts it, our creativity, in Bergsonian terms” since, after all, it is only through “continuous experimentation with the world of things to produce new things from the fluidity or flux” that enables us to adapt to new situations and to create novel forms expressions (Grosz, 2000, p. 157). For Grosz, as for other non-representational theorists,⁴⁷ to be able to think difference and creation beyond representation becomes not merely an ontological task, but an ethical one as well.

Avoiding the devaluation of things and the edification of representational paradigms is what is required. Instead, the ontological task is to affirm the particular and innumerable conditions conducive to the emergence of entities, individuals, and

⁴⁷ Representational ontologies not only restrict what a thing can be, they also set up a relationship that requires resemblance in order to bestow or generate value. Non-representationalists will counter that things do not require an original “true form” to which they’re related in order to be valuable; rather, things are always already productive and are lacking nothing since, to suggest otherwise, would be to suggest that a thing does not already possess its full range of capacities (i.e. potential capacities). On this issue, Deleuze and Guattari explain that: “Every time that production, rather than being apprehended in its originality, in its reality, becomes reduced [...] to a representational space, it can no longer have value except by its own absence, and it appears as a lack within this space” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 306).

actors in general. This is possible, of course, since all we are dealing with here are, presumably, revisable modes and methods of interpretation. What is required, then, is that we (whether academics or not) develop a more open, radical, and precise grasp of the limitations and potential of creative conditions, recognizing also that these capacities do not belong to individuals but are realized in relationships whose effects, in turn, are compounded and multiplied by the ongoing generation of other entities and conditions *ad infinitum*. Entities, then, are always expressing themselves *with* and *through* one another. My argument is that to develop a more nuanced and precise understanding of creativity in general it is important to recognize *how* entities and relations produce *determined* forms of difference that, though enabled and constrained, are effectively infinite. Relations, as they continue to change come to define and be defined by their creations; indeed, we could never even isolate the characteristics of “a relation” since relations never stand still long enough to be accounted for. Similarly, capacities *continue* to unfold according to the capacities of these always changing relationships. Determinacy is always, then, indeterminate. It is this indeterminacy of determination (its articulation, significance, meaning) that is the philosopher’s task to explore. Our philosophical and existential task – according to Deleuze – is to affirm, explore, and assess expression’s conditions. This requires an expanded ontology that acknowledges the reciprocal intertwining and enabling of difference and limitation, an ontology that interrogates forms of expression and identifies how *old* lines of inheritance produce *new* lines of flight. In sum, entities always only express that which they are capable of expressing, but these variegated expressions are themselves never repetitions, representations, or stable. Additionally, all expression is made possible by the reciprocal relationships that afford the expression in the first place. Things’ capacities are constituted by the capacities of other things (whether at micro or macro scales, and whether in the past, present, or future). The philosopher and the artist traces these paths of becoming forward and backward, in an effort to reveal⁴⁸ lines of flight heretofore unknown and unactualized.

The ontological task of identifying the forces that condition difference without appealing to transcendent or representational categories is one that is championed early-on by Spinoza, who regards the world as an incessant and immanent swirl of forces he describes as “expressions” that produces new configurations and new forms in accordance with its capacities. The next section will begin to describe the

⁴⁸ For more on “revealing” see Heidegger (1996).

significance of these forces, both their “creative potential” and – perhaps most importantly – their limitations.

2.2 Expressionism vs. Representation

With Spinoza, univocal being ceases to be neutralised and becomes expressive; it becomes a truly expressive and affirmative proposition. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 40)

In Deleuze (and Guattari’s) estimation all entities – including apparently representational mediums such as language, text, photography, painting – are wholly *real* expressions of becoming consisting of their own sets of attributes, particularities, and abilities that need no further justification. In Deleuze’s view, the multivalent expressions of things are adequate to their task: “What is expressed has no existence outside its expression, but is expressed as the essence of what expresses itself” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 43). Deleuze explains that attributes are not so much that which can be attributed to a subject, but are, conversely, “in some sense ‘attributive’”; Deleuze regards each attribute as expressing “an essence, and attributes it to [a self-causing] substance” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 45).⁴⁹ In other words, capacities – like attributes – are not expressions of subjects or objects; rather, what we typically define as individual subjects or objects are expressions of their capacities and of the conditions and things that afford these capacities in the first place.

Deleuze, inspired by the expressionism of Spinoza, encourages us to reconsider conventional understandings of the origin of entities. Spinoza’s reflections on the impersonal preconditions that produce entities and their attributes can bring another

⁴⁹ Deleuze’s explanation of attributes continues: “Substance first expresses itself in its attributes, each attribute expressing an essence. But then attributes express themselves in their turn: they express themselves in their subordinate modes, each such mode expressing a modification of the attribute. As we will see, the first level of expression must be understood as the very constitution, a genealogy almost, of the essence of substance. The second must be understood as the very production of particular things. Thus God produces an infinity of things because his essence is infinite; but having an infinity of attributes, he necessarily produces these things in an infinity of modes, each of which must be referred to an attribute to which it belongs. Expression is not of itself production, but becomes such on its second level, as attributes in their turn express themselves. Conversely, expression as production is grounded in a prior expression. God expresses himself in himself ‘before’ expressing himself in his effects: expresses himself by in himself constituting *natura naturans*, before expressing himself through producing within himself *natura naturata*” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 14).

perspective to our discussion of relations insofar as Spinoza's ontology describes a world that does not consist of individuals with attributes, but a world that produces individuals as effects and enables these individuals to have attributes that mirror their ability to affect and to be affected.

As Deleuze explains, typically we might think that *identities* or *individuals* pre-exist their *attributes*. But Deleuze encourages us to re-orient the way we understand the sequence of events that give rise to identity formation so that it is not the entity that expresses its attributes, but the infinite attributes⁵⁰ that express, and produce, entities. Insofar as Nature "comprises and contains everything" it is, according to Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, "explicated and implicated in each thing" (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 17). Attributes, then, determine the nature of that to which they are attributed, they "involve and explicate substance [i.e. the originary cause, for Spinoza], which in turn comprises all attributes" (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 17). This is the case because attributes are expressions of an infinite substance (the uncaused and self-creating cause). These attributes in turn are themselves as infinite as the substance from which they issue forth, and coagulate, we could say, into what we define as entities. For Spinoza, the entities resulting from attributes exist as modes of the one substance⁵¹ – the originary, unknowable creative force – and these modes, in turn, "involve and explicate the attribute on which they depend, while the attribute in turn contains the essences of all its modes" (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 17).⁵² Moreover, conventional conceptions of subjects, identities, composites are turned on their heads, becoming expressions that unfold from the bottom up, rather than from the top down. According to Deleuze:

⁵⁰ "Thus Spinoza says that each attribute expresses a certain infinite and eternal essence, an essence corresponding to that particular kind of attribute. Or: each attribute expresses the essence of substance, its being or reality. Or again: each attribute expresses the infinity and necessity of substantial existence, that is, expresses eternity. ... The expressive nature of attributes thus appears as one of the basic themes of the first Part of the *Ethics*" (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 13).

⁵¹ "Expression does not relate to substance or attributes in general, in the abstract. When substance is absolutely infinite, when it has an infinity of attributes, then, and only then, are its attributes said to express its essence, for only then does substance express itself in its attributes" (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 20).

⁵² Deleuze elaborates: "God expresses himself in his attributes, and attributes express themselves in dependent modes: this is how the order of Nature manifest God. The only names expressive of God, the only divine expressions, are then the attributes: common forms predicable of substance and modes" (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 59).

Attributes are for Spinoza dynamic and active forms. And here at once we have what seems essential: attributes are no longer attributed, but are in some sense 'attributive.' Each attribute expresses an essence, and attributes it to substance. All the attributed essences coalesce in the substance of which they are the essence. As long as we conceive the attribute as something attributed, we thereby conceive a substance of the same species of genus; such a substance then has in itself only a possible existence, since it is dependent on the goodwill of a transcendent God to give it an existence conforming to the attribute through which we know it. On the other hand, as soon as we posit the attribute as 'attributive' we conceive it as attributing its essence to something that remains identical for all attributes, that is, to necessarily existing substance. (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 45)

So it's not the delimited, individual entity that is real; rather, it is the flux, change, attributes, and capacities we typically identify as *belonging* to entities – attributes and capacities that produce the entities themselves – that are the real, impermanent constituents of reality. That is, it is the attributes and the *conditions* of the attributes that *attribute* to an entity its characteristics. Therefore, individual entities do not *have* attributes, but are *granted* attributes by the nature of their mutable and relationally dependent conditions. So, the reality of the entity exists across its transitions from one expression to another and is never actually stable enough to be able to suggest that such and such an individual entity has such and such set of capacities. Representational modes of thought, then, while undoubtedly an interpretive strategy capable of defining, comparing, delimiting, and controlling does not *adequately* describe the interconnected and ever-changing sets of forces that can provide an expanded (and, I'm arguing, more nuanced and accurate) conception of the ways things are.

2.3 Spinoza's Novel Determination

We can have only an entirely inadequate knowledge of the duration of particular things outside us. (Spinoza, 2004, p. 37)

All ideas, insofar as they are related to God, are true. All ideas that are in God agree entirely with their objects, and so they are all true. (Spinoza, 2004, p. 38)

That a painting, or any other thing, is an expression of relationally-produced sets of capacities – sets of attributes – will become increasingly significant for our investigation. Things as expressions of capacities and things as products of relations will be the basis not only for illuminating the nature of objects and “the conditions under which something new is produced” (Deleuze and Parnet, 2007, p. vii), but also for complicating our efforts by confronting us with the paradox of such claims.

Significantly, expressions that manifest themselves in a thing (or that a thing manifests) are *limited* by the capacities – the potentials – that are inherent to their condition of emergence – however complex such conditions may be. In other words, a thing can only express those capacities that it is afforded or granted, and these capacities can only produce the thing they're capable of producing. Viewed in this light, capacities (and things) must be regarded as determinations and as expressions of an unlimited number of, perhaps confusingly, interconnected *limitations*. The qualities of a painting are only those of which the painting is capable of (no more, no less) and these qualities are only those that certain relations can afford. A red, square oil painting will never be able to evoke the same viewer responses as a yellow, oval painting (though its potential to evoke an infinite number of other unique responses is not in question). Of course, since the capacities of the painting do not exist within a vacuum – existing instead within, and as a product of, networked sets of relations – they too are infinite insofar as a thing can *theoretically* enter into any number of different relationships, configurations, situations at any number of different times and places. That is, every painting – and every thing – exists in, as we know, a context, an environment, a milieu. Every painting reflects a culture, social formations, the artist's intentions, and is received by its viewers in accordance with the interpretative framework of its time. These capacities will be different for different paintings, and will be different at different times for the same painting

according to the relations and environments in which it is located – a repetition of difference.⁵³

Put differently, we could say that an entity's capacities manifest themselves as pre-determined expressions of differentiating potential, and here lies the paradox: things – as they actualize their potentials – are at once pre-determined and unceasingly differentiating at the same time. This suggestion goes farther than Deleuze's when Deleuze points out that differences always repeat (i.e. *Difference and Repetition*, 1994). That is, my suggestion is that differences repeat but are always determined or caused in specific ways and so not *as* different as we might think. Or, with Spinoza we could say that the repetition of difference is determined by the ways it affects and is affected. Difference, then, is a manifestation of novelty but not absolute newness, insofar as that which we might understand to be newness is in fact an actualization or expression of a pre-existent or determining set of potentials that, *given the relational circumstances*, inevitably became actualized. As Spinoza explains:

just as extension is determined by no limits, so also thought is determined by no limits. Therefore, just as the human body is not extension absolutely, but only an extension determined in a certain way, according to the laws of extended nature, by motion and rest, so also the human mind, or soul, is not thought absolutely, but only a thought determined in a certain way, according to the laws of thinking nature, by ideas, a thought which, one infers, must exist when the human body begins to exist. (Spinoza in Curley, 1994, p. xix)

Expression, then, complicates our understanding of creativity, innovation, and agency, insofar as we, with Bergson (1998), can regard the present as a contracted form of the past, as the inescapable compression of the whole past into a single, infinitesimally small, fleeting instant with its own characteristics at once defined by, but not the same as its conditions. In this way an entity or thing is a precise and

⁵³ Deleuze writes: "we [...] tend to think of repetition in terms of the identical, the similar, the equal, or the opposite. In this case, we create difference without a concept: one thing is a repetition of another whenever they differ though they have the same concept. From then on, whatever arrives on the scene to vary the repetition seems at the same time to cover or hide it. Again, as with difference, a concept of repetition has eluded our grasp. But could it be that we adequately formulate a concept of repetition when we perceive that variation is not something extra added to repetition, only to conceal it, but rather its condition or constitutive element – interiority *par excellence*? Disguise belongs no more to repetition than displacement does to difference: a common transport, diaphora. Taking this to the limit, could we speak of a single power, whether of difference or of repetition, which would make itself felt only in the multiple and would determine multiplicities?" (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 301-302).

passing expression – rather than representation – of potential, of what came before. The present is an adequate culmination of the past; it is novel but not new, different but determined.

The idea that entities are adequate to their forms of expression, each *expressing* expression (doing what they can do, as Spinoza would say) in a different way, can be a difficult, though not nonsensical, idea to grasp; this difficulty, in turn, reveals much about our own sets of perceptual and cognitive limitations.⁵⁴ Or as Peter Hallward observes: “All that we ever actually see or hear of a creating is its creature” (Hallward, 2006, p. 77). That is, to conceive of expression apart from the expressed presents us with the task of making sense of, literally, non-sense.⁵⁵

Spinoza attempts to develop methods for understanding existence and entities’ relationships in as unabstracted a way as possible (i.e. without recourse to various forms of representational categories and modes of evaluation). He accomplishes this by developing a theory of immanence based upon his observation that entities are capable of two things: affecting and being affected. Further, these capacities correspond with the argument I have been describing wherein affection (and actualization) can be thought to *conform perfectly* with the capacities of the entities (and corresponding circumstances, etc.) involved. Crucially, this correspondence does not function to *limit* entities, but rather to *expand* our understanding of them – to describe more comprehensively the interdependent nature of their being and to encourage that their relationally derived capacities be explored and teased out. The correspondence of modes of expression with capacities limits creative possibilities insofar as *the new* must correspond with what expressed it. This, we could say, is a sort of weak determinism that takes correspondence seriously while acknowledging also that *the new* is not easily predicted in advance and is always distinct from the conditions of its creation. Massumi explains how for Spinoza capacities correspond with their effects, and the conditions that produced them, as follows:

⁵⁴ “I should like to warn that I attribute to Nature neither beauty nor ugliness, neither order nor confusion. For things can only be called beautiful or ugly, orderly or confused, in relation to our imagination” (Spinoza, 1994, p. 63-4).

⁵⁵ Deleuze describes the relationship between sense and non-sense as follows: “If sense is necessarily a nonsense for the empirical function of the faculties, then conversely, the nonsenses so frequent in the empirical operation are like the secret of sense for the conscientious observer, all of whose faculties point towards a transcendent limit” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 155).

Each transition is accompanied by a variation in capacity: a change in which powers to affect and be affected are addressable by a next event and how readily addressable they are – or to what degree they are present as futurities. That “degree” is a bodily intensity, and its present futurity a tendency. The Spinozist problematic of affect offers a way of weaving together concepts of movement, tendency, and intensity in a way that takes us right back to the beginning: in what sense the body coincides with its own transitions and its transitioning with its potential. (Massumi, 2002b, p. 15)

Like Leibniz, Spinoza⁵⁶ is motivated by a desire to ground his ontology in the concept of expression.⁵⁷ He attempts also to come to terms with the implications of the apparent necessities of expressive effects requiring causes (save for the uncaused causer of causes – namely God, or substance). Spinoza observes that: “From a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and, conversely, if there is no determinate cause no effect can follow”; moreover: “Knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, knowledge of its cause” (Spinoza, 2004, p. 2).⁵⁸ Spinoza scholar and translator Edwin Curley describes some of the preliminary implications of the privileging and prioritizing of relationships as constitutors of causes by observing that the world of “finite changing things stretches back into the infinite past: there

⁵⁶ As Deleuze explains: “It is hard, in the end, to say which is more important: the differences between Leibniz and Spinoza in their evaluation of expression; or their common reliance on [expression] in founding a Postcartesian philosophy” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 4).

⁵⁷ On Spinoza, Leibniz, and expression Deleuze observes: “The question takes on added importance from the fact that Leibniz also took expression as one of his basic concepts. In Leibniz as in Spinoza expression has theological, ontological and epistemological dimensions. It organizes their theories of God, of creatures and of knowledge. Independently of one another the two philosophers seem to rely on the idea of expression in order to overcome difficulties in Cartesianism, to restore a Philosophy of Nature, and even to incorporate Cartesian results in systems thoroughly hostile to Descartes’s vision of the world. To the extent that one may speak of the Anticartesianism of Leibniz and Spinoza, such Anticartesianism is grounded in the idea of expression” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 17).

⁵⁸ Spinoza continues: “Now all bodies in Nature can and must be conceived as we have here conceived the blood, for all bodies are surrounded by others, and are determined by one another to existing and producing an effect in a certain and determinate way, the same ratio of motion to rest always being preserved in all of them at once, that is, in the whole universe. From this it follows that every body, insofar as it exists modified in a certain way, must be considered as a part of the whole universe, must agree with the whole to which it belongs, and must cohere with the remaining bodies. And since the nature of the universe is not limited, as the nature of the blood is, but is absolutely infinite, its parts are restrained in infinite ways by this nature of the infinite power, and compelled to undergo infinitely many variations.

... You see, therefore, how and why I think that the human body is a part of Nature. But as far as the human mind is concerned, I think it is a part of Nature too. For I maintain that there is also in Nature an infinite power of thinking, which, insofar as it is infinite, contains in itself objectively the whole of Nature, and whose thoughts proceed in the same way as Nature itself, its object, does” (Spinoza, 1994, p. 83-4).

was no moment of creation,” and goes on to note that this “infinite series of finite things could not have produced the world we know if it had not been determined to exist and act in the way it does by a finite series of infinite causes, those permanent and pervasive features of reality described by the laws of nature”; it follows that any effort to explain any given natural phenomenon “requires a knowledge both of its antecedent conditions and of the laws governing the operation of those conditions.” (Curley, 1994, p. xxiv).⁵⁹ Curley notes that the requirement that we know “antecedent conditions” demands that no “finite intellect can ever fully understand any event” (Curley, 1994, p. xxiv). However, despite this ignorance on our part we *can* assume that “the explanation of the laws themselves is finite, and comprehensible, since lower level laws must be explained in terms of higher level, more general laws” and that there’s “an inherent limit to the process of going from a less general to a more general law” (Curley, 1994, p. xxiv).

The significance of a commitment to an ontological system that regards the world as an immanent network of determined and determining, novel and relational, causes and effects should be becoming increasingly clear. For one thing, such a position does not require that any *particular* existence be justified by anything more profound than by noting that it was caused by particular circumstances whose potential corresponds with their effects. In other words, any *effect* is justified *a priori*, and must be understood as something requiring for its being no recourse to some external standard it could be said to “represent” or fulfill, and not reducible to any category nor the product of any pre-existing, inherent capacity.

Spinoza’s intention in his ontology is to demystify our experience of the mystifying world by describing the world as an immanent field of forces that, though experienced first hand by us, always exceeds our capacity for understanding, always

⁵⁹ Spinoza continues: “Thus nature always observes laws and rules which involve eternal necessity and truth, although they are not all known to us, and so it also observes a fixed and immutable order. ... From these conclusions – that nothing happens in nature which does not follow from its laws, that its laws extend to all things conceived by the divine intellect itself, and finally, that nature maintains a fixed and immutable order – it clearly follows that the term ‘miracle’ cannot be understood except in relation to men’s opinions, and means nothing but a work whose natural cause we cannot explain by the example of another customary thing, or at least which cannot be so explained by the one who writes or relates the miracle. Indeed, I could say that a miracle is that whose cause cannot be explained according to the principles of natural things known to the natural light. But since miracles have been performed according to the power of understanding of the multitude, who were, in fact, completely ignorant of the principles of natural things, it is certain that the ancients took for a miracle what they could not explain in the way the multitude are accustomed to explain natural things, namely, by going back to the memory to recall some other similar thing they are accustomed to imagine without wonder. For the multitude think they understand a thing sufficiently when they do not wonder at it” (Spinoza, 1994, p. 36-7).

is more than it *reveals*. Our ignorance of the full gamut of causal relationships is not, however, something we can be blamed for – our naiveté does not render us “guilty” and need not result in our being ashamed; it is not something that is necessarily reprehensible in light of our own inadequacies, context-bound situatedness, and embodied capacities (or lack thereof). Rather, as Deleuze emphasizes, by avoiding reification and deification, by acquiescing to the reality, necessity, and limitations of cause and effect, Spinoza’s ontology is one that celebrates the fact that all that exists is real (rather than representation), that each attribute’s expression is a mode of a perfect substance (insofar as it accurately corresponds with itself and becomes according to its capacities), and that the conventional correspondences we make between original and copy are misleading interpretations that pre-determine (i.e. excessively limit) what an entity is capable of such that our experiences of entities correspond with *our* expectations.⁶⁰ Despite the banality of Spinoza’s ontology – his observation that all that exists are forces that affect and are affected according to their capacities to do so – it can be regarded too as cause for affirmation. This affirmation, for Spinoza, derives from the realization that things are always doing what they are capable of and always *fully* responding to the situations that both produce and are produced by them.

Interpreting the world as fully real and adequate in all its configurations and as something that requires no justification yields, in Deleuze’s view, a philosophy of “pure affirmation” that inverts the transcendental prejudices of Platonically-inspired theories of reality, change, and becoming. This affirmation is “the speculative principle on which hangs the whole of [Spinoza’s masterwork] the *Ethics*” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 60). Expression’s expression, then, is one of pure positivity, pure potential. There is no need for ontological categories of correspondence or hierarchical theories of forms, only productivity, novelty, change, and difference. This potential, for Spinoza, manifests itself as the ability of entities to affect and to be affected. In sum, “nature” does not lack anything and “all forms of being are affirmed without limitation, attributed to something absolute, since the absolute is in its nature infinite in all its forms” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 82). The paradigm of representation – where *this* entity derives its identity and value from *that* entity – produces, for Spinoza and Deleuze, a false paradigm that suggests that something from the past is being represented when, in fact, the something that is being defined by the past is not a re-

⁶⁰ See also Heidegger’s essay (1977) on technology, or Whitehead’s *Science and the Modern World* (1953) for further analysis of how all-too-conventional paradigms or abstractions can leave thought in a rut.

hashing of an earlier phenomenon, but a new, different, and unique phenomenon in its own right that is revealed as a consequence of earlier configurations, as a solution to the past-as-problem, and, as we're positing here, as a spontaneous product of relation.

Spinoza's argument that actualizations are not representations but expressions of novel solutions to once-actualized-solutions-that-became-questions jibes with an ontological understanding of creation as a process of *novel determination*. In the same way that particular situations or contexts produce consequences, the past-as-problem produces the fleeting present-as-solution and, as Deleuze reminds us, "a solution always has the truth it deserves according to the problem to which it is a response, and the problem always has the solution it deserves in proportion to *its own* truth or falsity – in other words, in proportion to its sense" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 159). In other words, Deleuze describes a deterministic form of emergence when he states that the solution "necessarily follows from the complete conditions under which the problem is determined as a problem, from the means and the terms which are employed in order to pose it" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 159).⁶¹

While correspondence or similarity between objects might suggest to us that x has been re-presented by y, to do so is to define y in terms of something it's not (namely x). So while distilling similarities down to simplistic interpretations hinging on notions of representation might be useful, it ultimately sets y on a particular course, it narrowly determines the meaning and potential of y (*for us*) – y's values, interpretations, capacities. So for Spinoza our capacities as humans, while they are not lacking, are recognized as not being able to equip us with a *comprehensive ability* to understand and engage affirmatively with the world around us – to allow things to be determined and novel according to *their own* creative processes. Rather, it is only through deliberate acts of understanding that we can adequately respond in a way that is not tied down by habit and convention. As Armstrong points out, for Spinoza all "men [sic] are, like Adam, born into conditions of ignorance and relative impotence"; we are vulnerable not only to our own lack of power-over (as Nietzsche

⁶¹ Deleuze completes this thought as follows: "The natural illusion (which involves tracing problems from propositions) is in effect extended into a philosophical illusion. The critical requirement is recognized, and the attempt is made to apply the test of truth and falsity to problems themselves, but it is maintained that the truth of a problem consists only in the possibility that it receive a solution. The new form of the illusion and its technical character comes this time from the fact that the form of problems is modeled upon the form of possibility of propositions" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 159-60).

might say), but are also “subject to chance encounters” and to an ongoing onslaught of forces that act on our passive bodies. All this, while at the same time not being able to discern the “true causes of these affections” (Armstrong, 1997, p. 49). We are forced, then, to attribute things to the preconditions set by other things even if the connections are tenuous or even invisible.

Representation as an interpretive tool, then, becomes a way of coping with our *inability* to interpret our situations without recourse to *original* and *copy* modes of interpretation that, particularly in the realm of aesthetics, give rise to a critical episteme trapped in reductive conclusions. (A paradox, however, seems to be emerging insofar as my argument suggests that interpreting something according to a representational paradigm is somehow *more* restrictive than the cause and effect determinism I’m promoting.) But, to observe that causes have effects does not preclude the potential for those effects to be different from what preceded them. In other words, by identifying the limitations that accompany theories of representation, we aren’t overcoming or undermining the deterministic principles of cause and effect, but are instead opening up our object of study – whether painting or not – to other potential causes and other effects.

And yet, there remains the problem that results from a disavowal of the interpretive framework afforded us by representation insofar as it is the very restrictions of the representational framework that has, itself, compelled us to dismiss it. In other words, any logic that opposes representation, or that adds to its limitations, is itself a consequence of the limitations it is meant to overcome such that non-representational ontologies are themselves simply reactive. Our capacity, then, to bring something truly new into the world – an ontological paradigm, in this case – remains elusive, our powers merely reflecting *their own* potential (myopic as this may be). With such a description of the power – the capacity – of humans we are again, as Armstrong reminds us, left to wonder: “how is it possible for [us] to become active [agents]?” (Armstrong, 1997, p. 49).

2.4 Relational Reciprocity and Creative Agential Production

The ideas of the affections of the human body, insofar as they are related only to the human mind, are not clear and distinct, but confused. (Spinoza, 2006, p. 46)

For Spinoza and Deleuze, agency – becoming active, being creative, etc. – is not something that is done in isolation. We are not individual agents roaming across a field of options to which we can completely freely contribute to, or take advantage of. Rather, agency – becoming active – is a consequence of, and dependent upon, relationships, contexts, connections, and collectivities. To suggest that we are individual agents – acting alone, no less! – is, for Spinoza and Deleuze, the height of absurdity since they recognize that were we to be truly isolated, we would have nothing upon which we could direct the very agency our independence presupposes. Since Deleuzeans are compelled to emphasise the necessarily *relational* nature of agency – and of creativity – we are faced with the task of reformulating our understanding of agency by reformatting our understanding of how our actions (and the actions of non-human entities) can come to fruition at all. If it is not we – alone – who are acting as agents, who or what is active? For Deleuze it is necessary to expand what we mean when we talk about “ourselves” and our creative capacities by recognising that our ability to become active is always an expression of pluripotency, an expression of a system of interdependent forces that are expressed *through* multiplicitous sets of individual human and non-human “agents.”

When discerning the nature of what we conventionally describe as agency, it is imperative that we expand our understanding of agency’s content. If we work with the assumption that *we* are all composites that seek to maintain a certain degree of (shifting) coherence, our ontological task – when accounting for our abilities as agents, for example, to be creative, loving, active – is to account for the relations that have brought about our becoming-active. To enhance our ability to function as an active and more-or-less cohesive unit expressive of sets of collectivities – what must be shown, as Aurelia Armstrong states, “is how agreements can be produced, how powers can be combined and how relations between powers can be organized in such a way that these powers aid rather than restrain one another, add to rather than

subtract from one another” (Armstrong, 1997, p. 50). Armstrong observes that Spinoza and Deleuze’s articulation of agency is one that opposes “liberal” accounts of agency that tend “to construe freedom [agency] in individualistic terms, as a right or ‘private possession’ of an isolated individual”; instead, Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza “posits agency as an irreducibly collective or combinatory process.” Armstrong continues:

The primary focus of Deleuze’s investigation is the processes of collectivization which produce at the same time composites or combinations of individuals with greater power and multiplicity, and individuals as modalities of these greater individuals. The growth of agency is shown to consist in a process of becoming-active, in the increase and enhancement of ‘individual’ powers through their combination with the powers of other, compatible individuals and things. (Armstrong, 1997, p. 50)

Agency according to Deleuze and as described by Armstrong is not something limited by *our own* capacities and will, so much as it is enabled and enhanced by the *individual* forces that constitute the situations in which we find ourselves and by the individuals we are acting *with*. It is not so much our will that extracts activity and events from the objects that surround us as it is the objects that surround us that provide us with what Deleuze describes as the “complete conditions”⁶² necessary for specific events to unfold during each and every moment. Deleuze and Guattari’s is an ontology that recognizes the necessarily interdependent interaction of the world’s constitutive parts, the variegated resonances that vibrate across immanence. There is a world of complementarity, counterpoint, mutual beneficence, and co-generosity. Insofar as this is the case, individual agency is not merely our own but is contingent upon the existence of collectivities that act. As Spinoza observes:

A body that moves or is at rest must be caused to move or stop moving by another body, which has also been caused to move or stop moving by another, and that again by another, and so on, to infinity. [...] Corollary: A body in motion moves until another body causes it to rest; and a body at rest remains at rest until another body causes it to move. [...] How a body is affected by another body depends on the natures of each; so that one body

⁶² Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 159.

may be moved differently according to differences in the nature of the bodies moving it. And conversely, different bodies may be moved differently by one and the same body. (Spinoza, 2004, p. 30)

This, of course, is not to suggest that our agential or creative powers must be understood as being *reduced* by their being situated *within* rather than above the phenomenal world; rather, it is to expand the location of our actions or “choices,” and to regard agency as that which is expressed by dependent collectivities rather than by independent individuals. It is, then, the *system* that is agent – that acts, activates, engages in activities – and it is the system, in concert with itself, that generates what we, after the fact, conventionally regard as agency.⁶³ In turn, according to Spinoza and Deleuze (as well as Nietzsche, certainly), an entity’s power to act increases or decreases in accordance with the number of connections and combinations in which it participates. Crucially, however, as Armstrong reminds us, our power to act as a component within a system is contingent upon our being “compatible” with that system so that we can contribute without our own coherence – our ability to remain distinguishable as “ourselves” – is not threatened or dissolved.

As Armstrong describes it our coherent selves can be either joyful or sad depending on whether the affecting body agrees or disagrees with the body it affects; further, “agreement” can be described as a situation in which individuals can participate or engage with one another so that “their characteristic relations and extensive parts [are able to be] preserved while being combined” (Armstrong, 1997, p. 51).⁶⁴ In turn, of course, new relations or composite individuals are created (for example, a person who “agrees” with a paintbrush produces a new individual – the painter – with a new set of capacities – in this case an ability to paint).

⁶³ For Spinoza, the actor that activity expresses is God, and God’s action – insofar as they constitute and express his being – could not be otherwise: “All things have necessarily followed from Gods given nature (by 16), and have been caused from the necessity of Gods nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way (by 29). To think of them as possibly being different in some way is, therefore, to think of God as possibly being different; that is to think that there is some other nature that God could have – some other divine nature – and if such a nature is possible then it is actually instantiated, which means that there are two Gods. But it is absurd to suppose that there could have been two Gods. So things could not have been produced in any other way or in any other order than they have been produced” (Spinoza, 2004, p. 15).

⁶⁴ Armstrong goes on to describe what transpires when individuals do not agree: “If, however, individuals encounter each other in an order in which their relations cannot be combined, then either one or both relations may be destroyed by being determined to enter into a new relation not compatible with the preservation of the former ones. In this case the individuals are said to disagree. Joyful passions and sad passions resulting from agreements and disagreements between individuals must be understood in terms of dynamics of power: joy is the augmentation of the individual’s power and sadness is its diminution” (Armstrong, 1997, p. 51).

If Armstrong, Deleuze, and Spinoza's understanding of what constitutes agency is acceptably convincing – adequate to any situation – it follows that for someone to increase their power to act, or for something to increase its potential to act (by increasing its options), it must engage with its network *experimentally*, in a way that challenges the network: i.e. testing, weighing, evaluating, experiencing. It is only by experimentation – by producing new results, by combining components – that actualities emerge that move beyond the order of habit.

We must be careful, however, not to fall into the trap that regards experimentation as itself being a form of expressed agency, as though the experimenter applies rational knowledge in his/her efforts to tease out new “results”; the reason this would be a trap is because we would have simply returned to our prior prejudice where agency (the creation of new states of affairs) is regarded as being driven by individuals. Rather, it seems more appropriate to expand our understanding of experimentation to include not only our creation *of* situations, but our being created *by* situations. We experiment with things and, in turn, experience ourselves being experimented upon. Indeed, oftentimes new results are a consequence of there being no willed experiment at all, but instead comes about due to serendipitousness. Again, however, we must be careful not to assume that an accident is something that comes to us (or whomever) from out of the blue, since accidents themselves are preceded by their own unforeseen (by us) causes and effects. Virilio, for example, observes how every invention assumes its dissolution – its accident (1997, p. 17).

What experimentation, of course, allows for is an increase in knowledge and the new creations that emerge from active attempt to make and be open to connections. It is only by allowing new connections that new connections are made (indeed, our own capacity for experimentation is itself an inclination that gives rise to new realities that operate beyond the bounds of convention or habit). So it is with knowledge; it is only through experimentation that we can achieve knowledge adequate to a situation since this knowledge in no way pre-exists the situation but is instead the consequence of a particular set of processes “obtained by experimentation” (Armstrong, 1997, p. 53).⁶⁵ The adequacy of this knowledge, in turn, is related to, and limited by, this

⁶⁵ Armstrong continues: “we do not begin with adequate knowledge of ourselves and of things, but our knowledge becomes adequate to the extent that the ideas it encompasses are made to proceed by the same order of necessity as that of the ‘things’ of which they are the ideas. There is in this sense an absolute coincidence of the production of adequate knowledge with the processes by

knowledge's usefulness to us, and what is useful to us is that which helps us to preserve our integrity and expand our ability to act. Spinoza observes as much when he writes that "men act always on account of a goal, specifically on account of their advantage, which they seek" (Spinoza, 2004, p. 18-9). This integrity, in turn and in keeping with the argument above that agency itself is contextually and communally contingent, is one that – ideally – does not seek the dissolution of others, but instead seeks to enter into compatible relationships wherein entities are able to produce something greater and more complex. As Armstrong explains, the pursuit of what is useful "is not exhausted by the individual's effort to destroy bodies incompatible with its own"; rather, this pursuit "also implies another type of activity, namely, the endeavour of the individual to form coalitions with other, similar bodies so as to increase its capacity toward off potential threats to its perseverance" (Armstrong, 1997, p. 54).

Prioritizing compatibility demands that we consciously understand – if only abstractly or imprecisely – what constitutes the conditions of our existence. This is Spinoza's demand since as far as he's concerned "everyone must admit" that "that all men are born ignorant of the causes of things" and that "all men want to seek their own advantage and are conscious of wanting this" (Spinoza, 2004, p. 18). He goes on:

From these premises it follows that men think themselves free, because they are conscious of their choices and their desires, are ignorant of the causes that incline them to want and to choose, and thus never give the faintest thought – even in their dreams! – to those causes. (Spinoza, 2004, p. 18)

Spinoza here implores us to foreground our limitations in our efforts to think about things; this is not to suggest that our opinions and theories are *wrong* or even *unfounded*, it is – however – to point out that we must begin our ontological and creative journeys with an acute grasp of, if not the sheer number of our capacities, then at least the ways these capacities are or are not limited. We must begin thinking *modestly* by thinking about where our thinking begins: our perspectively-inflected (and thereby limited) specificity, our myopic positionality as a component within (and not beyond) a vast, complex, and ever-shifting environment. I would like to point out here that Spinoza (and much contemporary network theory) maintains the

means of which the body becomes active. The acquisition of 'a higher human nature' requires the transformation, and not the transcendence, of inadequate knowledge and of the passive modes of existence it presupposes and implies" (Armstrong, 1997, p. 53).

category of the individual as that of which networks consist of. But, as I'm arguing alongside this networked-individualism the radical reciprocity of the agents that constitute these networks might compel us to ask: Why do theories that focus on networks and interconnectivity perpetuate the idea that individuals exist at all, or that agency, capacities, and even creativity are expressions of *individual* actors (whether human or non-human, networked or not)?

Nonetheless, given our individual limitations Spinoza encourages us to foster productive rather than destructive relationships. Our abilities, such as they are, are enhanced by extending ourselves through others (things or people, etc.). In turn, efforts that promote compatibility lead, in turn, to creative activity which, for Spinoza/Deleuze, constitutes what we tend to call agency. Armstrong observes that it is only by "gaining an understanding of the conditions of our knowledge and our action, that is, an understanding of the interactive networks of relations into which our own relation is inserted and upon which it depends, are we able to come into possession of our powers of acting and knowing" (Armstrong, 1997, p. 55).

The necessarily collective nature of agency – and of creativity – is a major preoccupation for Deleuze and Guattari. They talk about collective enunciations in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) and *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986, p. 17-8). Referring to particular situations in which individual agency does not adequately account for the *truth* of a situation, nor accurately depict the actors active within a situation, Deleuze and Guattari observe that collective enunciations are a function of entities *desiring* (or depending upon, or requiring) one another; they write: "The issue is one of *desirability* as an assemblage component" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 439). They go on to observe, as we've been doing here, that every group "desires according to the value of the last receivable object beyond which it would be obliged to change assemblage"; that is, the desire of the present reflects a past's desired future – the future to which it moves, the one it is capable of accessing. They observe that "every [desiring] assemblage has two sides," the implication being that desiring – the productive sentiment that compels creativity – is not singular but plural, incorporating the affects, effects, and capacities that constitute the components of any creative event. According to this perspective, we can imagine that it is the *desiring assemblage* that is the agent, not the discrete individual who desires, nor the discrete object of the desire.

Spinoza can be said to support the idea that we are the product of the desiring assemblage. Provocatively, Spinoza declares that people “are deceived in thinking themselves free”; indeed, Spinoza thinks it downright laughable when we think that of our own free will we can “either do a thing or refrain from doing it” since this belief is merely “an opinion” that “consists only in this, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes that make them act as they do” (Spinoza, 2004, p. 38). Spinoza’s observation does not – I’d suggest – deny that we can be multitasked, nor does it imply that we are defective, it merely brings to light the limited scope of our viewpoints (presaging so many postmodern arguments). Spinoza guffaws: “So this – their not knowing any cause of their actions – is their idea of freedom!” Arguably, while this statement by Spinoza could easily be construed as an anthropocentrically-directed insult, when understood within the context of Spinoza’s assertion that we – and everything else – are perfect expressions of God, it can also be read as a most gracious acknowledgement of the magnitude of our complexity, the subtleness of our being, while also acknowledging the vastness of our delusions. Thus, while Spinoza identifies our ignorance with a statement like, “Of course they say that human actions depend on the will, but these are only words for which they have no idea and thus have no meaning,” his subsequent statement foregrounds the complexity of the very ignorant beings he is describing: “For nobody knows what the will is, or how it moves the body” (Spinoza, 2004, p. 38).

The implication of this statement by Spinoza is that we are not knowable to ourselves, nor is the world knowable – in any complete way – to us. This is so precisely because we – our capacities and talents and predispositions – are for him mere expressions of the infinitely productive and always evolving power of God (the originary creative force). Insofar as this is the case our finite capacities of understanding (our limited perspective) is never in position to comprehensively account for the infiniteness of which we are an expression. Spinoza’s pantheism – what Audrey Wasser recently described as, “perhaps singularly the most reviled and most revered kernel of thought in the history of philosophy” (Wasser, 2007, p. 50) – is significant (particularly for Deleuze) for its insistence that the singularity we might describe as “everything” is expressed by (or finds expression in) a panoply of stable/unstable immanent forces in relation and persistent/varying degrees of mutation.⁶⁶ For Spinoza, to describe entities (and the known universe in general) as

⁶⁶ Wasser expands on this topic as follows: “In Spinoza’s expressive ontology, substance is self-expressing in the attributes: it is both what is denoted by them and what manifests itself in them.

expressive allows for an ontological paradigm that draws “sense” from an immanent field, rather than a transcendental one, or one wherein more significant “realities” play a role in predetermining everyday experiences of cause and effect.

Wasser describes expression for Spinoza as articulating “the relation between attributes and substance, and what links them to a third, to the essence of substance”; indeed, expression is “the nature” of self-causing substance, “prior to any causal production” – “the essence of substance is what is expressed (*l’exprimée*)” (Wasser, 2007, p. 51-2). Everything is expressive in its very nature; as Spinoza reminds us any substance that is infinite must (i.e. God, in Spinoza’s case), by necessity, be infinitely productive and creative: “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways i.e. everything that can fall under an unlimited intellect” (Spinoza, 2004, p. 10).⁶⁷ Expression is manifested for Spinoza via “modes” which, in turn, are modifications of the self-causing substance.⁶⁸ The self-creating – expressive – power, then, is, as Wasser notes, “identical to [its] function as cause”; that is, it is the causal potency itself that causes, not some pre-existent power that emanates or wills causation.⁶⁹ For anything to exist, it follows, existence – as expression/creation – must persist: “God produces as he exists, and his very existence is productive activity” (Wasser, 2007, p. 54). Causation, as such, causes: “In this way, the causal production of the modes is also an imparting of causal power” (Wasser, 2007, p. 55). The causal chain, in turn, links that which has been caused to the infinity that preceeded, and will follow, it. Substance, then, expressed as attributes and actualized as modes exists as a recurring production of differentiation, as a sort of somersaulting-reciprocity that, with each

The essence of substance, on the other hand, is the sense of substance’s self-expression. Substance’s essence appears to be indistinguishable from substance, or from the attributes that express it, only when we discard the notion of a real being of sense which is irreducible either to what the expression designates or to the form of the expression itself” (Wasser, 2007, p. 53).

⁶⁷ Wasser explains: “Because it pertains to the nature of substance to exist absolutely and necessarily (to exist as infinite self-cause), it equally and necessarily pertains to its nature to produce an infinity of things. Or, in other words, the essence of substance is productive power. Thus Deleuze can write that “God produces an infinity of things by virtue of the same power by which he exists. He thus produces them by existing” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 94)” (Wasser, 2007, p. 53).

⁶⁸ Wasser explains: “In short, what is expressed by the modes is the unique modification of substance itself, seen from different points of view – the points of view of the modes” (Wasser, 2007, p. 54).

⁶⁹ “As cause, substance is not beyond or above what it causes; as *causa sui*, it is no more than this causal act, not an eminent or abstract One prior to this act, since this is one and the same act that both constitutes its own existence and causes the essence and existence of the modes” (Wasser, 2007, p. 59).

revolution, spins off novel effects and expressions. As Deleuze writes in *Difference and Repetition*: “All that Spinozism needed to do for the univocal to become an object of pure affirmation was to make substance turn around the modes – *in other words, to realize univocity in the form of repetition in the eternal return*” (p. 304).⁷⁰

The reciprocal relationship between substance and modes realizes an ontological system that prioritizes difference.⁷¹ Prioritizing difference, in turn, prioritizes relations, resulting in identity and individuals becoming effects. As Wasser notes, processes of differentiation should be thought of “as more primary than identity, which it produces as its effect” (Wasser, 2007, p. 62).⁷² Determining that difference is the internal, *a priori*, condition of substance (i.e. everything) allows Deleuze – inspired by Spinoza – to subscribe to an understanding of all that exists as a multiplicitous singularity; that is, by maintaining the “internal necessity of difference” Deleuze is able to raise difference itself “to the level of an absolute” (Wasser, 2007, p. 62).^{73 74}

⁷⁰ Regarding this allusion to Nietzsche’s eternal return Wasser notes: “The eternal return abolishes all possibility of difference’s being recuperated by self-identity by making it repeat in the form of further differences, and in various syntheses called ‘repetitions.’ What realizes univocity is the form of repetition raised to the highest power; it makes difference absolute” (Wasser, 2007, p. 61).

⁷¹ “Deleuze’s own ontological project is most thoroughly argued for in *Difference and Repetition*, and involves another ‘Copernican revolution’ in philosophy, as he puts it, whereby identity would be understood to ‘turn around difference’: where difference would be freed from the requirements of representation in a concept and be conceived instead as first cause or principle; where identity and constancy would be understood as mere way-stations for difference, produced by differential forces and in Spinozist terms ‘dependent on’ difference as their cause” (Wasser, 2007, p. 60).

⁷² “Expression is thus revealed as an articulation of immanence that both divides and joins; immanence itself is revealed as expressive, expressive in a univocal fashion and according to divergent principles (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 175). Deleuze’s suspicion of transcendence, analogy, and equivocity – all forms in which Being is related to beings by means of a mediating or transcendent ground [...] stems from his critique of the way these forms figure the relationship between being and difference. Univocity remains the only expression of being that does not subordinate difference to identity, presence, or a One” (Wasser, 2007, p. 60).

⁷³ Wasser adds: “One of the aspects of Spinoza’s work he seems to admire most, as he makes clear in the conclusion to *Expressionism in Philosophy*, is this going beyond a certain inadequacy, facility, or relativism to the absolute cause or principle of a thing. In other words, what Deleuze seems to be after here is a notion of singularity, where “singularity” does not refer to what is simply without precedent or radically uncaused – in fact, a notion of singularity premised on the total absence of causality is nothing more than the flip side of total determinism – but where singularity (still in the sense of a new, eventful, or autonomous entity) is thinkable along with its efficient cause. In Spinoza’s terms, it is thinkable only and precisely because we know its reason. Deleuze is interested in the power or productive engine that can account for – indeed, accounts for the necessity of – the power unique to singular beings” (Wasser, 2007, p. 57-8).

⁷⁴ Wasser elaborates: “Spinoza insists on the essential and conceptual independence of substance, on its being defined as ‘prior to its affections’ and as “not requir[ing] the concept of another thing from which it must be formed” (IP1, ID3). Deleuze takes some liberty when he asserts that ‘substance, by virtue of its power, exists only in its relation to modes: it has an absolutely infinite

Existence, then, is an ongoing process of differentiation, manifested in particular instances that themselves – never stable nor isolated – produce further differences. Difference, for Deleuze, is not so much about diversity as it is about the way in which “the given is given,” or “that by which the given is given as diverse” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 222). The necessity of difference for existence requires that the world be understood as an unfolding openness, as an unending expressiveness that is never closed or finished but that generates – produces – everything as a product of new questions requiring new answers (answers that in turn generate new questions).

Deleuze points to the generative productivity of the tension produced by relationality when he suggests that every phenomenon “refers to an inequality by which it is conditioned,” and that every diversity and change “refers to a difference which is its sufficient reason”; in other words: “Everything which happens and everything which appears is correlated with order of differences: differences of level, temperature, pressure, tension, potential, *difference of intensity*” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 222). The world, then, exists as a perpetual response to what new differential relations make possible, to the question: “What is a body capable of?” And once this question is answered it is followed by a further question: “What else?”⁷⁵

To think of relations and their effects as material and immaterial processes of becoming different is to take seriously the question with which we began this meditation: “What about painting (or anything else) is inconsequential?” This question, far from being flippant, operates as an opening for considering the unconsidered, for examining the unexamined, and for extending and developing our

power of existence only by exercising [it] in an infinity of things, in an infinity of ways or modes’ (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 95). Deleuze’s argument here amounts to making substance’s essence dependent on its existence, or to making substance’s power dependent on its being exercised, a move that does not seem to be in keeping with Spinoza’s system. Yet it is akin to the project of *Difference and Repetition* of ‘making substance turn around the modes’” (Wasser, 2007, p. 63).

⁷⁵ Wasser identifies the cyclicity of Deleuze ontological framework when she observes that: “Like the eternal return, a substance ‘said of the modes’ is produced through a synthesis of difference by means of repetition in the modes, and serves as the affirmation that universal Being can only be said of what differs – both of individuating differences and of the very difference between Being and difference – and that difference, conversely, can be thought in itself as the original, most primary and productive element, but only on the basis of its expression in individuating differences. This appears to be a rather dizzying situation in which what expresses itself (difference) is reciprocally determined by its expression (individuating differences), or in which what is most universal is reciprocally determined by what is most singular: perhaps it is the very vertigo that belongs to a philosophy of immanence (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 180), or to the circularity that comprises the eternal return” (Wasser, 2007, p. 63-4).

categories, not so that their fixed contents should be expanded, but so that our expanded sets of categories could more effectively and accurately leave room for remainders, for unknowns, for the not-yet-actual, for potential, and for the *seemingly* inconsequential. To take seriously this demand to interrogate and open ourselves to the differentiating immanent powers or forces that exist as a product of contexts is at once a call for closer examination of our environments, and a call for more provocative, impractical, and open-ended forms of experimentation.

As has so often been articulated relative to Deleuzean schemas, thinking emergent processes and creativity as being always in a process of differentiation moves us “away from any final definition of a body [or anything else] in terms of a fixed form, function or identity and towards an exploration of what bodies can do” (Armstrong, 2002, p. 47). Although perhaps a cliché (not to mention an imperative that has more recently been co-opted by contemporary pursuits of capital: “We must innovate or else!”), the demand to “think different” (an Apple slogan) is one that, to be put into practice, must perpetually renew/encounter the fishbowl in which it swims, and continually re-evaluate the targets towards which it should aim. As Armstrong notes, Spinoza’s observation that “we don’t know what a body is capable of” is not a call for us to anticipate or define what is possible in advance; rather, Spinoza is making the observation that what we’re capable of can never be decided in advance. Nor is it decided once the present has passed. Indeed, any response will “vary depending on the relations into which that body enters, the connections made with other bodies and the changing character of the contexts in which it exists.”⁷⁶ In Spinoza’s view the task is not to determine *how* to act, or *why* we act, but rather to pursue the central ethical demand that grounds his ontology – to *intensify* our *ability* to act, to feel energized and productive, by entering into *mutually beneficial* relations with other actors.⁷⁷ After all, it is thanks to mutual beneficence and the generosity of things that we are capable of anything in the first place.

⁷⁶ Armstrong goes on to invoke the observations of Paul Patton when she writes that: “Although Deleuze and Guattari discuss various kinds of processes of becoming, including becoming-intense, becoming-animal, becoming-woman, becoming-other, becoming-minor and becoming-revolutionary, Paul Patton has argued that becomings may in general be regarded as processes of increase or enhancement in the powers of one body, carried out in relation to the powers of another, but without involving appropriation of those powers” (Armstrong, 2002, p. 47).

⁷⁷ “For Spinoza, the properly ethical task is to intensify our powers of acting, to become active, to experience joy. He seeks to define the means by which individuals may realize this power as fully as possible and he denounces those forces which separate us from it” (Armstrong, 2002, p. 48).

Spinoza's is an ontological system that eschews conventional hierarchical notions and conventional distinctions between creator and created, being and ground. That is, the unfinished processual productivity of existence *demands* that we *create* values in this ungrounded universe. By undermining the very notion of identity, representation, originality, and creativity Spinoza's (and Deleuze's) is an ontology in which value must itself perpetually be renewed and renegotiated just as relations need to be perpetually renewed and renegotiated; indeed, his is an ontology that recognizes that values can *only* exist within a relationally differentiating universe; that is, values must be renewed in order to *keep pace* with a changing world. In other words, to be able to value – to be in position to actively affirm the differentiating processes that envelop us (and that are us, afterall) – it is imperative that one be able to value differently.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Wasser explains: "Deleuze names difference in itself as the element in which extremes communicate, but it also and paradoxically appears as the condition that is most proper to the 'middle' of things, dividing and differentiating them: expression or affirmation not only affirms difference as the most primary causal element but it also ultimately upsets what is at stake in the very notions of priority, being, or ground. For while difference is the object and sufficient reason of affirmation, affirmation as difference, on the other hand, is not a ground but a 'groundless' ground, or 'universal ungrounding' (Deleuze, 1994, p. 67), not merely an original productive or causal element but also, reciprocally, what itself must be made ('difference is made, or makes itself' (Deleuze, 1994, p. 28)), not merely expressed or affirmed but also the very motor and movement of expression or affirmation itself, which appears only on the condition of its returning. This movement is above all a differential and differentiating one – the movement of difference: "Being is expressive, and difference is expressive. In the equivalence of these assertions, we read the signature of univocity, for the only thing common enough to all things and to the differences between things, the only thing that can sufficiently account for the difference between things, to the singularity of each thing, as well as to the singularity of being, is difference itself" (Wasser, 2007, p. 64).

PART 3: CREATIVE DETERMINATIONS AND AFFECTIVE ETHICS

3.1 Novel Creativity as Rule Rather Than Exception

The role of the imagination, or the mind which contemplates in its multiple and fragmented states, is to draw something new from repetition, to draw difference from it. For that matter, repetition is itself in essence imaginary, since the imagination alone here forms the “moment” of the *vis repetitiva* from the point of view of constitution: it makes that which it contracts appear as elements or cases of repetition. Imaginary repetition is not a false repetition which stands in for the absent true repetition: true repetition takes place in imagination. Between a repetition which never ceases to unravel itself and a repetition which is deployed and conserved for us in the space of representation there was difference, the for-itself of repetition, the imaginary. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 76)

A world of repetitive differentiation is one that expresses its nature – to perpetually renew difference – through the generation of novelty. Differentiation and novelty do not occur *because* of this or that *reason* (for example: to be useful, to be productive, or to be creative), but because differentiation is what constitutes the universe in the first place; that is everything that exists or gives rise to existence exists as and through differentiations. Deleuze describes this phenomenon by describing the nature of the first mover – God, as Spinoza would say – as follows: “God does not produce things because he wills, but because he is. He does not produce because he conceives, conceives things as possible, but because he understands himself, necessarily understands his own nature. In short God acts ‘by the laws of his nature alone’” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 104). It follows that insofar as differentiation is *necessary* for the processes that are existence itself that the unbroken chain of differentiation could not and cannot be different than what it was, is, and will be. As Deleuze explains, God “could not have produced anything else, or produced things in a different order, except by having a different nature” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 104).

Deleuze, here expanding on Spinoza's theories of God-as-substance – which he describes as “a ‘Logic’” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 129) – notes that the observation that the universe is only capable of generating that which it is capable of generating is one that challenges conventional notions of creativity as something that infiltrates or defines a situation from an outside. Deleuze suggests that thanks to his ontology of expression Spinoza did not need to “denounce the incoherence of the idea of creation directly,” but achieved the same result by focusing not on creative acts but on the *mechanics* of creative expression:

[Spinoza] has only to ask: How does God produce things, in what conditions? The very conditions of production render it different from a creation, and ‘creatures’ different from creations. As God produces necessarily, and within his own attributes, his productions are necessarily modes of these attributes that constitute his nature. (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 104)

Creativity, when viewed from this perspective, is *itself* not a novelty but is the most common of occurrences. Creativity – and the generation of novelty – is *not the exception* but is, at each moment, *the rule*.

To regard creativity and novelty as something ubiquitous and ongoing (i.e. as the perpetual machine of existence itself), rather than as rare or unique, challenges those who would describe artists as *uniquely* creative individuals, for it demands that the criteria by which the artist is measured/valued be rethought. Alternatively, the newness and novelty created by the artist could be bracketed off from newness generally. Artistic newness, according to such an interpretation, could be regarded as a newness-for-humans rather than as a newness with any particular non-human significance.

In other words, if the artist (or the scientist, or the philosopher) is not uniquely creative, but is merely one *mode* of the infinitely creative expressive substance, by what criteria can an artist be judged or be judged to be creative? Certainly any attempt to describe artistic creativity as a significant event in a *macro* sense becomes non-sensical. Must we then limit our identification of creativity to *micro* – or *local*, or anthropocentric – forms of creativity? Is the identification of creativity only

appropriate once we've defined or narrowed the *limits* or *boundaries* within which the label "creativity" can be applied as a relative term?

That is, isn't novelty produced by the artist only new insofar as it exceeds what has, to this point, been incorporated into human experience? That is, isn't the novelty sought after by the artist or creator one that breaks with *local* conventions, with embodied and lived knowledge. This more restricted expression of novelty is a form of newness that takes advantage of the ongoing production of novelty all around it to tease out something that confounds or challenges the sense-making systems of local (or human) conventions of understanding.

Novelty, creativity, and newness, then, occur through a *redistribution* or *reallocation* of forces that compel habitual human trajectories to change course. What we regard as newness, then, is not the result of going beyond the given, but is rather an immanent and engaged re-organization of the given; not an encounter with a singularity separate from the flux, but a detour within the flux's flows.⁷⁹ For the individual (the artist, the painter) to achieve novelty is for them to experiment with ways of navigating smooth and striated spaces, of finding weak points, of being attuned to potential and propensities that can be brought into being within a predetermined field of constraints and consistencies. The challenge for the artist (in hopes of becoming creative according to human criteria) is to become keenly aware of the immanent tendencies playing themselves out within the emergent and pre-existent field of everyday life.⁸⁰ (The artist confronts and reorganizes conventional tendencies: technological tendencies, organic tendencies, aesthetic tendencies, spatial tendencies, immaterial tendencies, nonorganic tendencies). The creator/artist creates novelty by seeking, in effect, to outrun his or her capacities. In other words, attempts to be artistically creative are not attempts to overwhelming creative processes in general, but instead to overpower tendencies prevalent within immanent human systems and narratives, to create useful chaos without, as Deleuze and Guattari warn us, in turn creating dissolution.

⁷⁹ Meillassoux recently engaged with these ideas as follows: "But how to think a break of flux, which is itself a flux, without annulling it as a break? Very simply, by reducing the break to a detour of flux ... In identifying the break with detour, we assure ourselves that nothing exists apart from matter" (Meillassoux, 2007, p. 92).

⁸⁰ Meillassoux on the pre-conditions of novelty: "For if the mind is free, it is free insofar as it chooses, selects certain actions, from amongst the multiplicity of possible actions which it perceives in the world itself; but mind cannot choose unless an anterior selection, itself unfree, is already in operation – viz. the selection of images by bodies, a selection which, this time, constitutes the terms of the choice" (Meillassoux, 2007, p. 74).

By bracketing off creativity and newness in this way the intent is not to limit what is or is not art, or who is or is not creative. Rather, these creativity questions are being asked, as Deleuze states, to gain some insight into the mechanics and conventions “of our power of understanding” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 129). Gaining insight into our power of understanding, into the workings of the propensities and forces that contribute to what we call thinking (and valuing, and discerning, etc.), demands, I suggest, a taking-seriously of the *conditions* of its production and of the signposts (i.e. creativity, newness, human, non-human, reason, truth) it uses to navigate the world according to *its own* inclinations and capacities. This taking seriously, insofar as it requires an overcoming of ontological prejudices and assumptions, demands a letting-go of any inclinations to mastery, conclusions, and judgment. Re-imagining the human as an *expression* or an *effect of* creation rather than as *uniquely* or even *especially* creative results, suggests Deleuze, not in our “gaining knowledge of Nature,” but in our “gaining a conception of, and acquiring, a higher human nature” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 129). The task, then, is a “reflexive” one: thinking about thinking, judging judging. This reflexive task, as Deleuze explains, “consists solely in the knowledge of pure understanding, of its nature, its laws and its forces” (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 129).

In the next section we look at some of the techniques for overcoming all-too-human convention Deleuze identified in the artistic processes of painter Francis Bacon (1909-1992), techniques meant to use the unpredictability of the body to produce effects that compel the artistic act of making visible to move beyond the limits of convention and cliché.

3.2 Deleuze, Bacon, and Creating Chaos in Response to Clichés

It is a mistake to think that the painter works on a white surface. ... The painter has many things in his head, or around him, or in his studio. Now everything he has in his head or around him is already in the canvas, more or less virtually, more or less actually, before he begins his work. They are all present in the canvas as so many images, actual or virtual, so that the painter does not have to cover a blank surface but rather would have to empty it out,

clear it, clean it. [...] In short, what we have to define are all these ‘givens’ [*données*] that are on the canvas before the painter’s work begins, and determine, among these givens, which are obstacles, which are helps, or even the effects of a preparatory work. (Deleuze, 2002, p. 71)

Deleuze, in his book on Francis Bacon, describes the means by which artists make visible the invisible. He suggests that artists create not concepts (for this is the work of philosophy) but *affects*.⁸¹ Deleuze notes that the artist – or the painter – comes to the blank canvas only to discover an already completed field of clichés to contend with. The canvas, suggests Deleuze, though seemingly blank is already impregnated with convention, with the given, the commonsensical. The painter’s task is to extract from this field of clichéd whiteness something unforeseen and unexpected. The artist is tasked with confronting the momentous power of convention and to attack it in the hopes of breaking through and discovering something that can be regarded as new. We can think of this as a process of recontextualization.⁸² This task is made more challenging by the constraints inherent to any medium. That is, the painter must find the new in paint, the writer in words, the philosopher in concepts, the scientist in experimentation according to the limits of their respective mediums – since to declare that this new sculpture is the new painting would be for the sculpture (and the painting) to become something else entirely.

But assuming the painter must achieve the new with paint, his/her options are limited from the beginning (though, as we’ve been arguing, at the same time they are infinite). Creating novelty with materials and circumstances which are at-hand (is it even possible to do otherwise?) means that the already given must be arranged anew, must be composed in novel ways that provide artist and viewer alike with a sense of unexpected wonder that breaks with the overly general categories persistent in clichés. Indeed, it is one thing for the artist to achieve something new for themselves (given their limited purview), but to create something unexpected for an audience – especially a global audience – requires that the artist effectively surmount not only the categorical clichés of innumerable individuals, but also the spectral, no-longer-novel achievements that exist as art history and as memory.

⁸¹ For more on the role of art, philosophy, and the sciences see: Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1994). *What is philosophy?* New York: Columbia University Press.

⁸² See, for example, Pennycook, 2007.

Of course, even a comprehensive knowledge of past and present publics will not be comprehensive, and so today's apparently novel configuration may have been stylistically – if not exactly – actualized (in some way or another) at some earlier point; similarly, if today's groundbreaking artwork has no audience its newness will pass unnoticed. Artistic/aesthetic newness, it is important to recall, is consistently reliant upon the evaluative powers of those in position to judge it new or not. To be acceptably new means not so much that something has never been done before in this exact way (since this is the case for everything that exists); rather, newness means that something has exceeded the grip of (human) convention to make an impression, to create a different perspective, to induce reflection, to disturb coherence. To be evaluated as new by artists and viewers alike is not to create something out of nothing, something that has no precedent, nor is it to participate in a rare activity (the production of novelty), it is merely to break through the all too human world of socio-cultural clichés (hence the potency of a different culture's aesthetics to arouse the excitement in its “other”).

Aesthetic value, for Deleuze, is achieved not so much by severing a chain of cause and effect, but by effecting *unexpected* causes, by breaking with normative forms of clichéd representation. In his introduction to *Francis Bacon: The logic of sensation*, Daniel W. Smith reminds us that Deleuze declares that “the cliché is precisely what *prevents* the genesis of an image, just as opinion and convention prevent the genesis of thought” (Smith in Deleuze, Bacon, 2002, p. xxiii). Smith's suggestion is that if the clichés that constitute human interpretations of art, or painting, or thinking are not aggressively attacked by the artist, the painter, or the thinker they aren't, respectively, making art, painting, or thinking (in any sort of consequential or significant way *for us*). The artist's job, then, is not to overcome the mechanistic cause and effect relationships that constitute the immanent function of a materially-bound and novelty-generating universe, but merely to overcome the surmountable, short-lived, tenuous, and fickle *predispositions* of a given society or culture.

Here I am, in part, critiquing Deleuze's penchant for fetishizing newness to the point that newness itself becomes a value; indeed, if duping people into abandoning their clichés is what constitutes art and creativity it strikes me that Deleuze is forwarding a rather under-ambitious – if not misguided – aesthetic program. For while the generation of new perspectives (soon-to-be-new clichés?) is an effective form of churning people's habits, *new* perspectives and solutions are not necessarily better,

preferable, or more ethical than old ones. Newness, then, could be thought of as an empty signifier. Nonetheless, as Smith observes, the fundamental question of Deleuze's philosophy – particularly in his book on Bacon – is this: "What are the conditions for the production of the *new* (an image, a thought...)?"; Smith answers his own version of Deleuze's question by saying that the new only appears if the cliché, the convention, is catastrophically destroyed: "Hence the essential role of the catastrophe: the condition for the genesis of the image (or the sensation) is at one and the same time the condition for the destruction of the cliché" (Smith in Deleuze, Bacon, 2002, p. xxiii). So, newness as product of destruction. But what should we destroy?

In the face of this drive to encounter the new-for-us by destroying clichés we are wise to proceed, I would like to suggest, with a modicum of ontological skepticism. A cautionary note on newness is suggested by Paul Valéry, whom Walter Benjamin cites in the *Arcades Project*:

The new is [a] poisonous [stimulant] which [ends] up becoming more necessary than any food; drugs which, once they get a hold on us, need to be taken in progressively larger doses until they are fatal, though we'd die without them. It is a curious habit – growing thus attached to that perishable part of things in which precisely their novelty consists. (Valéry quoted in Benjamin, 2002, p. 560, S10, 6)

When attempting to articulate some of the issues we might have with any unbridled affection for newness for its own sake, we must examine the ways this logic of the new is understood and articulated by its proponents. So, if we disregard Valéry's criticism, we can observe that the "essential" role of the catastrophe referred to above by Smith is to create chaos – a mangling of comprehensible codes. The chaotic, for Smith, Deleuze, and Bacon, *must be produced* in order for new compositions to come into being. The chaotic event *could* be read as a variant of Kant's sublime – *or* as that which by unforeseen processes exposes the immanent and *a priori* limitation of our representational capacities. However, these limitations themselves are constantly under revision, constantly adapting to new contexts (just as new contexts are adapting themselves to us). So, observes Deleuze, a "chaos, a catastrophe" is also "a germ of order or rhythm" (Deleuze, 2002, p. 83).

In his ongoing attempts to reveal how chaos and order presuppose one another, Deleuze frequently alludes to the viscerally intense figures from Bacon's paintings. Deleuze writes that Bacon's painterly intensity, achieved through "color and line," is "directly" interested in depicting/enacting "a violence" in order to wrestle the paint and the painting free – by creating a bit of chaos – from the clichés that threaten to annihilate its ability to become new.⁸³ Deleuze observes how Bacon depicts "the violence of a sensation (and not of a representation)":

a static or potential violence, a violence of reaction and expression. [...] The violence of a hiccup, of a need to vomit, but also of a hysterical, involuntary smile ... Bacon's bodies, heads, Figures are of flesh, and what fascinates him are the invisible forces that model flesh or shake it. This is not the relationship of form and matter, but of materials and forces; to make these forces visible through their effects on flesh. (Deleuze, 2002, p. xxix)

Deleuze's Bacon, then, paints sensations rather than representations. In turn, we viewers *sense* the sensation communicated in paint by Bacon. In fact, for Deleuze, Bacon is not primarily a wielder of paintbrushes but a manipulator of forces, a controller of affect; he creates by harnessing violence, chaos, incoherence, sublimity and turning these into sensation. Difference and newness are here inherent to the painting's effects insofar as viewer's will each experience as difference sensations or affects when confronting Bacon's paintings. For Massumi, sensation is the always differentiating felt experience of the body prior to reflection, representation, and language. Life, Massumi argues, is encountered as sensation *first* and accompanies *by preceding* every lived experience. He explains that sensation:

is the registering of the multiplicity of potential connections in the singularity of a connection actually under way. It is the direct experience of a more to the less of every perception. It may be considered a third pole or limit of experience, accompanying each degree of action-perception (that is to say: it

⁸³ Deleuze's confrontation with clichés continues: "The entire surface is already invested virtually with all kinds of clichés, which the painter will have to break with. ... Having renounced the religious sentiment, but besieged by the photograph, modern painting finds itself in a situation that, despite appearances, makes it much more difficult to break with the figuration that would seem to be its miserable reserved domain. Abstract painting attests to this difficulty: the extraordinary work of abstract painting was necessary in order to tear modern art away from figuration. But is there not another path, more direct and more sensible?" (Deleuze, 2002, p. 12).

is a limit of experience immanent to every step along the continuum).
(Massumi, 2002b, p. 92-3)⁸⁴

Bacon's paintings, then, as described by Deleuze are felt on the human bodies with which they come into contact because they distinguish themselves from the humdrum of the everyday. They pierce through the canvas, through our retinas, and are felt on our bodies. To create such potent paintings Bacon has to tackle the world's omnipresent clichés.

For Deleuze, Bacon's painting enacts a particular ontological attitude, a type of tactic for dealing with clichés, by leaping across representational conventions and extreme forms of abstraction, by relying upon nothing but its own capacity to create sensation. To accomplish this Bacon's paintings do not draw their force by referring to actual things (representational painting), nor do they succumb to the ambiguity of non-representational painting; instead, they *produce* sensation – they harness it and generate it in the viewer by toying with representational and non-representational conventions and by placing ravaged, fleshy bodies at their centre.

Deleuze's artistic strategy, then, is one that promotes the production of ruptures, the generation of violent forces that destroy convention and coherence – but, we should add, not too much! Deleuze's artist is someone who is a bit crazy, who flirts with disaster through experimentation, who creates a little bit of chaos without being destroyed by it. Indeed, for Deleuze being an artist demands a *controlled* release of hysterics – demands being conscious of limits – to prevent chaos from spiraling out of control. Deleuze explains the relationship of painting and creativity and hysteria as follows:

What we are suggesting, in effect, is that there is a special relation between painting and hysteria. It is very simple. Painting directly attempts to release

⁸⁴ Massumi continues to describe sensation as follows: "Sensation is fallout from perception. Endo-fallout: pure mixture, the in-mixing-out of the most-mixed. A receding into a latency that is not just the absence of action but, a poisoning for more: an augmentation. However poised, sensation as such is inaccessible to active extension and systematic thinking-out. It is an always-accompanying, excessive dimension, of the purely infolded. Like the possibility that thoughtfully unfolds, it doubles present perception. Two modes of abstraction, doubly doubling perception: the only-thought and the only-felt, the possible and the impossibly potentialized. These modes can be understood as concurrent movements of abstraction running in opposite directions (before feeding back), one receding into felt-tending, the other laying out thinkable alternatives for the active unfolding of what had been only in tendency. The world concretely appears where the paths cross" (Massumi, 2002b, p. 98).

the presences beneath representation, beyond representation. The color system itself is a system of direct action on the nervous system. This is not a hysteria of the painter, but a hysteria of painting. With painting, hysteria becomes art. Or rather, with the painter, hysteria becomes painting. (Deleuze, 2002, p. 45)

Hysterical painting, then, is *new* painting. It is *new* insofar as it breaks with clichés and conventions. It is painting that exposes what painting is capable of, that makes visible that which had until then been hidden. The effects of this hysterical painting has effects upon the body, it assaults the senses, not differentiating one sense from the other, but impacting all of them at once: “Painting gives us eyes all over: in the ear, in the stomach, in the lungs (the painting breathes...)” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 45). By refusing to be captured by the conventional limits of either representational or abstract painting Bacon is able to explore painting’s other capacities, most significantly, for Deleuze, painting’s attempts to “capture forces”; Deleuze explains that:

In art, and in painting as in music, it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but of capturing forces. For this reason no art is figurative. Paul Klee’s famous formula — “Not to render the visible, but to render visible” — means nothing else. The task of painting is defined as the attempt to render visible forces that are not themselves visible. (Deleuze, 2002, p. 48)

Regardless of whether or not it might be appropriate here to point out that it is the forces themselves that render painting, all this melodramatic emphasis on emotion, affect, and hysterics is Deleuze’s way of forcefully providing readers with the tools and strategies for overcoming conventions and clichés by crushing them through deliberately frenzied acts of exploration and experimentation, through an opening to the outside, to the unknown. Deleuze’s work, defined as it is by his analyses of painting, cinema, plateaus, literature, music, is, after all, a wide-ranging effort to account for the forces that give rise to each of these emergent phenomena, and in turn to describe the becoming of life itself. His use of Bacon’s paintings, then, is notable since it serves to relate to readers an instance where heretofore invisible forces have been captured and where chaos has been carefully deployed and controlled. For Deleuze Bacon’s figures “seem to be” amongst the “most marvelous

responses in the history of painting to the question, How can one make invisible forces visible?" (Deleuze, 2002, p. 49).

To make visible invisible forces Bacon must differentiate them from that which is already visible. To accomplish this Bacon has to be especially attuned to the mechanisms and clichés and assumptions that are already at work – even on a blank canvas.⁸⁵ Deleuze notes that the painter's task is not to "cover a blank surface," but to "empty it out, clear it, clean it" (Deleuze, 2002, p. 71). Of course the painter's thoughts, sentiments, and memories also inform the painterly act, and these too must be attacked. Hysteria is relied upon at all levels of the artist's being. The painter must "reverse the relations between model and copy [representation]"; the painter must define and identify the "'givens' [*données*]" that are on the canvas before the painter's work begins" in order to "determine, among these givens, which are obstacles, which are helps, or even the effects of a preparatory work" (Deleuze, 2002, p. 71).

By determining the relative *usefulness* of the givens the painter is in position to put them to use, to take advantage of them. The canvas, as Deleuze observes, appears to the painter who surveys it as invested with both givens and potential, the givens are regarded by the painter as "equivalent" and all "equally probable," they exist within and define a limited field (the canvas itself) (Deleuze, 2002, p. 76). But the probabilities and potentials inherent to the relationship between painter and canvas must be teased out by the painter who, after all, is only then in position to deem one component more equal than another. The painter, then, must somehow discern, differentiate, and direct the chaotic flux: "There is thus an entire order of *equal and unequal probabilities* on the canvas" (Deleuze, 2002, p. 76). As the inequality of the painting's givens become clear the painter can "begin to paint," but it is at this very instant that s/he – if sensation is the goal – is faced with the question: "how do I proceed so that what I paint does not become a cliché?" (Deleuze, 2002, p. 76). In other words, how can I free myself from the past? How can I open my own mind? How do I access the *unknown* capacities of the relations that provide the conditions for what painting is capable of?

⁸⁵ "Clichés and probabilities are on the canvas; they fill it, they must fill it, before the painter's work begins. And the reckless abandon comes down to this: the painter himself must enter into the canvas before beginning. The canvas is already so full that the painter must enter into the canvas. In this way, he enters into the cliché, and into probability. He enters into it precisely because he *knows what he wants to do*, but what saves him is the fact that he *does not know how to get there*, he does not know how to do what he wants to do. He will only get there by getting out of the canvas" (Deleuze, 2002, p. 78)

3.3 Free Marks and Embodying Unpredictability

[T]here are *free marks* that extend or arrest the line, acting beneath or beyond representation. (Deleuze, 2002, p. 41)

The answer for Deleuze to the question of how to “free the mind” of the artist is by appealing to the unpredictability of the body, to the potential for novelty inherent to the material world itself and to the potential variability and creativity of contexts and relations. This is accomplished by Bacon, as Deleuze observes, through the creation of what he calls “free marks.” The goal of producing free marks – by throwing paint at the canvas, or scraping away the paint, or not looking at one’s markings – is to move beyond the mind’s images of thought – the preconditions that condition the intentions and experimentations of the painter. Deleuze explains:

What does this act of painting consist of? Bacon defines it in this way: make random marks (lines-traits); scrub, sweep, or wipe the canvas in order to clear out locales or zones (color-patches); throw the paint, from various angles and at various speeds. Now this act, or these acts, presupposes that there were already figurative givens on the canvas (and in the painter’s head), more or less virtual, more or less actual. It is precisely these givens that will be removed by the act of painting, either by being wiped, brushed, or rubbed, or else covered over. (Deleuze, 2002, p. 81)

Deleuze suggests that these violent gestures bring about the “emergence of another world” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 82). These movements are necessarily “irrational, involuntary, accidental, free, random. They are nonrepresentative, nonillustrative, nonnarrative,” nor are they “significant or signifiers” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 82). Instead, they are traits, traits of “confused sensations (the confused sensations, as Cezanne said, that we bring with us at birth)” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 82). Most significantly, they are “manual traits,” generated by a flailing body that *doesn’t know what it is capable of*. The painter flails with “a rag, stick, brush, or sponge”; s/he “throws the paint with his [/her] hands” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 82). The painter gives his/herself over to the independence of the hand, of the arm, of the material consistencies – the viscosities – of the paint; in turn, all of these materialities begin to be “guided by other forces, making marks that no longer depend on either [...] will or [...] sight” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 82). The painter works almost blind, his/her eyes being of no consequence when

faced with the authority of the hand. The painting, in turn is removed from the world of “optical organization” – from the sight regime – that “was already reigning over it” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 82-3). The painter has put the hand in charge in order to shake it free “and break up” the “the sovereign optical organization” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 82). The consequence: the painter “can no longer see anything, as if in a catastrophe, a chaos” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 82).

Free marks are “made rather quickly on the image being painted” to stay one step ahead of the sense that emerges from sensation – “to destroy the nascent figuration [of the painting] and to give the Figure a chance, which is the *improbable itself*” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 76). The artist attacks clichés – predetermined conclusions – with the unpredictable, the marks being “accidental, ‘by chance’” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 76). In this case, however, the chance is chosen and “no longer designates probabilities,” designating instead “an action without probability” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 76-7); they are, however “nonrepresentative” insofar as their chanciness expresses “nothing regarding the visual image,” concerning only “the hand of the painter” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 77).

The only purpose of free marking is to be “utilized and reutilized” by the painter who wrenches the image (of thought) “away from the nascent cliché,” and from the “nascent ‘illustration and narration’” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 77). In this way the painter embraces chance as a choice, declaring “Yes!” to chaos, hysteria, to the overcoming of convention and habit. The new painting, then, becomes an accident, and chance a decision, a choice: “Chance, according to Bacon, is inseparable from a possibility of utilization. It is *manipulated chance*, as opposed to *conceived or seen probabilities*” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 77). Similarly, the painting feeds on itself, perpetuating the production of new affects, drawing again and again on the miscellany of marks. Describing the chaotic and convulsive works of Turner, Deleuze and Guattari explain how:

the canvas turns in on itself, [...] is pierced by a hole, a lake, a flame, a tornado, an explosion. The themes of the preceding painting are to be found again here, their meaning changed. The canvas is truly broken, sundered by what penetrates it. All that remains is a background of gold and fog, intense, intensive, traversed in depth by what has just sundered its breadth: the schiz.

Everything becomes mixed and confused, and it is here that the breakthrough – not the breakdown – occurs. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 132)

In a similar vein, contemporary German artist Gerhard Richter, well known for his philosophical reflections on the process of painting, describes the act of yielding to the forces at work in the painting in a similar way. In an extended and illuminating passage he writes:

Accept that I can plan nothing.

Any consideration that I make about the ‘construction’ of a picture is false and if the execution is successful then it is only because I partially destroy it or because it works anyway, because it is not disturbing and looks as though it is not planned.

Accepting this is often intolerable and also impossible, because as a thinking, planning human being it humiliates me to find that I am powerless to that extent, making me doubt my competence and any constructive ability. The only consolation is that I can tell myself that despite all this I made the pictures even when they take the law into their own hands, do what they like with me although I don’t want them to, and simply come into being somehow. Because anyway I am the one who has to decide what they should ultimately look like (the making of pictures consists of a large number of yes and no decisions and a yes decision at the end). Seen like this the whole thing seems quite natural to me though, or better nature-like, living, in comparison with the social sphere as well. (Richter, 1991, p. 123)

The necessary violence done by the painter to the clichés never ends, the battle goes on and on – repeating differently. Deleuze and Guattari describe the tension between artist, cliché, and materials when they declare that the artist “stores up his treasures so as to create an immediate explosion” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984, p. 34). With every brush stroke, and every free mark, cliché and convention lie in wait; but with every unrestrained painterly gesture unexpectedness is being revealed, being proposed. The lunging paintbrush, gesture, scratch, can do anything to the painting – they *threaten* to do anything. Grappling with clichés, then, becomes not *a* battle, but *the* battle – “a task perpetually renewed with every painting, with every moment in

the life of every painting” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 79). The results produced by choosing chance do not, however, come from nowhere. They are already always there. The task is not to discover something that is missing (lacking), but to generate something that *could* be there but requires different relations in order to achieve actualization. The process the artist uses to discover these givens – free marks in whatever form – are always changing (out of necessity); Deleuze states that the act of painting “is always shifting,” constantly “oscillating between a beforehand and an afterward: the hysteria of painting” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 80). Painting is not so much about creation as it is about extraction, retrieval, manipulation since that which comes into being on the canvas is “already on the canvas, and in the painter himself, before the act of painting begins” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 80). The work of the painter, then, is *manual* labor, “out of which the Figure will emerge into view” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 80).

Deleuze suggests that “we do not listen closely enough to what painters have to say” insofar as the painter’s *true* battle contradicts the fantasy of the painter as individual creative genius, or of the painter merely as a reflection of a social milieu.⁸⁶ Deleuze would say that to suggest that painters receive creative inspiration directly is to be too literal about where this “creativity” comes from. Indeed, it is to ignore that it *does* come from somewhere; similarly, to say that paintings of significance merely reveal their social milieu is to negate the painter’s struggle to *overcome* this milieu, his/her fishbowl of clichés. If anything, the painter paints despite being immersed within a particular habitus. Indeed, the painter battles against these very limitations, against the capacities the painters themselves know all too well (i.e. capacities limited by convention). The painter knows that painting is a battle to be released from capacity’s limitations, at least the known limitations. This struggle, states Deleuze, is “the act of painting” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 82) – the creation of an object consisting of “lines and colors” (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 176).

Despite his passionate analysis of painting, Deleuze is actually a rather reluctant apologist for painting if his stated discomfort with the topic is any indication. He risks, after all, restricting painterly becoming if the prescriptiveness of his descriptions become excessively heavy handed, weighing down painting’s potential to

⁸⁶ They say that the painter is *already* in the canvas, where he or she encounters all the figurative and probabilistic givens that occupy and preoccupy the canvas. An entire battle takes place on the canvas between the painter and these givens. There is thus a preparatory work that belongs to painting fully, and yet precedes the act of painting. This preparatory work can be done in sketches, though it need not be, and in any case sketches do not replace it” (Deleuze, 2002, p. 81).

be new; he risks turning painting itself – by defining it, by pinning it down – into its own cliché. When asked if he found pleasure in writing about painting he described the experience as “frightening” (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 183). But if Deleuze does pin down anything it is that his is an attempt – using for illustrative purpose painting, writing, science, philosophy – to describe not eternal or universals, but “conditions under which something new is created (*creativity*)” (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 304). His philosophical methodology – a sort of empirical pluralism – attempts to assess things in order to extract “previously nonexistent concepts from them,” since the “states of things are not unities or totalities but multiplicities” (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 304).⁸⁷

In closing this section I must reiterate that according to the relational ontology I’m proposing the chaotic imagery produced during these “free marking” sessions is a product neither of the painter, the painting, nor the “free marks.” Rather, all three gain their individual force as the *effects* of the relationships that produced them. That is, it is the invisible relations *among* the image-maker, the cliché-filled canvas, and the free marks that give rise to their respective attributes, not to mention the tensions among them. So while Deleuze might say that it is the free marks *themselves* that – as individuals – act “beneath or beyond representation” (2002, p. 41), the post-Deleuzian ontology I am proposing here re-imagines this set of relations, suggesting that it is the dissonance of the *relations* themselves that produces the catastrophe and chaos as their *effect*.

3.4 Chance, Affect, and Confronting Clichés

When I am *in* my painting, I’m not aware of what I’m doing. It is only after a sort of ‘get acquainted’ period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony,

⁸⁷ “Multiplicities are reality itself. They do not presuppose unity of any kind, do not add up to a totality, and do not refer to a subject. Subjectivations, totalizations, and unifications are in fact processes which are produced and appear in multiplicities. The main features of multiplicities are: their elements, which are *singularities*; their relations, which are *becomings*; their events, which are *haecceities* (in other words, subjectless individuations); their space-time, which is *smooth* spaces and times; their model of actualization, which is the *rhizome* (as opposed to the tree as model); their plane of composition, which is a *plateau* (continuous zones of intensity); and the vectors which traverse them, constituting *territories* and degrees of *deterritorialization*” (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 310).

an easy give and take, and the painting come out well. (Jackson Pollock quoted in Read, 1974, p. 266-7)

The point of making free marks and of the artist's flailing of his/her body is to thrust affect(s) and sensations into the foreground – literally. Affect, as Massumi (2002b) has demonstrated, pervades – indeed, inaugurates – our experience of the emotional and rational, the cognitive and physical moments of our lives. Affect, understood here in the Spinozist sense (as a play of forces that affect and are affected), is distributed – exchanged – through an interchange of cause and effect: one thing can affect another, or another can affect it.

In other words, an affect does not exist on its own, but – like any quality – *comes into existence* only in the presence of something that can be affected. That is, the affects that constitute the affectability of things are relational – affects are relation's effects. Deleuze's ontology emphasizes the significance of this affective interchange. Affect's significance, for Deleuze and for us here, rests in the observation that everything derives its existence from the give and take that it enables, for it is only within an economy of give and take, of cause and effect, of comparison and contrasts, that meaning, materiality, or any other actualization comes into being. Or, as Deleuze might say, in order for force to exist, it must be *pre*-existed by exertion and resistance; indeed, force itself can be understood not as a thing, but instead as the *effect* of two bodies in relation to one another (of course, bodies not only exert force but are defined by the force – that which exists in between actor and acted-upon – they exert).

Forces are expressions of capacities, but these capacities are actualized in the space between the thing that affects and the thing that is affected. Affect, force, and expression all exist as a product of a relation, and individuals – insofar as they can be said to exist – exist as bundles *of* affects, forces, and expressions. As Massumi observes: "Expression is always fundamentally of a *relation*, not a subject. In the expression, process and product are one" (Massumi, 2002a, p. xxiv).

The painter, then, by appealing to the emergent and in-process potential of the relationship between canvas, the body's potential to surprise, and the immanent capacities of materials (paint, canvas, wood) acknowledges that creative expression emerges from an inbetween space and relies on the combinatory potential that exists *across* those entities participating in the painting. The new – the "creative" work –

does not come into being from nowhere, “there is no *tabula rasa* of expression”; rather, creativity is always actualized from within an already “cluttered world” that is “strewn with the after-effects of events past, already-formed subject and objects and the two-pronged systems of capture (of content and expression, bodies and words) regulating their interaction” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xxix).

So, insofar as the artist must shatter clichés in order to create something “new,” the unpredictability of the body can be called upon. The body is called upon to yield surprises, to exceed the forces of habit-prone reflection that so often define and control it. The body is regarded here as having the potential to short-circuit thought, to expose reflection to something different, to create a space for something unexpectedly interesting. This is so because the body and its relations and its feeling *precede* reflection, cognitive processing. (Keep in mind, however, that drawing neat distinctions between feeling and thinking, experiencing and deciding, leads to its own set of problems and blind spots.)

Bodies, as Massumi observes, do not “choose to think” but are “forced to think” by virtue of their being forever implicated in “a self-propagating, serially self-organizing generative movement” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xxxi). This embodied movement *forces* the artist to think new thoughts and experience new affects by *preceding* it. The artist’s body is called upon because it *feels* – it responds pre-reflectively and, perhaps, beyond the bonds of convention, to affective inputs. Affect *induces* thought, a thought that “strikes like lightning” with its own “sheering ontogenetic force” that is “*felt*” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xxxi). New feelings (affects, in the more conventional sense) produce new thoughts, and feelings are not *known* fully in advance but only come to be partially known upon reflection. Indeed, Massumi argues, what we call “thinking” should not be “contained in the designations, manifestations, and significations of language, as owned by a subject” since to do so would be to recognize only “partial expressions of it: pale reflections of its flash”; instead, what we typically call “thinking” is merely a particular culmination (that soon passes into the past) that exists on a relational continuum of folding and blending: “The thinking is all along the line. It *is* the process: its own event” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xxxi). In other words, the body’s flailing while creating free marks is *itself* a mode of thinking, a mode of thoughtful receptivity to the effects of relation. By forcing thought to confront hysterical, unpredictable chaos – by taking advantage of our not know what our body’s are capable of – thought can break free of convention.

We can think of creative thoughts as conclusions – solutions – that exist at the end of a line, so to speak (though they are always at the same time a new beginning). Reflection exists at the other end of sensation. The artist's task is to induce confusion into this process, to force thought into another, unforeseen, space. Mastery escapes us while feeling surprises us. It is incumbent upon the artist to submit to thought's processes, by "letting its self-propagating movement pass through" us and, in so doing, being in position not to arrest or master it, but to divert it, compel it, play with it (Massumi, 2002a, p. xxxi).

To allow thought's self-propagating movement to "pass through us" requires that it not be allowed to become rigid. Allowing thought – understood as broadly as possible – to pass through us requires that we, in a rather pragmatic way, remain supple, that we continue to be "in touch" with that which touches us (both our minds and our bodies).

Being touched, as Luce Irigaray suggests, is "the matter and memory for all of the sensible": to sense is to touch and vice versa. Touching, she writes, "constitutes the very flesh of all things that will be sculpted, sketched, painted, felt, and so on, out of it (Irigaray, 2004, p. 137). For Bacon too, notes Deleuze, the creation of free marks is not simply an appeal to the affective/affecting body, but an attempt to *get in touch* with the *untouched*, thereby being able to "see" the unseen so as to make visible the invisible. When the artist produces free marks s/he short-circuits conventional forms of expression, and is able to create the sort of new markings that signify, to us at least, creativity.

By deferring to the body's potential to surprise the artist appeals to chance, to the material affordances bound up but not visible in relations. To escape convention the artist must appeal to these endlessly inventive capacities. As Irigaray observes, too often it assuages our anxieties to jump to the seemingly stable conclusions that derive from the belief that life can be "master[ed]," that creativity comes into the world from a single source (i.e. us); too often "our culture" attempts to "control the sensible, the growing or changing of living beings" (Irigaray, 2005, p. 390). This belief in mastery, this Cartesian perspective, has been revealed as inadequate by any number of theorists, Irigaray included, who regard the relationship between us and world, between thought and feeling, as one of permeability and exchange. Emphasizing the potential for "things" to impact us – our consciousness, our creativity – Irigaray

points out that it is only by *encountering* things that we are able to become creative (whether aesthetically or otherwise):

My inner space is [...] modified by the things, and even more by the others, whom I encounter. It is inhabited in multiple ways, and the manner in which I look cannot be reduced to the mere perception of the visible external to me. I co-look with that which already inhabits me, outside of all representation. (Irigaray, 2005, p. 394)

Free marks, then, inhabit the artist and the canvas in curious ways, affecting him/her unexpectedly, producing new configurations that, in turn, are drawn out (or painted). Free marks uncomfortably inhabit the painting, throwing the cliché into disarray, creating juxtapositions that themselves reveal what could not have been seen (sensed) earlier. The new configurations that are revealed are not so much new as they are configurations that, in a sense, could have been possible prior to the territorializing force of convention. Free marks don't reveal or create something that was not already there, but they do – in a sense – sharpen our vision, attune our sense to what was once inconsequential; free marks make us (more) conscious of the world that exists outside of our habits.

Irigaray reminds us that the invisible, whether we're aware of it or not, already "takes part in our everyday relations with the world, with the other(s)"; she describes the everyday importance of invisible processes when she notes that "the air through which we relate to the world and [...] with the other(s), remains invisible. [...] Similarly, the] relations between us and the world, us and the other(s) are not visible" (Irigaray, 2005, p. 395).⁸⁸ The tactile/material effect of creating free marks is such that the artist is, in effect, "touched" – affected – by the "un-cliché" these marks reveal. The tactility of painting is not restricted to the encounter between our skin (for example) and the painting's physical components. For Irigaray paintings are "always already tactile" in the broadest sense possible insofar as, for instance, seeing a painting involves our being touched "by light, by colors [...], by the world and by the things" (Irigaray, 2005, p. 400).

To shatter all too human clichés, then, requires that we look beyond the merely

⁸⁸ Irigaray goes on to speculate how painters can expose the invisibles that contribute to our day to day existence: "How could a painter express them? I am not a painter but I think that it would be possible to suggest the invisible by a certain use of forms and colors in particular white and a certain use of perspective" (Irigaray, 2005, p. 395).

visible (not to mention the cliché we cling to that regards the visible as that which can be seen, or the tactile as that which must be touched). Free marks afford us this opportunity by objectifying the relationship between seeing and touching: we touch the paint and hurl it at the canvas in unpredictable ways and from unexpected angles, the flailing body writhing blindly with no objective other than to reveal the invisible, to allow the artist's senses to touch the untouchable. The artist, having created the free marks, can sense the shattering of clichés by the painting becoming, all of a sudden, uncomfortable, unrecognizable, shocking, chaotic, horrific, incoherent. The artist must be poised and prepared for cliché-free opportunities. The artist looks at and *with* the free marks to discern – affectively – that something new has been achieved, that something has broken through the restrictive confines of the comfortable clichés that constrict our creativity. As Irigaray says, we “co-look” with what already, in a sense, “inhabits” us, that inhabits us “outside” – or beyond – “all representation” (Irigaray, 2005, p. 403).

Free marks, then, hijack the sensory hardware we habitually rely upon to make sense of things. Exposing us to a little bit of chaos, free marks help to create compositions that exceed the conventional apparatuses we rely upon to account for things. By having an affective effect on the artist, free marks open up new avenues that would not otherwise have been taken (although it must be noted that *any* actualized avenue is one that excludes all others). The markings open up affective pathways the artist can pursue in order to seem creative, to provide newness to an insatiable audience that recognizes newness by the way it makes them feel. Free marks, then, tear the artist in the studio away from the cliché; in turn, the completed artwork – which goes on unfolding in new ways once the artist sets it free – exposes viewers to newness, to invisibles made visible.

Affect and affect's manipulation is for Deleuze a most important topic to grapple with when we want to think about how becoming – whether aesthetic, linguistic, scientific, biological – takes place. Deleuze regards affect as prelinguistic, as the originary enabler of all that follows, of all instances of *being affected*. For Deleuze affect precedes language and is language's preconditions. Massumi suggests, in fact, that language speaks affects *after the fact* and that Deleuze and Guattari would argue that we do not speak so much as *are spoken through* or *with* when he writes that for Deleuze and Guattari the subject is “in a sense spoken by extra-linguistic [i.e. affective] forces of expression, and that this impersonal speaking is not a matter of

choice”; the “force of expression,” Massumi observes, “strikes the body first, directly and unmediatedly”; from there it passes “transformatively through the flesh before being instantiated in subject-positions subsumed by a system of power. Its immediate effect is a differing” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xvii). Alan Bourassa observes that Deleuze’s affect describes anything that “comes into being when something is affected or affects something else” and that affect is “the determination (which must always be actual) that founds all potentiality”; about language Bourassa points out that it is always “filled with affects” and would, as I’ve been noting, “have no existence without them” (Bourassa in Massumi, 2002a, p. 65).

3.5 Micro and Macro Modulations of Affect

I see a repressive effect here, precisely at the border between micro and macro. (Deleuze, 2006b, p. 126)

Once again, the role of free marks is to bring the new into being by breaking with habit, with clichés. The degree to which this tackling of clichés is “creative” – that is, the degree to which we can ascribe the overcoming of the cliché to the artist or human agent alone – is, admittedly, minimal (i.e. would it not be more accurate to describe these instances of creativity as accidents or as chance or as completely dependent on that which is at hand?). Indeed, insofar as artistic (or any other form of) creativity is a success it will have accomplished a task no more difficult than revealing to people something that, according to their set of past sensorial experiences, has not yet been encountered. That is, the task of aesthetic lines of flight is to produce that which has not yet been assimilated, to force a bit of chaos into the everyday lives of producers and consumers of art. Point being, the production of novelty is significantly more modest an endeavour than producing something *ex nihilo*, or, as convention would have it, from the mind of the artist and him/her alone. My point, then, is to emphasize that the process of bringing newness into being – whether art, affects, etc. – is one that culminates in products that are produced not by artists exclusively, but by context-bound relations, not by breaking causal chains, but by revealing hidden – “new” – links. Indeed, despite their fetishization of newness Deleuze and Guattari’s foregrounding of the role of affect as fundamental to this causally linked process allows them to remain faithful to the precepts of Spinozist immanence, to the notion that all that exists are forces that

affect and are affected in indeterminate ways according to their capacities and propensities.

The unfolding of force occurs along a causal chain. This unfolding, fulfilling as it does its own requirements while routinely exceeding our human ability to control it or account for it, mutates and becomes more complex as it moves along; the present pushed into being by the past's requirements becomes an increasingly complex product of entropic inevitability. To suggest that these complex, creative processes must be supplemented by the (apparently) superior capacities of the "creative" power of human agents seems an absurd anthropomorphism. Afterall, we are product of these processes as much if not more than we are producers of these processes. Regardless of our ontological status it remains the case that immanent processes of relationally derived affecting and being affected is an ontological model of singular importance when attempting to come to terms with creativity – at both micro and macro scales. Within an affective economy creativity and, indeed, thought becomes something else entirely, they become connected to and a consequence of contexts, emergent processes, and reliant upon affordances.

In Deleuze and Guattari's view, affective experience constitutes a form of thinking equal (but different) to that performed by, for example, philosophy. Indeed, we could say that philosophy is itself merely a mode of affect's affectivity. Affects, in their view, *define* the organism:

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 257)

In Deleuze's ontological universe art sets itself apart from forms of thought such as philosophy or science by its prioritization of affect (feeling) as its medium and, indeed, as its end. Art's *raison d'être* is the actualization of affects. Placing greater emphasis on affect's more conventional meanings, as relating to emotion or feeling, Deleuze and Guattari observe that art "thinks no less than philosophy," but note that art "thinks" differently – "through affects and percepts" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 66). Deleuze argues that despite their being distinct, art and philosophy are

intertwined and at times can be indistinguishable, for while their mediums might be different, good art and good philosophy – those that avoid clichés – are both in pursuit of the new: art through the use of affect, philosophy through the use of concepts. Deleuze and Guattari describe this porousness between affect and philosophy (the creation of concepts) as follows:

the concept as such can be concept of the affect, just as the affect can be affect of the concept. The plane of composition of art and the plane of immanence of philosophy can slip into each other to the degree that parts of one may be occupied by entities of the other. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 66)

Admittedly, our definitions of affect – whether we regard it from a Spinozist perspective as the inherent capacity of things to affect and be affected, or whether we cling more conservatively to affect as feeling – can plunge us into an ambiguous realm wherein affect can be understood differently depending on whether its considered at micro or macro scales. It is worth observing, however, that the definition of *feeling* itself needn't be restricted to anthropocentric definitions. Indeed, we could regard all responses as in some sense being responses *of feeling*, of reacting, of responding. When understood this way the macro and micro uses of affect themselves begin to blur. When understood this way *everything* can be said to *feel* in one sense or another, just as in the Spinozist sense *everything*, at whatever scale, affects and is affected.

So whether we regard affect from a macro or a micro, a global or a local perspective, to believe in affects, in affect's role, in affect's immanent processes, in affect's adequacy – to prioritize these processes – is to affirm the “plane of immanence,” to reposition the interpretative role we give to language, and to renounce expectations of transcendence and the temptations of teleologies. But prioritizing the plane of immanence is not easy. With Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that “believing in this world, in this life, becomes our most difficult task, or the task of a mode of existence still to be discovered on our plane of immanence today”; they describe the believer in *this* world – a world of affecting and being affected according to relationally determined capacities with no recourse for transcendent escape – as having to undergo an “empiricist conversion” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 75). To believe in *this* world the task of thought no longer consists “in knowing,” nor is it

“inspired by truth,” but instead privileges – and finds adequate – “categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 82).

In a non-transcendent, non-representational affective ontology we are tasked with discerning what is significant according to the demands of immanence. For Deleuze and Guattari, who regard language and texts not so much as reflecting or representing reality than as one of reality’s modes (recalling Spinoza), affective receptivity is regarded as the initial consequence of a force upon a body, of a body being affected. It is only afterwards – once the affected entity has reflected upon the affective experience – that language, ontologies, and representations are created. In other words, affect – the effect of relations – impacts prior to our conscious processes being able to account for it. It makes sense then that we typically encounter the world using representational modes of thinking. That is, it could be said that conventionally we only become fully human once post-processing of affects has occurred. Or we could say we become human upon further reflection. Of course, whatever constitutes this post-processing could itself be understood as a further articulation of affect, as a further extension of affective expression.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest in their final collaborative work that art is the human activity whose role is not so much representing events or objects, but the creation and distribution of affects. Art is what happens when affects are created and consumed for their own sake. Perhaps we could say that art *distills* affect, makes affect *explicit*. Alternatively, representational regimes are about pre-determining, restricting, defining *what* forces/entities are capable of, assuming, as Massumi explains, an “already-defined” world full of “things for the mirroring,” resulting in “[e]xpression’s potential” being “straight-jacketed by [...] pre-definition” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xv).

Massumi’s regards illusions of human exceptionalism – our presumed ability to pass judgment on the world, to delimit what the world is capable of – as excessively anthropocentric. He would rather we recognize that environmental forces *define us*, constitute us. In Massumi’s view, subjects do not “express the system,” but are expressions “of the system”; more precisely, the system “expresses itself” and does so through “its subjects’ every ‘chosen’ deed and mystified word – in its very form of life”; where, wonders Massumi, “in the conformity and correspondence between the life-form of the subject and the system of power that produced it, has the potential for change gone?” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xvi-xvii). Massumi, here, while lamenting the

rigid framework demanded by representationalist ontologies and championing – as a Deleuzian – the necessity to recognize the prelinguistic forces that “speak us,” or indeed, that “use” us according to our and their propensities in order to further their own agenda, is challenging the notion that human beings’ creative/expressive/emotive power begins (or emerges) from the point at which they begin to *post-process* their environment using representational models. Suggesting, in effect, that an ontology that moves beyond those founded upon representational judgments is one that acknowledges the deterministic – though emergent and novel – processes of systems, Massumi urges us not to worry. His – and Deleuze’s – is a *different type of determinism*, one that is not rigidly determined or decided in advance, but that unfolds according to the affective capacities of things at each moment in a creative process of novel production.

The reason, then, that Massumi, with Deleuze, is so keen to privilege affect as a suitable concept when considering creative becoming is that affective models respond to a post-representational world where language can not respond to, let alone adequately represent, ongoing processes of change and differentiation. To think the world in terms of affects provides a framework for responding not to the question: “What does it mean?” but to the question “How does it work?” That is, the question that concerns Deleuze and Guattari and Massumi (etc.) is how does “determinate being, or being-determinate, serially [emerge]”? How does change come about? How is “the new” created? What constitutes creativity? Massumi assures us that the product of Deleuzian determinism is difference. That is, what is determined “does not conform or correspond to anything outside it, nor to its own conditions of emergence” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xxxii-xxxiii). Massumi urges us to understand that a “determination of being is not a tracing,” but that determination “is a differing”; what emerges is always different: “every genesis a heterogenesis. A thing’s form does not reflect its formation. It inflects it” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xxxii-xxxiii).

Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy is, notes Massumi, an empiricism insofar as it is “experimental and pragmatic”; theirs is a philosophy, he writes, that “accepts the *reality of the potential from which determinate being arises*” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xxxiii – emphasis added). Determinate being – a being that merely and infinitely affects and is affected – is an “extended expression” of its “constitutive conditions” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xxxiv); there are no accidents, there is no unbounded freedom, rather creativity is context-bound and contingent.

Within this more limited – i.e. determined – ontological field art and aesthetics function as probes that poke and prod, that expose, examine and produce affects; this poking and prodding does not *produce* the not-yet or not-already given, but rather allows us to see – opens our eyes – to the options that can be made available to us. We could say that this revealing, this opening up to affecting and being affected is art's *raison d'être*. Art for Deleuze, while operating within a determining field of forces, is an activity that responds to the given by investigating what is, for us, the unseen and the unforeseen. Art, then, reveals the limitations of our own vision(s); similarly, the production of art reveals to the artist the inadequacy of imagination – since without much prodding one can only imagine that which already exists within the confines of one's head.

Art, acting on the senses – drawing on the senses as vehicle and end – manipulates sensations and art's materiality – its capacity to reveal new compositions, textures, sounds, smells: “We paint, sculpt, compose, and write with sensations” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 166). Artists are seekers of un(fore)seen affects, and once these affects are discovered – once something is revealed to be *more* or *newly* affecting – artists harness these affects using paint, print, stone, light, sound, touch. But artists, says Deleuze and Guattari, don't just create affects “in their work,” they “give them to us,” making us become “with them” – we get drawn “into the compound” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 175).

Art speaks the language of sensation, of affect.⁸⁹ Significantly, a work of art is productive without having opinions of its own, it reserves judgment (so to speak), instead being open to the interpretation of others, to the proliferation of what it produces: affect. Passing under and beyond the restrictive radar of opinion (though certainly opinions are thrust upon it) art mobilizes “percepts, affects, and blocs of sensations that take the place of language” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 176). So called non-representational painting is not “abstract” for Deleuze and Guattari; rather, *all* art is abstract, all painting is abstract, insofar as it seeks the unknown, summons “forces,” in order to exhibit them using canvas, paint, wood. The affects produced by painting never remain within the painting's frame, instead circulating freely amidst spectators' bodies, mingling with the forces inherent to other works,

⁸⁹ “Whether through words, colors, sounds, or stone, art is the language of sensations” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 176).

being impacted by critics, times, places, etc.⁹⁰ (Of course, it is when faced with spectators that the affective potential of the painting is able to be actuated).

Having extolled the virtues of free marks it's worth reminding ourselves that the making of free marks is done within the confines – the *constraints* – of the canvas. There is always some sort of structure upon which, or into which, the art is created. At the very least art always has a site, a location (even if its more virtual/atmospheric/ephemeral manifestations find their location or have their effects on our bodies). Even Pollock's paintings – free marks in their entirety – are captured and restrained by the canvas (although his paint splashing undoubtedly exceeded the boundaries of the canvas during the painting's production). There is, then, always a scaffolding, a framing, an imposed order, a context, a scene, a time/space into which the art is inserted. Deleuze and Guattari warn us that even as we pursue lines of flight and hysteria through the creation of, for example, free marks we (i.e. we bundle of affects, we composite compositions) risk implosion, self-destruction if we fly out of control, if we fly off the handle: "We require just a little order to protect us from chaos" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 202).

The artist, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, must not only create the artwork within a context in an attempt to avoid chaos, but must also – to be effective – present their work to a public, a people, a community who themselves are context-bound and are predisposed to their own limited levels of receptivity. They warn that the audience is rarely ready for the unknown, for the new that breaks through. They remind us that people are "constantly putting up an umbrella that shelters them and on the underside of which they draw a firmament and write their conventions and opinions"; the artist, on the other hand, makes "a slit in the umbrella, [tearing] open the firmament itself, to let in a bit of free and windy chaos"; they identify too, of course, how even the artist's little bit of windy chaos is itself too much for a world that draws comfort from its clichés, leading to the incorporation of the new back into the shelter of convention: "Then come the crowd of imitators who repair the umbrella with something vaguely resembling the vision, and the crowd of commentators who

⁹⁰ On the connections between art and the world Deleuze and Guattari write: "Are there not as many different planes as universes, authors, or even works? In fact, universes, from one art to another as much as in one and the same art, may derive from one another, or enter into relations of capture and form constellations of universes, independently of any derivation, but also scattering themselves into nebulae of different stellar systems, in accordance with qualitative distances that are no longer those of space and time. ... Universes are linked together or separated on their lines of flight, so that the plane may be single at the same time as universes are irreducibly multiple" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 196).

patch over the rent with opinions: communication” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 203-204).

As theirs is a processual ontology Deleuze and Guattari do not despair the ebbing and flowing of artistic (i.e. chaotic) exchange, the slitting and the patching, the tearing and the repairing; indeed, the ponderousness of the umbrella *demands* that it be slit, while the slitting of the umbrella *requires* that it be “fixed” – on and on we go, one process folding into the other, one force compelling the other into being. It goes without saying that artists “are always needed to make other slits, to carry out necessary and perhaps ever-greater destructions – since, after all, the earlier slit is by now itself a cliché, a convention – thereby restoring to their predecessors the incommunicable novelty that we could no longer see. This is to say that artists struggle less against chaos (that, in a certain manner, all their wishes summon forth) than against the ‘clichés’ of opinion” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 203-204).

The artist, then, *dips into chaos* to extract not merely more chaos – not to foment the chaotic – but to open up pathways to new potentialities, to other options that can, perhaps, be incorporated into and change the already in process field of convention. The artist situates him/herself amidst the chaos by facing two directions, by mediating between the cliché and the chaotic. The artist *uses* chaos as a force, a catalyst, for creating outside the bounds of all too human clichés. The artist creates form – structure – out of the chaotic. Situated betwixt and between chaos and composition the artist is a *mediator* whose manipulation of affects and effects is driven by the demands of change and a desire to break free of habit (i.e. produce “the new”). Deleuze and Guattari explain that art itself “is not chaos,” but is instead a “composition of chaos that yields the vision or sensation, so that it constitutes, as Joyce says, a chaosmos, a composed chaos – neither foreseen nor preconceived” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 204); they ask, “And what would *thinking* be if it did not constantly confront chaos?” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 208).⁹¹

⁹¹ Despite their recognition that flirting with too much chaos can cause any system to spin out of control – essentially to bifurcate into something other than itself – Deleuze and Guattari’s disdain for structures that impose themselves as expressions of power is palpable, an example of the sorts of discourse they despise: “You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body – otherwise you’re just depraved. You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted – otherwise you’re just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement – otherwise you’re just a tramp. To the strata as a whole, the BwO opposes disarticulation (or n articulations) as the property of the plane of consistency, experimentation as the operation on that plane (no signifier, never interpret!), and nomadism as the movement (keep moving even in place, never stop moving, motionless voyage, desubjectification)” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 115).

Artists are conductors or modulators of chaos in search of, and driven by affects. They generate free marks in order that they themselves become affected, and in turn produce art that – ideally – will affect others. That the affective output of artists seems composed, arranged in whatever way, works to conceal the randomness, the chanciness, of the contexts from which the artwork was produced. Concealing the chaos results in the viewer being predisposed to thinking that, perhaps, the new affects they are experiencing have some sense behind them, some single agent, some *raison d'être*; viewers feel compelled to “make sense” of the composition, to bring “the new” under an umbrella of recognition and control. They are comforted by the solidity of the frame, or by the gallery. The artist, if s/he is keen to have “the new” be able to be incorporated somehow into a conventional context, in order to renew it, is advised, basically, to *allow* coherence to happen. Deleuze and Guattari warn that utter incoherence leaves open the possibility that there will be no effects, that there will be nothing recognizable when they write:

You have to keep enough of 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 quantities to enable you to respond to the dominant reality. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 160)

Their advice is that the individual who seeks out the potential embedded in the swirling infinitude of chaos – who willingly pursues hysteria – must, in order essentially to contextualize the chaotic, “[m]imic the strata” since there is much to lose by “wildly destratifying” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 160).

Let’s be clear that the chaos Deleuze and Guattari are alluding to, the one that goes beyond clichés and that we are receptive to insofar as it slices through our habits and conventions, is not the same as what we would regard as a disorderly state of affairs. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari’s chaos isn’t a state of affairs at all. Rather, what they’re calling chaos is the unknowable *potential* of a state of affairs or a set of relations *to become*. When they say chaos they are not identifying a *particular* situation, but are highlighting the indeterminate, unpredictable potential of all situations. There is a chaos that exists *alongside* the world of configurations, one that gives rise to “new”

configurations, and that, according to the immanent feedback loop in which it exists, is *receptive* to the effects of actual states of affairs upon the infinitely complex state of chaos itself. The reason particular, actual states of affairs are not – according to their use of the term – chaotic is that actual states of affairs are chaos’ resolution and product. That is, particular *actualized* states of affairs are chaos’ mini-conclusions. Once an event has emerged from the chaotic field of potential – a field of relations – it has been organized, it is chaos’ composition. Actualization, for Deleuze and Guattari, is what has emerged from out of a field of *seemingly* chaotic potential.

As we’ve been discussing, what determines chaos’ configurations are forces, affects – whether *we* can sense them or not. As Deleuze and Guattari point out: “Movements, becomings [and] pure relations of speed and slowness, pure affects, are below and above the threshold of perception. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 281). Of course, affects themselves do not come into being out of thin air but are built up, produced, by a series of events. Force is, so to speak, distinct from, though impacted by, its effects. Bodies, then, are not defined by characteristics, but by their affective receptivity and potency which itself is determined by the conditions in which they find themselves. Bodies, then, are *defined* by the way relations define what they *can do*, by the potential that derives from their associations, by their being mobilized by chaos as vehicles and manifestations of difference: “A body is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance or subject nor by the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfill” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 260-1). Deleuze and Guattari argue that the affecting body is defined by “a longitude and a latitude,” that is by the “sum total” of the “material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness”; we are defined – determined – by the way *the chaos that preceded our “agency”* is composed; we are the “sum total of the intensive affects [we are] capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude). Nothing but affects and local movements, differential speeds” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 260-1).

As an expression of affective articulations we are a site, a crossing, where forces come to play. Deleuze and Guattari describe such as site as a haecceity: a singular set of relations, an individual multiplicity.⁹² We are an expression of forces, a consequence

⁹² Deleuze and Guattari’s description of haecceities recalls Spinoza’s pantheism, but without God as substance: “There are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages. Nothing develops, but things arrive late or early, and form this or that assemblage depending on their compositions of speed. Nothing subjectifies, but haecceities form according to compositions of nonsubjectified powers or affects. We call this plane, which knows only longitudes

of unpredictable – though determined – affects. The artist, then, is not really a person, or a subject at all, but the *product* of “relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 261). In other words, it is wrong to imagine that we are agents/subjects that interact/exist *within* environments – sets of relations. We “must avoid,” warn Deleuze and Guattari, “an oversimplified conciliation” that there exists, on one side “formed subjects,” and on the other “spatiotemporal coordinates of the haecceity type”:

For you will yield nothing to haecceities unless you realize that that is what you are, and that you are nothing but that. [...] You are longitude and latitude, a set of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a set of nonsubjectified affects. You have the individuality of a day, a season, a year, a life (regardless of its duration) a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm, a pack (regardless of its regularity). Or at least you can have it, you can reach it” (Deleuze and Guattari, ATP 1987, p. 261)⁹³

The artist, then, exists not as an individual in charge of an environment, but as one component within a haecceity, as one point of intersection in an environment. As Claire Colebrook explains, for Deleuze the subject is never distinct from the environment, but *can* be distinct from what we might conventionally regard as itself. She notes that Deleuze showed us that not only “can the human be situated in a field of singularities; one can also extend a singularity as human. That is, one can think or develop a singular potential or event in life to the point where human thought extends itself beyond any already constituted image of ‘man’” (Colebrook, 2004, p. 1). The nature of these relationships, the bounds of these environments, the trajectories of these affects – of the immanent potentials, the unactualized affordances – are not

and latitudes, speeds and haecceities, the plane of consistency or composition (as opposed to the plan(e) of organization or development). It is necessarily a plane of immanence and univocity. We therefore call it the plane of Nature, although nature has nothing to do with it, since on this plane there is no distinction between the natural and the artificial. However many dimensions it may have, it never has a supplementary dimension to that which transpires upon it. That alone makes it natural and immanent. The same goes for the principle of contradiction: this plane could also be called the plane of noncontradiction. The plane of consistency could be called the plane of nonconsistency” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 266).

⁹³ Deleuze and Guattari continue: “It should not be thought that a haecceity consists simply of a decor or backdrop that situates subjects, or of appendages that hold things and people to the ground. It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity; it is this assemblage that is defined by a longitude and a latitude, by speeds and affects, independently of forms and subjects, which belong to another plane” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 261).

always apparent; instead, it is the clichés, the perspectives framed by language and by vision-regimes⁹⁴ that are most readily observed – sensed – by all too human humans.

In the next section we will expand our understanding of how inter-relational dependencies define creative processes through an examination of the work of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947).

3.6 Whitehead, Vagueness, and the Creation of Novelty

Thought is abstract; and the intolerant use of abstractions is the major vice of the intellect. This vice is not wholly corrected by the recurrence to concrete experience. For after all, you need only attend to those aspects of your concrete experience which lie within some limited scheme. (Whitehead, 1967, p. 25)

Alfred North Whitehead's writings precede Deleuze's by decades, yet his thought, particularly as articulated in *Process and Reality* (1978), complements Deleuze's work on affect and on newness as something that issues forth from processual fields of relation. Whitehead's thought is gaining traction across academic disciplines. Indeed, Whitehead's writings have recently been situated front and centre in social theory research with a special issue of *Theory, Culture, and Society* (25(4)) devoted to him in July, 2008. In his physics-inspired theoretical writings Whitehead develops a process ontology – a philosophy of organism⁹⁵ – that aims to take seriously the implications of the interconnected relationships between things – thought, the environment, causal forces – and how these things, relations, and processes come to constitute the reality we experience in our everyday lives.

For Whitehead the world's systems have an infinite capacity for producing change: “the complexity of nature is inexhaustible” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 106). One of the most fervent objectives of Whitehead's thought is to reveal the excessively

⁹⁴ See, for example Crary (1990).

⁹⁵ “The aim of the philosophy of organism is to express a coherent cosmology based upon the notions of ‘system,’ ‘process,’ ‘creative advance into novelty,’ ‘res vera’ (in Descartes’ sense), ‘stubborn fact,’ ‘individual unity of experience,’ ‘feeling,’ ‘time as perpetual perishing,’ ‘endurance as re-creation,’ ‘purpose,’ ‘universals as forms of definiteness,’ ‘particulars – i.e., res verae – as ultimate agents of stubborn fact’” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 128).

teleological and anthropocentric prejudices that have defined for so long great swathes of Western philosophical tradition – prejudices that attempt to contain complexity. He suggests that our subjectivity and values have too often been defined by what he calls “abstractions,” having little to do with the *reality* of the world’s causal processes, and that our preference for teleological trajectories – for conclusions, answers, finality, closure (whether in the realm of religion, politics, or philosophy) – reveal the degree to which we cling to the “prevalent fallacy” that all forms of seriality “necessarily involve terminal instances” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 111).

Whitehead tries to outline the causal seriality of events and, like Deleuze, to emphasize that what we might interpret as coherence is in fact the ongoing repetition of divergent differences. This difference, of course, envelops us – indeed, *we* change right along with everything else – but too rarely has the ongoing change we feel with our bodies been reckoned with philosophically. Whitehead notes that philosophers have for too long “disdained the information about the universe obtained through their visceral feelings” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 121).

Events and newness, for Whitehead, slide in and out of view according to degrees of chaos, vagueness, and clarity. Vagueness, of course, is the counterpart of *clarity*, and tends to be regarded as undesirable. Whitehead argues, however, that vagueness is *required* for clarity (or at least what we consider to be clarity) to be achieved or extracted. We can think of vagueness here as a *nonquality*, or as something which for us is indiscernible or unidentifiable; that which is vague does not affect in a way that distinguishes it, or that brings it forward. One’s shirt on one’s back, for example, rests imperceptibly on one’s skin amidst waves of less “vague” affects (for example, a painful pair of shoes). Many vague affects – the majority of affects or forces upon the body being, of course, vague or indeterminate – can coexist unproblematically within the same field of perceivables. Whitehead observes that thanks to the vagueness of things – their undifferentiated indiscernibility – “many count as one, and are subject to indefinite possibilities of division into [...] multifold unities.” In other words, most of the forces that exist in our environments pass below our radar and remain undifferentiated, existing together within an undivided field of “vague prehension,” as “faint chaotic factors in the environment” that we can, effectively, relegate to “irrelevance” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 112). Whitehead argues that vagueness as indeterminate quality of affectivity is crucial since it enables a context – “a background,” as Whitehead terms it – to contribute its “relevant quota,” and enables

that which is *in the foreground* to gain “concentrated relevance” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 112). Vagueness, then, is always able to become *unvague*, delineated, and revealed. With Deleuze, Whitehead declares that, the “right chaos, and the right vagueness, are jointly required for any effective harmony”; such a vagueness-filled environment, rather than complicating matters, rather than rendering discernible indecipherables, produces a “massive simplicity” described by Whitehead as “narrowness” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 112).

Artists engage with these complex layers of vagueness and chaos, relevance and irrelevance. In order to create something new – to extract something new from the field of vagueness – they must be attuned to the oversimplification of environments. They must become aware of the narrowing processes that generate what comes to be regarded as relevant, the processes of simplification that produce conventions and clichés. The artist must, in order to bring new affects to light, be attuned to vagueness, accessing it with small dabs of chaos, in order to extract the imperceptible from a field of not-yet-apprehended forces. The artist must capitulate with Whitehead’s observation that “the character of an organism depends on that of its environment” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 110) in order to extract from environments what is required to create works of art. What the artist extracts was always in a sense “there,”⁹⁶ but the artist – as a human representative attuned to affects as well as to that which is imperceptible in environments – is charged with lifting the curtain and exposing us to new experiences.

The perceptible and imperceptible affects that exist within environments are expressions of an inheritance from the past, and can be understood as actuating upon living and non-living organism “throbs of emotional [affective] energy” that are defined by the “specific forum” provided by our sensorial capacities (Whitehead, 1978, p. 116). The task of the artist in a Whiteheadean universe is to enlarge his/her “specific forum,” to poke and prod the limits of his/her affective landscape and, as a functioning component of the environment, to provide feedback to the environment and so introduce a degree of disequilibrium into an affective landscape controlled too often by convention. The artist, then, exists within an environment of affective exchange and relies on his/her capacities of curiosity and invention to generate what we call creativity. The artist – or the artistic person – effectively takes in – absorbs –

⁹⁶ Whitehead explains that: “the experience of the simplest grade of actual entity is to be conceived as the unoriginative response to the datum with its simple content of sensa” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 115).

more environmental activity, putting it to use in accordance with, and in discordance with, specific contextual criteria. The artist digests the environment, contributing back to the environment the fruits of his/her aesthetic labour. Whitehead describes the sensitivities of the human body as a “complex ‘amplifier’” of environmental forces, able to tap into indiscernible flows and make sense of the indeterminate (Whitehead, 1978, p. 119).

Whitehead regards body/environment/context as a relationally coordinated system of amplification, and suggests that our experience of amplifying affects is “inherited with enhancements accruing upon the way” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 119). So, for instance, what we typically regard as our personality Whitehead regards as the context-bound product of an “historic route of living occasions which are [...] dominant in the body at successive instants” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 119).⁹⁷ Whitehead imparts a similarly mechanistic view to the perceptions that give rise or constitute our personalities by suggesting that perception is not of the present so much as of the “settled world in the past” as presently constituted “by its feeling-tones” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 120). Moreover, his analysis of vision as more than a function of the eyes is noteworthy, especially as it pertains to the vision regime so entrenched in aesthetic theory. Suggesting, again, that what we “ordinarily term” visual perception is a result of the “the later stages in the concrescence of the percipient occasion” he notes that what we see when we look upon the world, what registers in consciousness, is “something more” than “bare sight,” something more than that which is presently at hand; in fact, he notes, what we see if we “look” closely enough is that the object of our gaze (he uses the example of a grey stone) has a past that could have been

⁹⁷ Whitehead describes the causal trajectory of affect as follows: “In the transmission of inheritance from A to B, to C, to D, A is objectified by the eternal object S as a datum for B; where S is a sensum or a complex pattern of sensa. Then B is objectified for C. But the datum for B is thereby capable of some relevance for C, namely, A as objectified for B becomes reobjectified for C; and so on to D, and throughout the line of objectifications. Then for the ultimate subject M the datum includes A as thus transmitted, B as thus transmitted, and so on. The final objectification of the original group S. The modification consists partly in relegation of elements into comparative irrelevance, partly in enhancement of relevance for other elements, partly in supplementation by eliciting into important relevance some eternal objects not in the original S. Generally there will be vagueness in the distinction between A, and B, and C, and D, etc., in their function as components in the datum for M. Some of the line [sic], A and C for instance, may stand out with distinctness by reason of some peculiar feat of original supplementation which retains its undimmed importance in subsequent transmission. Other member of the chain may sink into oblivion. For example, in touch there is a reference to the stone in contact with the hand, and a reference to the hand; but in normal, health, bodily operations the chain of occasions along the arm sinks into the background, almost into complete oblivion. Thus M, which has some analytic consciousness of its datum, is conscious of the feeling in its hand as the hand touches the stone. According to this account, perception in its primary form is consciousness of the causal efficacy of the external world by reason of which the percipient is a concrescence from a definitely constituted datum. The vector character of the datum is the causal efficacy” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 120).

otherwise had its situation been different; we also see that our object “probably has a future” and stands out from the background – addressing us through affected perceptions – through its greyness,⁹⁸ its hardness. At the same time, of course, our seeing the stone involves its shape and texture and colour existing contemporaneously with the perceiver, and according to “certain spatial relations [...] more or less vaguely defined” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 121).

It is the artist’s perceptive and affective capacity – itself the function of an environment and a moment in time – that, coordinated as it is with the processes at work in his/her body and his/her context, “rescues from vagueness” what can usefully be transmuted to an audience (Whitehead, 1978, p. 121). The artist engages with “the world as a medium” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 127), becoming attuned to its processes. We might say, in keeping with Whitehead’s analysis, that the artist is in touch with a context’s “contemporaries” – those not-yet-actualized possibilities of objects, environments, and events that exist alongside the “causal past” and the “causal future” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 123). The artist subdivides that which presents itself, making discernible – making visible – information that had recently been imperceptible (Whitehead, 1978, p. 124). Artists, set on changing the world – on creating something new – are aware that any credence given to a belief in the unchangeable character of things depends, from a quantitative perspective, on instrumentation that is only ever capable of testing the *relative* stability of objects “for seconds, for hours, for months, for years” and that these time-limited tests can themselves only be tested by “another instrument” with the knowledge that, despite our desires, “there cannot be an infinite regress of instruments” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 127).

Whitehead also alludes to the significance of scale for our attempts to understand the world as a field of processual forces that affect and are affected. He notes that the entities that populate his philosophy of organism are interconnected, but are separated in terms of scale: the microscopic and the macroscopic. The microscopic dimension of organism is concerned with “the formal constitution of an actual occasion,” with the processes that converge to form “an individual unity of experience”; the macroscopic meaning of organism, on the other hand, is concerned with “the givenness of the actual world [...] which at once limits and provides

⁹⁸ The sensum ‘grey’ rescues that region from its vague confusion with other regions” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 121).

opportunity for the actual occasion” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 129). In keeping with our Deleuzian -inspired assessment of the artist as someone adept at identifying and capturing imperceptible forces we might say, with Whitehead, that the artist is not making visible the technically invisible, nor making perceptible the ideally imperceptible, but is engaged in the significant task of scaling up the microscopic for macroscopic public consumption. The artist is required to become attuned to scale and significance differently. That being said, artists – like the rest of us – can never escape the fact that they themselves remain an expression of a pre-existent state of affairs. As Whitehead reminds us: “we essentially arise out of our bodies which are the stubborn facts of the immediate relevant past” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 129). Going further in the direction of determination, Whitehead notes that not only are we a *product* of our causal past, but we are “carried” by our immediate past; he notes that “we finish a sentence *because* we have begun it”:

The sentence may embody a new thought, never phrased before, or an old one rephrased with verbal novelty. There need be no well-worn association between the sounds of the earlier and the later words. But it remains remorselessly true, that we finish a sentence *because* we have begun it. We are governed by stubborn fact. (Whitehead, 1978, p. 129).

With this statement Whitehead identifies one of the paradoxes of newness I’ve been emphasizing and suggesting is significant – that it is at once novel *and* determined. He places emphasis also on the fact that at the same instant that we’re producing creations, our creations are *producing us at the same time*. As Whitehead observes, “It is in respect to this ‘stubborn fact’ that the theories of modern philosophy are weakest” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 129). Whitehead’s project, then, is to expose the conventions (the clichés) that have defined philosophy (and philosophy’s view of art and creativity) for so long, theories that are concerned with “remote consequences” and “the inductive formulations of science” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 129). Whitehead admonishes the practitioners of such false- (Deleuze would say “state-”) philosophy by imploring them to “confine [their] attention to the rush of immediate transition” since by doing so their explanations “would then be seen in their native absurdity” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 129).

3.7 New Deleuzean Derivations

AFFECT/AFFECTION. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). *L'affect* (Spinoza's affectus) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'affection* (Spinoza's affection) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include 'mental' or ideal bodies). (Brian Massumi in Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. xvi)

The emphasis Deleuze, Spinoza, and Whitehead – amongst others – place on affect, on the complex assemblages that conspire to produce sensation, events, and creation has become for a number of recent theorists of “radical empiricism”⁹⁹ (those who deploy theories that attempt to account for the processes at work on the body, and the processes the body goes through to identify the processes at work within an unbounded, continuous structure) a significant point of departure from which to reassess the role of the artist, the mechanics of creation, and the embodied capacities and limitations inherent to human experience. These theorists are united in their attempt to take seriously the sensual and material world – its forces and affects – and in their attempt to articulate how we might begin to think about creation and the forces of becoming as inherent to, and as constitutive of, the processes and unfoldings of the (immanent) world. Affect becomes, for these theorists, an escape hatch out of the world of transcendence and abstraction and into a world of relations, connections, and evolving immanent structures. For these theorists the world is already full, already full of meaning and potential. At the same time, we are at once a worldly product, but also a worldly consumer and participant as we express the world's capacities and engage in experimental and experiential investigations into how the world works and what it's capable of.

The outlines of a post-Deleuzean theory of affect have been anthologized recently by Patricia Clough, whose book, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (2007), opens theories of affect up to new uses within social theory (and beyond), and by Brian Massumi in his books *Parables of the Virtual* (2002b) and *A Shock to*

⁹⁹ See William James (1984, 2003, 2004).

Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari (2002a). More recently, Massumi has been developing, in his lectures, a theory of the relationship between affect and politics in order to identify the strategic tactics deployed by governments, the media, and other opinion-makers in order to achieve consent for their objectives.

Two recent Deleuzian interlocutors whose work we will be focusing on in this section attempt to articulate the precise significance of a Deleuzo-Guattarian emphasis on affect as it pertains to art. Simon O'Sullivan in his book, *Art encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond representation* (2005), and Stephen Zepke's, *Art as abstract machine: Ontology and aesthetics in Deleuze and Guattari* (2005) attempt to reorient theories of art and aesthetics away from the increasingly untenable clutches of excessively linear, representational thinking.

While this is certainly a task worth doing, merely switching the interpretive register we use to evaluate the art object from one of representation to one of affect overlooks, in my view, the more pressing question of *what we mean when we talk about art*. That is, merely by re-assessing art using an alternate discourse, our understanding of *art itself* – and its attendant discourses and boundaries – *remains largely untouched and unchallenged*. In other words, the question of what it is that separates artistic creativity from other more everyday forms of creativity is ignored. Moreover, the possibility for *other* activities, events, and actions *becoming* artistic is curtailed. In other words, simply switching our perspective on art – as a taken-for-granted category – leaves in place the assumption that art objects (and artists) remain somehow different, special, sacrosanct, or at the very least, unique creative beacons whose ability to bring about “new” modes of seeing, and “new” affects is unique and not to be criticized or undermined. Affect, I argue, seems to function for O'Sullivan and Zepke as a *new* tool for keeping art aloft that can, if we allow it, generate new emancipatory effects capable of extracting us from the repetitive drudgery of the seemingly *less* affectively charged – and less-new and exciting – world of our everyday lives.

3.8 Is Art Especially Affective? Responding to O’Sullivan

In his recent work on painting and art from a Deleuzean perspective Simon O’Sullivan highlights the absurdity of writing about painting at all. His opinion on the matter is summed up in a 2001 essay, “Writing on Art (Case Study: The Buddhist Puja),” where he expands on Derrida’s passage quoted above by declaring that “talking, and writing, about painting – visual art in general – silly” (O’Sullivan, 2001b, p. 115). He wonders:

Why write about an object or experience which, in itself, is alien to discourse?
What could motivate such a project besides a desire for colonization, or, more specifically, a desire for meaning? (O’Sullivan, 2001b, p. 115)¹⁰⁰

In the face of the colonial aspirations of aesthetic discourse O’Sullivan supports the development of an affirmative discourse that does not “limit the art experience,” but that “opens it up to further adventures” (O’Sullivan, 2001b, p. 115). To this end, he turns, in this essay, to an examination of the Buddhist puja (an immersive ritualistic Buddhist practice) as an example of art-as-lived-event, as an immersive and aesthetically enveloping experience.

O’Sullivan suggests that his object – the Buddhist puja – is not something representational but is “something altogether different” (O’Sullivan, 2001b, p. 117), a making the invisible visible. It is, it seems, the puja’s ability to transport its practitioners to a sort of other-worldly (but seemingly at the same time this-worldly) realm – an alternate space¹⁰¹ – that singularizes the experience: “The puja operates as a portal into/onto these other worlds precisely as a kind of space-time machine. And

¹⁰⁰ O’Sullivan continues: “Indeed one of Derrida’s intentions in *The Truth in Painting* from where the above quotation is taken is precisely to demonstrate that such a desire has motivated and animated the discourse of aesthetics from its inception. Aesthetics here understood as a discourse on (beside, above?) the art experience. It is not my intention to rehearse Derrida’s argument. Suffice it to say aesthetics, at least as Derrida reads it, involves, as its animating force, a desire for meaning, ultimately a desire for self presence. It is, of course, also Derrida’s point that the object frustrates this desire. Art outruns any discourse on it” (O’Sullivan, 2001, p. 115).

¹⁰¹ “The puja is then an immersive space, one in which all the senses are engaged (albeit some of them in a micro fashion). As such the puja is not representational but something altogether different: a summoning of other beings a space and a practice of incarnation in which the invisible (that which lies outside the human register, outside the fantasies of realism, outside mundane time) is made visible” (O’Sullivan, 2001, p. 117).

the experience of the puja is not a singular thing, but involves complexes of sensations and becomings” (O’Sullivan, 2001b, p. 117).

My main concern with O’Sullivan’s analysis is his seemingly benign suggestion that immersive and open-ended aesthetic experiences (or, artistic experiences) can work as portals “into/onto [...] other worlds” in the manner of a “space-time machine” since this seems to imply that certain modes of non-representational or non-embodied modes of experience are somehow *more* genuine, not to mention more exciting (as opposed to merely different), than others. The artistic act, according to O’Sullivan, would seem capable of bestowing upon its *individual* practitioners creative powers, rather than objectifying for said practitioners the potential of those aspects of the world around them that pre-existed their being discovered and, subsequently, revealed. O’Sullivan’s description of the puja also underemphasizes the everyday immanent relationality that affords the “other-worldly” experiences in the first place.

One could also argue that rather than the puja (or other such embodied/affective practices) *facilitating* a context in which aesthetic experience can be truly felt, any effort to attune ourselves to the unactualized affective capacities of environments (and language too) objectifies how limited we are by the stultifying effects of our conventional habits, postures, and discourses. In other words, O’Sullivan’s description of the potency of immersive affective experiences seems to me a bit too laudatory of the feeble human’s capacity to account for magical acts and experiences (not to mention space-time machines).

O’Sullivan seems to be articulating a rather loose Deleuzo-Cartesian position – appealing at once to aesthetic experience’s immanence *and* the way it transcends space and time – He states that while the puja “does not [...] *transport*, or promise to transport us to some Other place” (O’Sullivan, 2001b, p. 117), it does provide us with an “access point onto other worlds [that] might not be a bad model for all art” (O’Sullivan, 2001b, p. 119). He goes on to note that while art may “invite a reading” or “invite a deconstruction,” what it does best is effect “a transformation” (O’Sullivan, 2001b, p. 119).

This discussion of “other worlds” seems at odds with any ontology of immanence. My point, then, is that the *ontological status* of this transformation O’Sullivan alludes to

is not made clear. All we know is that the transformation will be *different* – newer – than whatever went before. Suggesting that art’s transformative capacities are only activated via participatory processes, he warns that to remain “within one’s own boundaries” and to remain “within one’s own, known, world” is to remain “unaffected by art,” to rely on art as a “shield from mortality,” and, ultimately, to capitulate to the “fascistic and conservative” ideologies of art’s most depraved commentators (O’Sullivan, 2001b, p. 119). And so, according to this logic a discrete binary remains between art and whatever is meant to function as art’s other. The art object – as art – remains intact, and the non-art object remains effectively abject.

The boundary O’Sullivan delineates between art and non-art strikes me as discouraging, presenting non-artists with little reason to pursue or engage the *potential* for artistry – or at least creativity – I am suggesting is all around us, accessed not so much by operating according to the requirements of a particular episteme, but in the spirit of a particular *artistic attitude* that finds the world *becoming artistic* when approached from an alternative ontological perspective. Indeed, it seems a shame that breaking with clichés requires its own socio-cultural category – art – rather than being much more common and much less rarified. If cliché and habit breaking is the domain of the artist alone it seems that the rest of us are condemned to the continuation of convention.

In his essay “The Aesthetics of Affect” (2001) O’Sullivan continues his description of art as an activity with exclusive attributes, namely an ability to be both “a *part* of the world (after all it is a made thing),” while at the same time being “*apart* from the world”; indeed, for O’Sullivan, art’s “*apartness*” constitutes “art’s importance” (O’Sullivan, 2001a, p. 125).¹⁰² Suggesting that art is “precisely antithetical to knowledge,” O’Sullivan describes art as something with excessive abilities “over and above its existence as a cultural object” (O’Sullivan, 2001a, p. 125). O’Sullivan’s definition of art as something whose “defining characteristics” include affectivity, excess, and otherworldliness seems like a definition created to bolster art’s distinctiveness, its apartness. Indeed, how can we appeal to excess when trying to articulate an ontology of immanence. O’Sullivan’s objective, we might think, is for art to remain, somehow, transcendent, somehow worthy of our ongoing fetishization, reverence, and adoration. My lack of enthusiasm for this aspect of O’Sullivan’s

¹⁰² We could, on the other hand, argue that the potential for *all* of us to become artists (to break with clichés), to become works of art as Foucault or Nietzsche would say, that is “art’s” most important message – not its “apartness” but its closeness, its being accessible by each of us.

argument – its breathlessness on the topic – derives from my sense that O’Sullivan substitutes art’s apparently transcendental excessiveness – its “apartness” – for the very immanent – though perhaps more prosaic – affective capacities of art upon human bodies and minds. That is, his appeal to art’s *excessiveness* and apartness suggests an affinity with transcendental categories while ignoring the more humdrum – but more significant and accurate, in my view – abilities of art to be adequate merely by being able to excite our bodies and emotions by exposing us to non-clichés – to what is possible.

While O’Sullivan *does* explicitly reject my suggestion that excess and transcendence go hand in hand – “I want to claim that this excess need not be theorised as transcendent; we can think the aesthetic power of art in an immanent sense through recourse to the notion of affect” (O’Sullivan, 2001a, p. 125) – there remains, nonetheless, the explicit assumption that it is precisely art’s *apartness* and *excess* (whether transcendent or not) that gives art its *raison d’être*.

Regardless, O’Sullivan’s attention to art’s affective abilities remain significant and are especially so in light of more conventional art discourses that too frequently relied narrowly on Marxist, historical, or “artist genius” paradigms for their analysis.¹⁰³ O’Sullivan’s identification, then, of representation as effectively an aesthetic and conceptual dead-end for art analysis is important insofar as it points not only to the logical problems deriving from the suggestion that art functions as a stand-in for an original, but that as a consequence of art’s being wrapped up in representational concepts it becomes captive to the “crisis in representation” befalling other post-structuralist objects of inquiry.

O’Sullivan argues that after – and, surely, before – any deconstructivist or representational reading “the art object remains” and life “goes on”; whether we like

¹⁰³ O’Sullivan writes: “Before moving on, however, a backward glance. What happened? What caused this aesthetic blindness? In the discipline of art history there were, are (at least) two factors in play. First, Marxism (or The Social History of Art) and the propensity to explain art historically, through recourse to its moment of production. Second, deconstruction (or The New Art History) and the propensity to stymie (historical) interpretations, whilst still inhabiting their general explanatory framework. Marxism and deconstruction: understanding art as representation, and then understanding art as being in the crisis in representation; appealing to origins as final explanation, and then putting the notion of origin under erasure. First aesthetics fell foul of Marxism. A disinterested beauty? A transcendent aesthetic? Ideological! Then it fell foul of deconstruction. The apparatus of capture that is deconstruction: Derrida neatly reconfiguring the discourse of aesthetics as a discourse of/on representation. Aesthetics is deconstructed, and art becomes a broken promise” (O’Sullivan, 2001, p. 125-26).

it or not art goes on “producing affects” (O’Sullivan, 2001a, p. 126). Suggesting that affects can be understood as “extra-discursive” or “extra-textual” (I would suggest that they are, perhaps, *non*-discursive or *non*-textual – although this is debatable), he describes affects as moments of “intensity” and as a “reaction in/on the body at the level of matter” (O’Sullivan, 2001a, p. 126). Again, while much of the argument *seems* to mirror what I have here been arguing the question remains: What effects or reactions *do not* exist at the level of matter? Indeed, what “*immaterial*” forces *do not* have their effects at the level of matter? In other words: *What makes art so special* beyond its human-cliché-busting abilities and its ability to excite us by doing so? So while O’Sullivan argues that we “might even say that affects are immanent of matter” (O’Sullivan, 2001a, p. 126), one is left wondering if it even matters that, as Spinoza argues, *everything* is an expression of affect, and if so what makes artistic affects so unique or significant? Are there instances when affect is *not* involved in sensation? In becoming? In immanence? To suggest that affects are “immanent to experience” is not the same as saying that experience *is entirely* the experience of an unrelenting unfolding of affect. Further, his suggestion that affects have little to do with “knowledge or meaning” begs the question: Is an affect not a *form* of knowledge? Is affect not that which gives rise to meaning? In other words, if affect – as we’re understanding it here – goes all the way down, what’s so *unique* and *otherworldly* about it?

While O’Sullivan acknowledges that language too can have “an affective register,” suggesting that meaning could, indeed, be the “effect of affects” and that from “a certain perspective” affects only come to *mean* “within language” his expansion of affect’s terrain of influence seems to confuse his effort to distinguish art as somehow unique due to its apparently *special* reliance on the affective register. His suggestion that affect can be understood – or “figured” – as “always already” a representation of what he calls the “Ur or originary affect” – an “unreachable (and unsayable) origin” – and that there is “no denying” that affects “make up life, and art” further confuses things (O’Sullivan, 2001a, p. 126) insofar as we are left asking, again: “So what’s so special about art?”

Basically, O’Sullivan’s (and my) attempt to articulate with language this thing called affect, and its role in aesthetic/artistic production and experience finds language bumping into its limits, finds language being called upon to say the unsayable. Would it be best to just keep quiet? To do rather than to say? For to *identify* affects – *what*

they are, *how* they work, *when* they work – is to imply that, at times, they *aren't* and they *don't*. Indeed, O'Sullivan's suggestion that art is "made up of affects" and that art could be described as affects "frozen in time and space" makes one seriously wonder when, and at what times, *are* things in fact "frozen," static? This statement is especially remarkable – its invocation of the possibility of a frozen space-time – by how it goes against the flow of a Deleuzo-Guattarian-inspired ontology.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps, then, what O'Sullivan is identifying is not that affects are exclusive to art, but that for too long affects have been excluded *from* our thinking *about* art. He might be identifying that which is missing from artistic discourse, rather than from art itself, or the world as such (of course, insofar as affects inflect all aspects of existence their being excluded from our own thought paradigms does not have any effect on whether or not they actually and actively exist); as O'Sullivan observes, "what can one say about affects? Indeed, what needs to be said about them?" (O'Sullivan, 2001a, p. 126).¹⁰⁵ Again, though, when O'Sullivan observes that art is "a bundle of affects," a bloc of sensations, "waiting to be reactivated by a spectator or participant" (O'Sullivan, 2001a, p. 126), the assumption seems to be that it is *us* that activates affects rather than the affects activating us.

Can our description of affect get more specific, or does it only get more confusing? O'Sullivan writes that what "defines the affect" is its being "precisely an event or a happening" (O'Sullivan, 2001a, p. 127). This, of course, forces us to ask – "What is an event?" – which is itself a confounding question open to much recent speculation.¹⁰⁶ Alternatively, we might ask, "What *isn't* an affect?" This question, in my view, draws attention to the difficulties we have of dealing with affect's leaky boundaries (assuming we can speak of affect having boundaries at all); that is, what difference does it make when we deem *this* to be an affect rather than *that*? Further, how do we

¹⁰⁴ O'Sullivan observes: "Affects are, then, to use Deleuzo-Guattarian terms and to move the register away from deconstruction and away from representation the molecular beneath the molar" (O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 126).

¹⁰⁵ But, I wonder, is the affect really of this type? Is the affect transcendent in this sense (beyond experience)? Or, rather, is it not the case, as I have already suggested, that the affect is immanent to experience and that all this writing about the affect is really just that: writing. Writing which produces an effect of representation. (Parodying Derrida a little, we might say that by asking the question what is an affect? we are already presupposing that there is an answer (an answer which must be given in language). We have in fact placed the affect in a conceptual opposition that always and everywhere promises and then frustrates meaning.) (O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 126-27).

¹⁰⁶ See, for instance: Hallward, P. (2004) or Badiou, A. (2005, 2000).

do such discerning in the first place? Are we even in position to make such discernments, especially in light of we ourselves being expressions of affect in the first instance?

By describing art *as* affect O'Sullivan, like myself, attempts to move art beyond discussions that make sense of art according to more conventional aesthetic discourses. He acknowledges too that discourses of the event can become much like questions of faith, suggesting that there is a quasi-religious dimension to suggestions that *the event* unfolds out of nothing, or as "something genuinely unexpected" (O'Sullivan, 2001a, p. 127). Moreover, event-speak finds us always attempting to identify Events that speak Truths. O'Sullivan is keen, instead, to reconfigure the event as "immanent to this world" and as not "arriving" from a transcendent realm, but "as emerging from the realm of the virtual," the realm of potential. Art's virtuality – its potentiality – is, he suggests, "no longer an object" but is instead "a space" or "a zone" or "a site" (O'Sullivan, 2001a, p. 127). These unactualized virtual artistic spaces, zones, and sites are where affect is *in potentia*. Like Deleuze he qualifies this statement by suggesting that these affects *in potentia* are not any old affects but new ones that have the ability to challenge our "spatio-temporal register" (O'Sullivan, 2001a, p. 127). Art's virtuality, however, remains determined despite its newness-producing potential. As Deleuze explains:

When it is claimed that works of art are immersed in virtuality, what is being invoked is not some confused determination but *the completely determined structure formed by its genetic differential elements*, its 'virtual' or 'embryonic' elements. The elements, varieties of relations and singular points coexist in the work or the object, in the virtual part of the work or object [...]."
(Deleuze, 1994, p. 260 – emphasis added)

O'Sullivan, despite his occasional appeal to transcendence, emphasizes too that the world of art is "our own world seen without the spectacles of subjectivity"; but, he asks "how to remove these spectacles, which are not really spectacles at all but the very condition of our subjectivity? How, indeed, to sidestep our selves?" (O'Sullivan, 2001a, p. 128). He responds to his question by suggesting that we are in fact doing this sidestepping "all the time" insofar as we are "involved in molecular processes that go on beyond our subjectivity." He writes:

we are these processes. We are as well as subjects (bound by strata) bundles of events, bundles of affects (in a constant process of destratification). At stake here, then, are practices and strategies which reveal this other side to ourselves; practices which imaginatively and pragmatically switch the register. After all, why not try something new? (O’Sullivan, 2001a, p. 128)

Art’s affects, then, are, as I’ve been arguing, register-switching ones.¹⁰⁷ They are produced using pragmatic practices and strategies – free marks, for instance – that explore the plane of immanence and our own potential to become-artist.¹⁰⁸ So art engages not with transcendentals or representational schemas but with the visceral potentiality of everyday life. Affects, writes O’Sullivan are “brutal” and “apersonal”; they connect us to the world around us; in this sense, he suggests, affect is “a kind of transhuman aesthetic” that permeates and constitutes the fabric of our being, of our existence (O’Sullivan, 2001a, p. 128). Once again we are left wondering what it is specifically about *art’s* affective capacities that make them more notable or significant than the rest of the affects swirling around us. Perhaps it’s art’s *deliberate* attempt to cultivate *new* affects (is *deliberateness* so important?)? Is it the artist’s effort to interrogate affect on its own terms, and for its own sake? O’Sullivan takes up this point when he suggests that art’s affective potency derives from its being a bit “dangerous,” capable of introducing us to “another world (our world experienced differently)” (O’Sullivan, 2001a, p. 128).

The emphasis on affect being developed by O’Sullivan reaffirms the special status of art as a purveyor of newness, of new affects and sensations. Is it art’s element of surprise that makes it so significant? Art’s ability to sneak up on you? Its penchant to shake your resolve (or produce newfound commitments)? O’Sullivan quotes Deleuze’s remark that his project has led him to focus on “modes of individuation” that transcend particular “things, persons, or subjects”; his interest, as mentioned already, is in haecceities: “a time of day,” “a region,” “a climate”; Deleuze, in fact,

¹⁰⁷ O’Sullivan continues: “New (prosthetic) technologies can do this. Switching temporal registers: time-lapse photography producing firework flowers and flows of traffic; slow-motion film revealing intricate movements which otherwise are a blur. And switching spatial registers too: microscopes and telescopes showing us the molecular and the super-molar. Indeed, at this point the new media coincide with art: indeed, the new media take on an aesthetic function (a deterritorialising function). However, we need not turn to new technologies. The realm of affects is all around us and there are as many different strategies for accessing it as there are subjects” (O’Sullivan, 2001a, p. 127).

¹⁰⁸ “For Deleuze and Guattari this is a pragmatic project: you do not just read about the body without organs you make yourself one” (O’Sullivan, 2001a, p. 127).

wonders whether it is in fact a “mistake to believe in the existence of things, persons, or subjects” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 26). If we integrate O’Sullivan suggestion that art’s “function” is “to switch our intensive register,” to provide us with a getaway from the everyday with Deleuze’s efforts to redefine, or redistribute how we go about defining distinctions that divide subjects from objects, things from events, we come to the conclusion that a distinctly apersonal form of newness is one of the most significant things on offer from that most revered human activity – art.¹⁰⁹ Is this desirable? Doesn’t this exaggerated emphasis on newness-as-good, or newness-as-virtuous¹¹⁰ serve to undermine the significance of our body’s need for more prosaic and repetitive requirements: the need for stable friendships, the comfort derived from our favourite foods? Moreover, doesn’t a fetishization of newness supplant the significance of such quintessentially human activities as ritual, liturgy, ceremony, communal traditions, and so on?

That is, if art-as-affect’s purpose is to furnish us with newness, to rain newness down from the aesthetic firmament, it seems that this view could leave out large swathes of artistic activity and lead us towards a Marinetti-esque/Futurist future where new affects are pursued for their own sake as a sensory salve to help cope with a nihilistic landscape emptied out of tradition and ritual. Breathlessly, O’Sullivan declares that more significant than art’s representational function is its ability to transform things by functioning as “a fissure in representation”; art, he goes on, invites us to a dance:

in which through careful manoeuvres the molecular is opened up, the aesthetic is activated, and art does what is its chief *modus operandi*: it transforms, if only for a moment, our sense of our selves and our notion of our world. This is, of course, to claim quite an importance for art. Certainly it is to move far away from those postmodernists who assert that it is time for art to be included within the broader picture of representational practices in contemporary society. (O’Sullivan, 2001a, p. 128)

¹⁰⁹ “This is arts function: to switch our intensive register, to reconnect us with the world” (O’Sullivan, 2001, p. 128).

¹¹⁰ “Art, then, might be understood as the name for a function: a magical, an aesthetic, function of transformation. Art is less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being, of becoming, in the world. Less involved in knowledge and more involved in experience, in pushing forward the boundaries of what can be experienced.²⁵ Finally, less involved in shielding us from death, but indeed precisely involved in actualising the possibilities of life” (O’Sullivan, 2001, p. 130).

O'Sullivan's argument is that art opens life up to new experiences. By playing on and with affective registers art actualizes potentials that were unable to be anticipated. Suggesting that art exists on the "borderline between the actual and the virtual" results, he suggests, in art's having an "ethical imperative" since art involves moving "beyond the already familiar (the human)" and towards a process of "self-overcoming" (O'Sullivan, 2001a, p. 129). Of course, to suggest that successful self-overcoming is achieved not by encountering familiar affects but *new* ones is to devalue things we might *deliberately* repeat. While overcoming oneself might – in practice – involve an endless process of reaching for newness – new experiences, new modes of thought – the suggestion that these are to be achieved by encountering new affects, and that new affects are to be sought when pursuing this ongoing process is to regard *new* affects as *valuable in and of themselves* rather than as the always *already* new medium through which force affects us.

So, it's not just that newness is excessively valued, it is that its value seems too often to derive from newness' rarity. My point is that to attribute excessive value to affects – new ones in particular – is, firstly, to reify and sanctify a process, an exchange, a medium, a relation that *constitutes exchange as such*. It is to single out as uniquely special something that is common to all things. Further, to divide our experience of life into art and non-art, into the common/repetitive and the transformative/new is to perpetuate a dualistic ontology and, in my view, to limit the potential for transformation outside the artistic/aesthetic realm.

As a general response to O'Sullivan's affect-speak I would like to argue that when we point in our writing – or whatever – to *an* affect we are pointing to something without content, without value, since all we encounter when we encounter things *are* affects. That is, affects are nothing in particular but are expressed by everything. Affects, we could say, are not content but means, not values but value-enabling. What is distributed is different than the means of distribution. An affect – as that which affects – does so naïvely, without prejudice, without predetermined judgment, and without any specific or particular content. An affect affects. Content and value are added after the fact. Put differently, we must always ask: On what grounds can we say that such and such a phenomenon does *not* affect? Is *not* an affect? Art, according to this definition of affect, does not have at its disposal an *affective monopoly* but instead *uses* affects – processes, connections, relations, propensities, forces – in order to make its impact, and, if you want, to *produce affects* in the more

conventional sense of the term (i.e. affect as emotion or feeling). In other words, art does not monopolize affect, its *raison d'être* is not to produce *new* affects – since, presumably, these are being produced all the time, everywhere, and by everything¹¹¹ – but perhaps art is somewhat unique by the *way* it expresses affect, by its being able to generate and find affects that make an impact on our bodies, and, no less, by its being *an activity* that is itself its own reward, that is itself an embodied engagement, serving as a sensuous release of energy in a unique “language” all its own. Or perhaps art is the activity designed specifically to give us pause, to operate on our bodies, to cause us to reflect, to strike us like lightning, etc. (but surely other activities have similar effects?). In sum, while defining the parameters of art seems to be a non-starter in many respects, defining art as having a special relationship with affect seems even more difficult (assuming we're subscribing to a Spinozist/Deleuzean definition of affect).

Moreover, art's processes need not always be new to be significant. While the latest and greatest artist to make a splash often brings something novel to the “art scene,” said artist just as often goes on to produce a body of work that just repeats what was *once* novel – consider, for instance, the repetitive bison motifs of early cave painters, or the repetitive grids of Agnes Martin, or the repetitive playfulness of the works of Paul Klee.¹¹² In these cases, we might add, it is the *repetitiveness* of the artmaking

¹¹¹ O'Sullivan seems to recognize this. Indeed, his description of the ubiquity of affect – of affect's integration with all aspects of lived (and non-lived duration) is outlined in the following passage: “Life goes on. Art, whether we will it or not, continues producing affects. So, what is the ‘nature’ of these affects, and can they be deconstructed? Well, they are certainly extra-discursive and may well be extra-textual. Affects are passages of intensity, a reaction in or on the body at the level of matter. We might even say that affects are immanent to matter. They are certainly immanent to experience. In fact, following Deleuze-Spinoza, we might define affect as the effect another body (for example an art object) has upon my own body, and upon my body's duration.

An affect is then not simply a given intensity, although in a sense it begins with this. For Deleuze-Spinoza the latter is in fact termed affection, or the actual ‘state of the affected body/ (which in itself ‘implies the presence of the affecting body’ (Deleuze, 1988, p. 49). These affections ‘express our state at a given moment in time ... they are a slice of our duration’ (Deleuze, 1998, p. 139). However such affections also determine a passage to a ‘more’ or to a ‘less.’ They are, if you like, always experienced in time, as duration. Thus, affect, understood here as precisely the body's passage from one state of affection to another (Deleuze, 1988, p. 49). Affect then, for Deleuze-Spinoza, names the risings and fallings – the becomings – of my own body, especially when it encounters another body. It follows that different encounters will have different characters, and indeed that certain encounters will be more productive, others less so. Hence Spinoza's comment (quoted by Deleuze): ‘By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained’ (Deleuze, 1988, p. 49)” (O'Sullivan, 2005, p. 40-1).

¹¹² In regards to how the discipline of art history might engage with art's realignment as affect O'Sullivan writes: “How might this effect the practice of art history? A certain kind of art history might disappear: that which attends only to arts signifying character, that which understands art, positions art work, as representation. Indeed, these latter functions might be placed alongside arts

process that is its most important characteristic; indeed, one is just as likely to find something new – assuming that is the goal – or interesting through a process of repetition as through processes of always new, cliché-less free-marking. There is always something new in repetition. While the pursuit of new affects according to O’Sullivan’s recommendation might prove challenging, insofar as routinely encountering new situations demands that one ongoingly make choices in the face of new phenomena, to suggest that this process of encountering newness is *itself* a valuable one is to imagine that value can be located without recourse to community¹¹³ or some other sort of repetitive context or situation. There are, after all, no contextless values, values being produced as a consequence of a process of continuity, repetitive testing, and choosing within the context of a (or multiple) relationships.

My intention, then, is to be critical of affect-inflected aesthetic language and ontologies that point to affects not merely as being significant (which they undoubtedly are), but as being *more* significant in *some* cases than in *others*. My own position on affect is that affecting and being affected are ubiquitously distributed *across* relations and *across* time/space; their significance does not derive from their being significant in and of themselves but by their relationship to particular contexts and particular uses. Art should not be exclusively *about* affect, and is not made valuable *by* affect, but is – instead – an activity that *examines and manipulates* affects *that were already in process*, revealing more to us about our myopic worldview and consciousness than about where and when affects do or do not reside or exist.

My position on affect, then, refuses to locate any value in particular in the existence of affect as such, affects being understood, instead, as relationally-dependent effects through which and by which force, becoming, and value is distributed and

other asignifying functions arts affective and intensive qualities (the molecular beneath, within, the molar). In this place art becomes a more complex, and a more interesting, object. And the business of art history changes from a hermeneutic to a heuristic activity: art history as a kind of parallel to the work that art is already doing rather than as an attempt to fix and interpret art; indeed, art history as precisely a kind of creative writing. So I end this paper, this skirmish against representation, with the outline of a new project: the thinking of specific art works, the writing on specific art works, as exploration of arts creative, aesthetic and ethical function.²⁶ This will involve attending to the specificity of an art work, and the specificity of the milieu in which the art object operates. This is not a retreat from art history but a reconfiguration of its practice a reconfiguration which might well involve, as one of its strategies, a return to those writers who have always seen the aesthetic as the function of art, and to those writers who might not be art historians but who are nevertheless attuned to the aesthetics of affect” (O’Sullivan, 2001, p. 130-31).

¹¹³ See, for example, Hauerwas, 1981.

articulated. Nor is my position on affect one that attempts to determine whether *this* or *that* activity is a more or less significant *instance* of affectivity (since, in this expanded affective – i.e. Spinozist – ontology affecting and being affected constitutes the *basis* for action, novelty, becoming in general). This does not preclude the necessity to describe and identify the *ways* affects affect us; however, to suggest that we are in position to exhaustively account for the forces that swirl around us and that constitute our context would be delusional, and to suggest that humans and human activities are of greater (affective) significance than those of non-humans would be crudely anthropocentric.

My suggestion that art is not autonomous, not separate, and certainly does not have a monopoly on affect demands an ontology that offers an *expanded* understanding of affect, an ontology of affective affirmation that understands affect to be *distributed across* entities, whether artistic or otherwise. This would be an ontology suspicious of exclusionary boundaries, one that does not seek an outside, one that recognizes what we might feel compelled to call a rupture as an immanent phenomenon that, while perhaps exceeding the capacities of our clichés, demands to be incorporated into an immanent worldview.

Recognizing that affects have the capacity to introduce us to something “new,” something outside of our everyday habits, O’Sullivan suggests that these not-yet-incorporated experiences facilitate “genuine encounters” wherein: “Our typical ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disrupted. We are forced to thought” (O’Sullivan, 2005, p. 1).¹¹⁴ O’Sullivan explains that “the encounter” operates “as a rupture in our habitual modes of being and thus in our habitual subjectivities. It produces a cut, a crack”; this, insofar as it could be construed as a bit banal, “is not the end of the story” since “the rupturing encounter also contains a moment of affirmation, the affirmation of a new world, in fact a way of seeing and thinking this world differently” (O’Sullivan, 2005, p. 1).¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ About “though,” O’Sullivan writes: “For both Serres and Lyotard, thought, when it really is thought (and not just a habitual response or reaction), is decidedly non-representational. Such a rethinking of thought involves a rethinking of the *cogito*. The ‘mind’ is no longer the origin of thought as such, but operates as a kind of threshold, or temporary turbulence, within a thought cloud-field here thought, thinking, is itself a multiplicity. Creative thinking then involves an openness to, a reconnection with, this nebulous realm of potentialities beyond (in fact, always parallel to) the subject” (O’Sullivan, 2005, p. 30).

¹¹⁵ O’Sullivan continues: “Art, in breaking one world and creating another, brings these two moments into conjunction. Art then is the name of the object of an encounter, but also the name of

While O’Sullivan’s enthusiasm is certainly infectious it strikes me that a more appropriate expression of affirmation would be *not* to fetishize this apparent rupture, but to recognize it for what it is: an encounter with our all-too-human limits. Rather than reify the abstraction that is “the rupture” why not confront the limitations inherent to “the human” and our inability to grasp comprehensively the complexities – affective and otherwise – of the world we live in? Why a fascination with rupture rather than an acknowledgement and foregrounding of our limits? The rupture itself is of little (cosmic) significance, after all. Seeking to further identify the conditions that would demand a sort of reverence O’Sullivan suggests that the point of rupture “is the creative moment of the encounter that obliges us to think otherwise”; further, “Life, when it truly is lived, is a history of these encounters, which will always necessarily occur beyond representation” (O’Sullivan, 2005, p. 1).

Now, while O’Sullivan is right to highlight the more-than-representational dimension of our lives, by not acknowledging the fact that these “beyond representation” experiences happen to us – through our bodies, our experiences, our thoughts – at every moment of every day he at once *overdetermines* affect as artistic encounters and *overlooks* the affective pervasiveness of all of our encounters (and all of the encounters of everything else). My suggestion, instead, is that our experience of what O’Sullivan describes as ruptures is most responsibly understood as an effect of our limited capacities to make adequate sense of things.

3.9 Aesthetic Atom Bombs: Responding to Zepke

Novelty. The cult of novelty. The new is one of those poisonous stimulants which end up becoming more necessary than any food; drugs which, once they get a hold on us, need to be taken in progressively larger doses until they are fatal, though we’d die without them. It is a curious habit – growing thus attached to that perishable part of things in which precisely their novelty consists. (Paul Valéry quoted in Benjamin, 2002, S10, 6, p. 560)

the encounter itself, and indeed of that which is produced by the encounter. Art is this complex event that brings about the possibility of something new” (O’Sullivan, 2005, p. 1-2).

Stephen Zepke's recent work on the affective dimension of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of art, like that of O'Sullivan's, also articulates a post-representational aesthetic ontology¹¹⁶ that, while maintaining conventional notions of art as an especially *unique* or *privileged* mode of human activity, places particular emphasis on the role bodies and materials play in art making. Expanding on Deleuze's interpretation of Bacon's "free marks" – as things that open up artistic expression to new perspectives – Zepke describes art as a "privileged site of corporeal experimentation" (Zepke, 2005, p. 4). Suggesting that art is, significantly, "an experience of becoming, an experiential body of becoming, an experimentation producing new realities" (Zepke, 2005, p. 4) he challenges the academic boxes that result in art's consistently being encased and neutered. Observing that the implications of a Deleuzo-Guattarian ontology of art "are obvious" he notes that there needn't even be "an ontology of art nor an aesthetics of art, each in its own realm of competency, each with its own all too serious professors"; rather, there are simply *artists at work*, scurrying about and being engaged in "the pragmatic practice *onto-aesthetics*" (Zepke, 2005, p. 4). Zepke describes these pragmatic practitioners as "cosmic artisans" who are "everywhere setting off their atom bombs" (Zepke, 2005, p. 4).

Here Zepke compels us to believe in art's singularly explosive potency, its difference from other less creative pursuits. In this case it is art's uniquely powerful *affective* capacity that is emphasized. Zepke suggests, following Nietzsche, that worthwhile artistic creations will be destructive, will annihilate whatever is (un)lucky enough to be in its presence: "Any creation worth its name will therefore encompass the destructions necessary to set it free, an explosion that destroys negation and propels its liberated matter into the new" (Zepke, 2005, p. 8). Art's destructiveness, then, is matched only by its ability subsequently to create the new.

Indeed, insofar as art-as-affect-machine relies on the affective potency of newness – and of the unexpected, of the destructive, of obliteration – it demands that our belief

¹¹⁶ "Art as abstract machine's first principle: it is real and not representation. Deleuze and Guattari, whether discussing art, philosophy, or anything else, will not stop coming back to this first principle. And as such, it immediately implies another – its necessary compliment – that constructing an abstract machine is to construct construction itself. The abstract machine is the vital mechanism of a world always emerging anew, it is the mechanism of creation operating at the level of the real. Here, a new world opens up, a living world in which nothing is given except creation. To open a world, to construct a new type of reality, this is the ontological foundation of the world – of *this* world and of all the other – on an abstract machine guiding its becoming" (Zepke, 2005, p. 2).

in the new's potency, relevance, and powers be unwavering, be grounded in conviction and a sort of myopic belief in the benevolence – even when violent – of this *desireable* newness. Again, the quasi-sacred dimension of art is clear and remains in place. Curiously, however, the emphasis on affect and on newness finds the art object itself being given second tier status – becoming no art object in particular – in the face of the sheer need to affirm the chaotic ether from which newness emerges. *Affirmation-in-the face-of-chaos* through *faith-in-the-perpetual-production-of-the-new* becomes art's repetitive refrain. As Zepke explains:

Affirmation is therefore like a leap of faith, a leap into the chaos of the world in order to bring something back, in order to construct something that expresses life beyond its sad negation. And how could it be anything else? Because from our subjective perspective, from within its narrow and blinkered vision, the life of matter, the cosmic infinity of our here and now is what cannot be experienced or thought, at least not without some recourse to mollifying images of a transcendent beyond. This unthought of thought, the insensible in sensation, this is the impossible aim of Deleuze and Guattari's project. Not, once more, to transcend the world, but to discover it as it is, to create a thought, a sensation, a life that participates in the world's joyful birth of itself: a dancing star. (Zepke, 2005, p. 8).

Having mixed chaos, dancing stars, and liberating destruction into one overwhelming aesthetic unity we find Zepke, like O'Sullivan, being compelled to over-embellish art in an effort to distinguish it from more prosaic creative pursuits. The trajectory is one of differentiating art rather than incorporating it or democratizing it. While acknowledging with Deleuze and Guattari that the artwork is "a productive machine that does not represent anything, is itself unrepresentable [insofar as every representation is in fact itself a real instantiation in word, or thought, or image, etc.], and exists only as the conjunction of material flows and their traits of expression" (Zepke, 2005, p. 117), Zepke perpetuates the leap made by O'Sullivan that separates art and artmaking from everyday life and that bestows upon the artworld a special status before which we might – perhaps – be tempted to genuflect. Why, I am compelled to wonder, does this art fetishization persist? Is there something to be gained by distinguishing art from other everyday activities? Having identified accurately the materiality of art, its affective modes of production and distribution, why set it apart from *other* "material flows" and "traits of expression" that also

manifest the ongoing processes of differentiation described by Deleuze? Why the need to set art apart? And what use is it to regard human art making as an *exemplary* instance of creation (which, after all, is already going on) and affectivity (which is, following Spinoza, the ongoing state of things-in-relation)?

In their efforts to align the creative processes of artmaking with the affective forces at work in the wider world¹¹⁷ – reconstituting art as a sort of microcosm (or representation) of larger processes¹¹⁸ – we are left wondering whether, at the end of such embellishment, art as a defined category shouldn't be left behind? Certainly, the affective turn *challenges* many of the conventions of art historical discourse, or the sociology of art, but why not finish the job? Why *gesture* towards the universal nature of affectivity acknowledged by Spinoza while, at the same time, locating its most significant mode in the world of art and artmaking? Dismantling the persistence of the “fine-arts system” in favour of a much more pragmatic understanding of art as *just another mode of production* – one that exists within a modest spectrum of a much larger affective system – seems more in keeping with the project – or at least the broader implications or objectives – of the Deleuzo-Guattarian project. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari themselves regard art (with philosophy and science) as just one of the pragmatic ways we solve problems – the problem of human expression, for example, or the problem of what to do with blank surfaces. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) they write:

¹¹⁷ Zepke objectifies the dissolution of boundaries between art and life in the following passage that unpacks how Spinozist doctrine impacts aesthetic discourse: “Spinoza introduces a new understanding of art, no longer as inadequate representation, but as adequate expression. As a result, ethical-aesthetics will not ask what an artwork means or represents, but what it is capable of, what it expresses. An expressive artist is the one who affirms new common notions, and constructs new affectual assemblages. The artist has become critical, and is simply the name for the action of affirmation that emerges from modal encounters properly understood. The artwork is, similar to last chapter, indiscernible from this action as its embodiment and expression. Only by asking what the artwork does, what joys it brings and what essences it expresses, will we understand it. But this understanding is not once and for all, and is processual, resumed each time the work is perceived or encountered. This means the art assemblage includes on the one hand the affects emerging from its encounter, and on the other remains open to connections yet to come. Art is always under construction. Aesthetics is always a question about ‘what happens?’, about the process of composition that is expressed in a work. This is entirely appropriate given the ontological assumption that, as Deleuze puts it: ‘Everything in Nature is just composition’ (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 237) (Zepke, 2005, p. 64-5).

¹¹⁸ Zepke here demonstrates the degree to which art and life can become conflated in an overly enthusiastic reading of Deleuze and Guattari's affect-theory: “Pure immanence is ontology as the theory and practice of a creative life, because we cannot think this ontological power ‘in itself’; it has no ‘in itself’ and only exists as the becoming-new in things, in art. This makes Deleuze and Guattari's ontology inseparable from aesthetics, in as much as pure immanence is what appears, as what appears – what appears when essence is existence. What appears is sensation. Sensation is the being of sensation – difference – but this differential essence only exists as affects (becomings) and visions (percepts), in other words it only exists *in and as experience*: a life” (Zepke, 2005, p. 223).

In no way do we believe in a fine-arts system; we believe in very diverse problems whose solutions are found in heterogeneous arts. To us, Art is a false concept, a solely nominal concept; this does not, however, preclude the possibility of a simultaneous usage of the various arts within a determinable multiplicity. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 300-1)

Art, in this passage, is described as a practical activity. Art is useful insofar as it serves as a tool for innovatively responding to life's *problems* and *questions*. As such, it becomes one of many tools in our toolboxes for dealing with an immanent world constituted by affects, processes, and differentiation. While art certainly *does* expose us to what we might regard as "the new,"¹¹⁹ it is *we* who create art as a response to, and in anticipation of novel but determined actualities.

3.10 Affect as Art vs. Art as Affect

We cannot decide whether animals have painting, even though they do not paint on canvas [...]; even here, there is little foundation for a clear-cut distinction between animals and human beings. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 300-1)

The above quote by Deleuze and Guattari signals a certain degree of irreverence not only towards human exceptionalism, but also for the artworld and the artworld's artistic discourse itself. For Deleuze and Guattari, art exists as but one of the methods we use (alongside science and philosophy) to solve the problems that arise during becoming. For them, the "fine-arts system" as articulated by art historians, critics, sociologists, and others does not adequately address – or comprehend – the pre-individual forces at work within an "a fine-arts system" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 300). Ronald Bogue explains that what Deleuze and Guattari find objectionable about the "art system" is the way it functions as "a closed system that ignores the specificity of the various arts and posits essential distinctions between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic" (Bogue, 1996, p. 257).

¹¹⁹ Zepke agrees: "Art is the becoming-animal of the world, it creates new forms of life outside our stratifications, our comfortable organicism, and opinionated thoughts [...] appearing in sensations that overflow human perceptions and affections to take us somewhere else" (Zepke, 2005, p. 183).

Indeed, as we've already touched on, to rashly draw distinctions between art and anything else is to risk losing touch with the ways life and art, or *living* and *making*, intermingle and co-exist. For one thing, insisting on such distinctions prevents us from recognizing – and pursuing – a logic of relational interconnectedness. Nonetheless, for Deleuze, as Bogue reminds us, “there is nothing wrong with systems as long as they are open systems” subject to change (Bogue, 1996, p. 257). And as Deleuze explains, the system of artistic expression is differentiated from other systems only by its methods, its strategies, its mediums, while sharing in common with other systems the tracing of a line of becoming. This line of becoming opens, for Deleuze, a path to art's becoming a form of philosophical thought in its own right: a becoming-philosophy of art. Deleuze explains:

So is this it, to paint, to compose, or to write? It is all a question of line, there is no substantial difference between painting, music, and writing. These activities are differentiated from one another by their respective substances, codes, and territorialities, but not by the abstract line they trace, which shoots between them and carries them towards a common fate. When we come to trace the line, we can say ‘It is philosophy.’ Not at all because philosophy would be an ultimate discipline, a last root, containing the truth of the others, on the contrary. Still less is it a popular wisdom. It is because philosophy is born or produced outside by the painter, the musician, the writer, each time that the melodic line draws along the sound, or the pure traced line colour, or the written line the articulated voice” (Deleuze, 2006a, p. 55).

Art, then, is just another form of thinking, of processing, and problem solving. Art is the expressive form of a solution to a problem.

While Deleuze and Guattari's assessment of art (relative to the other two modes of problem-solving: philosophy and science) foregrounds art's mobilization and generation of affects, the emphasis on affect risks becoming an *overemphasis* on affect, on art being thought of as having a monopoly on affect. This, as we've noted already, is far too limiting an assessment both of art and of affect. As a way of responding to this problem of affective-over-emphasis my suggestion is that any *proliferation of affects* be regarded as *artistic*. It is with this categorical shift that affect *moves beyond its conventional meaning as emotion*. By suggesting that *affect itself is artistic*, rather than art having a privileged *access* to affectivity, we more

accurately enact the Spinozist project that locates its most profound position in the observation that everything affects and can be affected or that, as Deleuze and Guattari correctly, “Affects are becomings” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 256).

Affects, then, enact becoming and becoming becomes affectively. This affect-becoming certainly has aesthetic dimensions. But that which is artistic does not nor could not monopolize affects as such. Art, then, does not *monopolize* the production of affect but must be regarded as an *expression of affect*. This frees art from the parochial confines of its own sets of clichés and conventions and allows art to become, instead, the word we use to describe the all-too-human activity of exploring and arranging the immanent propensities and capacities of things¹²⁰ so that “new” configurations and affects can come into being that open things up and defy conventional categories, etc. Art as affective exploration, affective exploration as art.

Admittedly, however, insofar as for Spinoza *all* relations embody and enact affective relationships (whether these relations consist of conscious or non-conscious, material or immaterial beings/entities) attempts to use affect in *this* case rather than *that* case reveals the degree to which such attempts run into problems. That is, insofar as for Spinoza *all* relations are relations of affect, to speak of this or that relationship as *especially* affect-laden is to undermine the *all-encompassing affectiveness of relation itself* and *all processes of becoming*. Affect, then, remains an ambiguous term and is deployed, at best, inconsistently across recent theoretical and philosophical discussions. We might say that due to its ubiquity, but also its lack of specificity, affect is everywhere but nowhere *in particular*; that is, affects do not exist in isolation but are expressed through durations and across relations; they enact a seamless unfolding, a seamless flow that both constitutes and is reconstituted. The becoming of affect – the production of the new – is ongoing. To suggest, with O’Sullivan or Zepke, that the new must be brought into being – as though it wasn’t already in process – is to appeal falsely to newness *itself* as having emancipatory power, to bestow upon newness ontological characteristics it either doesn’t deserve or could never have. Newness, from their vantage point, becomes a sort of teleological objective (as though it isn’t always in the process of occurring).

¹²⁰ “To every relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness grouping together an infinity of parts, there corresponds a degree of power. To the relations composing, decomposing, or modifying an individual there correspond intensities that affect it, augmenting or diminishing its power to act; these intensities come from external parts or from the individual’s own parts. Affects are becomings. Spinoza asks: What can a body do? We call the latitude of a body the affects of which it is capable at a given degree of power, or rather within the limits of that degree” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 256).

Additionally, insofar as we tend to believe that emancipation follows from newness we must recognize that an ontology premised upon perpetual newness postpones liberation indefinitely since it is always to come but will never arrive. At best, we can say of the new that it is ubiquitous and contentless, a featureless feature of endlessly novel processes of becoming.

Since, according to my argument, newness is always here resulting in emancipation's perpetual postponement I suggest that we instead be content with immanence. Let's be content too with an expanded – Spinozist – understanding of affect and, in turn, an expansive understanding of becoming's *ongoing* newness. Affect inaugurates becoming, is a consequence of becoming, but is not becoming's product, as though becoming becomes in a way that is external of affect.

At the same time, however, we can acknowledge the aesthetic and artistic dimension of this affective becoming and recognize that what we describe as art is not the mobilization of affects but affect's mobilization for the sake of identifying and extracting new – non-clichéd – experiences (experiences we must bracket off from experience in general by emphasizing their anthropocentric nature, i.e. new experiences *for us*). The goal here is not to disparage the art object, nor to undermine the making of nor the appreciation of art objects, but rather to extend the reverence we have for so long *had* for the art object – for the art object's capacity to make visible what is *for us* invisible – to an expanded field of entities – indeed, to all entities. This expanded reverence enriches our appreciation of the world around us while at the same time causing us to acknowledge that the human capacity to frame, to create boundaries, to create discourses, to create representational paradigms, is *itself* an artistic/affective project of creation that is *itself* at once productive and destructive, at once creating and limiting the world. We're all artists already!

Moreover, by acknowledging the artistry of even the slightest of movements or the smallest configuration, we are in position to recognize the beauty – indeed, the cosmic perfection, as Leibniz would say – that is impersonally unfolding around us and in spite of us. Art can provide us with such a point of view, one that affects, that compels us to emote. It is by changing perspective – or by encountering or being struck by a new perspective – that the simplest thing can become beautiful. But looking or thinking from a different perspective need not be restricted to art objects (conventionally understood). Indeed, as Nietzsche and later Foucault recognized, the creation of art can extend to oneself, to *one's own* becoming. The challenge, in any

pursuit to make of oneself or the world *un objet d'art*, is to attune oneself to the overwhelming affective/artistic/creative potential inherent to all situations and all relations, to not restrict one's affective appreciation to those objects that have been, for whatever reason, deemed (thanks to a series of clichés and conventions) "art." The challenge is to attune oneself to an expanded experience of artistry, to the potential of all objects to affect, and to the inherent capacities of things to become in accordance with the immanent propensities they derive from their relations. This becoming itself becomes an awareness of the artistry all around us. Indeed, the creative effort required to adopt this perspectival reorientation could *itself* be thought of as artistic.

If the larger Deleuzean project is, with Nietzsche, to affirm Life while overcoming the many forms of resentment so common to it, embracing an expanded affective ontology helps accomplish this by situating what exists on a plain of immanence that consists purely of capacities, propensities, relations, affects, and becomings. With affect as the *a priori* feature of things we are in position to develop – despite our limited vocabularies – an ontology – and subsequently the outlines of an ethics – that affirms the world as consisting of entities – material and immaterial – that are always in the process of negotiating relationships, that operate according to their respective inclinations, that clump together to form assemblages, that break apart, and, while these permutations undoubtedly follow from relations of cause and effect, are not thereby impoverished but are true to what they *can* become. This is a world that is required perpetually to adapt, to attempt continually to maintain equilibrium, and to enact an ongoing expression of homeostatic harmony. This is especially important within the human world where the vagaries of revenge and jealousy and scarcity conspire to set us against one another.

3.11 Ethology: A Down-To-Earth Ontology

"Ethology" then can be understood as a very privileged molar domain for demonstrating how the most varied components (biochemical, behavioral, perceptive, hereditary, acquired, improvised, social, etc.) can crystallize in assemblages that respect neither the distinction between orders nor the

hierarchy of forms. What holds all the components together are transversals, and the transversal itself is only a component that has taken upon itself the specialized vector of deterritorialization. In effect, what holds an assemblage together is not the play of framing forms or linear causalities but, actually or potentially, its most deterritorialized component, a cutting edge of deterritorialization. An example is the refrain: it is more deterritorialized than the grass stem, but this does not preclude its being "determined," in other words, connected to biochemical and molecular components. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 336)

In what Dianne Chisholm has described as their "down-to-earth ontology" (Chisholm, 2007), Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the interpretive tools required to adequately address – or come to terms with – an ontology that looks out at the world through a lens that regards what exists as expressions of affectively-driven relational processes of becoming are best examined through an *ethological* lens.

Ethologists observe behavioral processes of living things in a way that does not limit that which is observed to any particular group. In other words, an ethologist would examine the many ways entities affect and are affected *by one another* in a way that does not readily distinguish between species or group but rather looks at the interacting entities – entities in relation – as themselves constituting a sort of organism. Ethologists attend to dynamic processes that produce greater or lesser harmony, that reveal how well one organism or practice fits with its environment. The ethologist is an observer (and potential theorist) of relations. Armstrong explains that in the "simplest possible terms" ethology defines bodies in terms of their "powers for affecting and being affected by other bodies"; she notes that to think ethologically is to resist final definitions of what bodies can do, or of a body having a "fixed form, function or identity" (Armstrong, 2002, p. 47). She notes that for Spinoza, bodies' capacities are never known in advance, nor can they ever be finally decided, since capacities – what Gibson call "affordances" – change according to the contexts and relations in which organisms exist (Armstrong, 2002, p. 47). The ethologist, then, in Deleuzian terms, assumes that all allegedly individual becomings are products of interacting relations.¹²¹

¹²¹ "Although Deleuze and Guattari discuss various kinds of processes of becoming, including becoming-intense, becoming-animal, becoming-woman, becoming-other, becoming-minor and becoming-revolutionary, Paul Patton has argued that becomings may in general be regarded as processes of increase or enhancement in the powers of one body, carried out in relation to the

The machinic quality of an ethologically-inflected ontology such as Deleuze's places it at odds with much modern and contemporary philosophy. Ansell-Pearson suggests that Deleuze, as a philosopher, is difficult to position within the pantheon of philosophers due to the "peculiar character" of his theories, with their investments in "biology and ethology" (Ansell-Pearson, 1999, p. 1). Undoubtedly, a Deleuzian ethology would attend to forces that cross multiple boundaries that exist amongst conventional categories, including: living/dead, material/immaterial, actual/virtual, human/non-human, subject/object, etc. The Deleuzian ethologist could, for example, explore the "becoming animal" of the human, of nature, of an artwork. Derived from the Greek word "èthos" (ἦθος) meaning "character," the etymological root of the word ethology can also be found in the English word "ethics."

Indeed, from a certain perspective to be an ethologist – especially a Deleuzian ethologist – is also to be an ethicist. The ethologist, after all, enacts an ontology, one that determines the contours of how entities are defined and understood. By choosing to place an emphasis on behaviour rather than being, and process rather than stasis, the ethologist prioritizes a way of relating to others – an ethics – that is open to the potentialities enacted by processes of affecting and being affected.

For Deleuze ethology is the study of "relations of speed and slowness, of the capacities for affecting and being affected that characterize each thing" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 125). To do ethology is to be attuned to the amplitude of "relations and capacities," to "thresholds (maximum and minimum)," and to "variations" and "transformations" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 125). Through their observations of Nature, ethologists select "that which corresponds to the thing; that is, they select what affects or is affected by the thing, what moves it or is moved by it"; recalling the question with which we opened this manuscript – "What about painting is inconsequential?" – Deleuze states that the ethologist when, for example, observing an animal is compelled to ask: "[W]hat is this animal unaffected by in the infinite world? What does it react to positively or negatively? What are its nutriments and its poisons? What does it 'take' in its world?" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 125).

Observing that an animal or a thing "is never separable from its relations with the world" Deleuze notes that every point "has its counterpoints: the plant and the rain, the spider and the fly"; all is folded chiasmatically:

powers of another, but without involving appropriation of those powers (Patton, 2000)" (Armstrong, 2002, p. 47).

The interior is only a selected exterior, and the exterior, a projected interior. The speed or slowness of metabolisms, perceptions, actions, and reactions link together to constitute a particular individual in the world. (Deleuze, 1988, p. 125)

The individual's capacities do not exist in isolation but are realized "according to circumstances" that determine how the individual's capacities are "affected" and "filled" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 125). These affective processes, in turn, have their own capacities that can either be enhancing or negating, productive or destructive. For example, the ethologist will note how the entity in question – whether regarded as a singularity or a composite – will attempt to maintain equilibrium and coherence in the face of a world that perpetually threatens either to "diminish its power, slow it down, reduce it to the minimum," or "strengthen, accelerate, and increase it: poison or food?" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 126).

The significance for Deleuze (and Guattari) of an ethological perspective is that it allows the observer to adopt an ethos or ethics as free from discrimination as possible, one that while recognizing a world of forces does not fall victim to abstract or convenient divisions, exclusions, and categories. A resistance to discrimination is *built into* an ethological perspective insofar as such a perspective is made more comprehensive and accurate by incorporating more entities and data into the overall set. As Moira Gatens notes:

The distinctions between artifice and nature, human and non-human, will not be of interest on an ethological view since these terms too will be analysable only on an immanent plane where distinctions between one thing and the next amount to kinetic or dynamic differences. (Gatens, 1996, p. 167)¹²²

¹²² Gatens continues: "An ethological evaluation will not select subjects, animals or persons, categorized according to species and genus but rather will individuate according to principles of composability, sets of fast or slow combinations, the range of affects and degrees of affectability. There are not two planes or two numerically distinct forms of being, rather there are qualitatively different modes of evaluating, embodying and thinking being. Ethology does not select the organism' – which Deleuze understands as the judgmental organization of the organs – but the body insofar as the body can be thought and lived as a dynamic system of non-subjectified affects and powers. As such ethology does not disavow the organs but rather selects out the transcendental organization of the body's organs' in favour of a principle of composition or a harmonics of bodies and their exchanges. Ethology does not, however, merely provide alternative descriptions of stable referents. A Spinozist will insist that to think differently is, by definition, to exist differently: one's power of thinking is inseparable from one's power of being and vice versa" (Gatens, 1996, p. 167-8).

The ethologist, observes Gatens, is unlike the biologist insofar as the biologist “lays down rules and norms of behaviour and action,” while the ethologist “does not claim to know, in advance, what a body is capable of doing or becoming”; the ethologist selects “similarities and differences” according to a body’s powers to affect and be affected and is compelled by questions such as “What can this body do? what are its typical relations with other bodies and what are its typical powers? what makes it weaker? what makes it stronger?” (Gatens, 1996, p. 169).

Ethology allows its practitioners to acknowledge the univocity of forces that cross all thresholds, that permeate all membranes, that traverse all systems. The ethologist investigates beings’ manners of being and becoming. Ethology looks beyond anthropocentric limitations to discover an intricate web of relationships that exists in a perpetual process of forming and deforming, coupling and decoupling. The ethologist must be sensitive to the material, immaterial, affective, biological, virtual, and contextual intertwining of beings, their motivations, capacities, propensities – in other words, the way *things exist in common*, the way *immanence incorporates*.¹²³ Ethology, as Gatens explains, because it attends more to emergent behavior than to established divisions (species, genus, race, etc.), does not impose “a plane of organization” from the outside, but instead “posits a plane of experimentation, a mapping of extensive relations and intensive capacities that are mobile and dynamic” (Gatens, 1996, p. 169). The ethologist becomes an ethicist by activating an ontology based on her/his observations of bodies in “constant relation,” some of which are compatible, giving rise to “joyful affects which may in turn increase the intensive capacity of a body,” and others of which are incompatible, giving rise to “sad or debilitating affects which at their worst may entirely destroy a body’s integrity” (Gatens, 1996, p. 169).¹²⁴ It is the ethologist’s attunement to joy and sadness that takes on an ontologically derived ethical importance.

¹²³ Moira Gatens lucidly describes this scenario as follows: “If we understand a rule-based morality as one which addresses itself to molar subjects, then ethology may be understood as offering an ethics of the molecular – a micropolitics concerned with the ‘in-between’ of subjects, with that which passes between them and which manifests the range of possible becomings. Clearly, an ethological perspective will not privilege human being, a priori, over other forms of being, since a ‘body can be anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, a collectivity’ (Deleuze, Spinoza, 1988, p. 127). The distinctions between artifice and nature, human and non-human, will not be of interest on an ethological view since these terms too will be analysable only on an immanent plane where distinctions between one thing and the next amount to kinetic or dynamic differences” (Gatens, 1996, p. 167).

¹²⁴ Gatens continues: “A third sort of relation occurs when two bodies encounter one another in a non-reciprocal manner such that the more powerful body captures the less powerful. Such encounters enhance the capacities of the more Powerful body at the expense of the powers of the

Deleuze objectifies the ethical import of an ethological outlook when he concludes the section on ethology in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1988) with the observation that an ethological outlook, by incorporating the practices of beings into its purview without discriminating according to species or rigid categories, is able to model a method for assessing becomings that recognizes – indeed, privileges – the fact that entities exist *because of* relation, and that these relations yield greater or lesser degrees of equilibrium and harmony. The goal being, insofar as Deleuze is articulating an ethological ethics, to craft an ethics that recognizes the interdependent affectivity of reality as an ongoing becoming, as an expression of affect, and that due to its immanence, its being a shared (and non-transcendent) space, *we'd* be well advised to begin *thinking* and *acting* ethologically for our own good.¹²⁵ At length, Deleuze writes:

Lastly, ethology studies the compositions of relations or capacities between different things. This is another aspect of the matter, distinct from the preceding ones, heretofore it was only a question of knowing how a particular thing can decompose other things by giving them a relation that is consistent with one of its own, or, on the contrary, how it risks being decomposed by other things. But now it is a question of knowing whether relations (and which ones?) can compound directly to form a new, more 'extensive' relation, or whether capacities can compound directly to constitute a more 'intense' capacity or power. It is no longer a matter of utilizations or captures, but of sociabilities and communities. How do individuals enter into composition

weaker body. A Paradigm case of a relation which enhances one body whilst destroying the other, is eating" (Gatens, 1996, p. 169).

¹²⁵ Gatens explains the social import of a Spinozist/ethological ethics as follows: "Spinoza argues that each individual seeks out that which it imagines or thinks will increase its power of preserving itself. From this simple maxim, it follows that an attempt to organize one's encounters in order to minimize bad, and maximize good, affects, leads human beings to sociability. He argues that, of all the bodies we are likely to encounter, it is those bodies which are like our own that will be most useful to us, most composable with our own, and most enhancing in our endeavour to maximize good affects. Thus, human bodies are always parts of more complex bodies: the family, schools, institutions of all kinds, and ultimately, a political body. Such highly composite bodies invariably attempt to organize the plane of immanence into a plane of captured and stable forms of interrelation. Sociability assumes language and other signifying practices. The less adequate a form of sociability is, the more likely is it that it will be organized by signs of the imperative kind: commands which seek to capture affects into stable patterns of compliance and predictability. To paraphrase Nietzsche, all complex bodies have commanding parts and obeying parts. Hence, complex bodies tend to be organized so that the needs and desires of some parts of that body dominate the entire body. This is to say that the extensive parts and intensive capacities of some of the individuals that make up the political body may be incorporated or captured for the benefit of other individuals. The political body, or the state, is essentially an organization of capture" (Gatens, 1996, p. 179).

with one another in order to form a higher individual, ad infinitum? How can a being take another being into its world, but while preserving or respecting the other's own relations and world? And in this regard, what are the different types of sociabilities, for example? What is the difference between the society of human beings and the community of rational beings? ... Now we are concerned, not with a relation of point to counterpoint, nor with the selection of a world, but with a symphony of Nature, the composition of a world that is increasingly wide and intense. In what order and in what manner will the powers, speeds, and slownesses be composed? (Deleuze, 1988, p. 125-6)

This final question Deleuze poses to us – we humans – who alone are in position to accept, reject, ignore, or remain ignorant of the immanent, interconnected relationship we have with the world so that we might be encouraged to become aware of the ways that desire is mobilized by the world's constituents in their efforts to perpetuate their processes of becoming.

3.12 Ethology and the Artlessness of Activity

In the same way that we avoided defining a body by its organs and functions, we will avoid defining it by Species or Genus characteristics; instead we will seek to count its affects. This kind of study is called ethology, and this is the sense in which Spinoza wrote a true Ethics. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 257)

The ethological perspective advocated by Deleuze (and Spinoza) challenges many of the hierarchical conventions that rigidify the ways we categorize entities, composites, and contexts. Moreover, an ethologically-informed view of the world that regards becoming as consisting of distributed affective expressions of relations can function as a sort of shifting ontological ground for a type of ethics, one attuned to the inclinations, capacities, and requirements of an immanent world of processual relations. Similarly, insofar as ethologists must be sensitive to emergent conditions, the ethics that could derive from an ethologically-inflected ontology is one that does

not subscribe to, nor does it seek, definitive, rigid solutions; as Deleuze would say, we should avoid *morality* in our pursuit of *ethics* (Deleuze, 1991, p. 34-6).

(Having said that, however, it can be alarming how much an ethological outlook can seem overly mechanistic, or excessively formulaic in its own way. In much the same way as the open determinism of Deleuze or Spinoza undermines some of our fantasies about what it means to be creative, or an agent, the ethological perspective seems to subvert the creative capacities of things, providing instead a rather impersonal and mechanistic framework for understanding complex practices.)

Osborne observes that Deleuze's ethological ontology "opened a pathway" for thinking creativity differently in terms of "differentiating, impersonal, inventive power" (Osborne, 2003, p. 511); for Deleuze, creativity emerges from the bottom-up unfoldings of immanent forces and energies. Deleuze's theories, Osborne suggests, are in step with a contemporary "creativity explosion" of a more capitalistic variety (Osborne, 2003, p. 511) – consider Richard Florida's influential thesis on the "creative class" (2009, 2007, 2005, 2004), management-speak about the role of innovation within corporations, or the TED.com conferences featuring creativity gurus from Al Gore to digital culture practitioners to other techno-globalists.

Osborne notes that although distinct from contemporary "creative economy-speak," Deleuze has much to offer recent reflections on creativity (Osborne, 2003, p. 511). Osborne suggests that Deleuze's creativity commentary, developed most notably in *What is Philosophy?* with Guattari, emphasizes the *rarity* of creativity – unlike the creative-economy narrative espoused by Florida that suggests that with the right corporate restructuring or government investment creativity can be available to all. Deleuze, Osborne notes, argues that true creativity is a rare thing, restricted to intellectual pursuits of "newness" in the arts, sciences, and philosophy (Osborne, 2003, p. 511). As we've already discussed, Deleuze's understanding of creativity is one that defines the creator as an experimenter, a determined avoider of clichés, an hysterical arm-flailing free-marker. Deleuze's creator does not create *ex nihilo*. Rather, Deleuze's creator is an experimenter, a tester of limits. We could even say that Deleuze's creator does not create anything at all, but rather finds *what comes to be regarded as "creative"* through experimental process of testing and chance, of playing with changing givens (Osborne, 2003, p. 511).

Osborne observes that Deleuze's ethological methods, when applied to artistic or creative practices, results in art's becoming a rather artless activity (Osborne, 2003, p. 514-15). Highlighting the ethological description Deleuze and Guattari use to describe the affective and relational world of the tick – "It has three ways of being affected: climb to the top of a tree, let yourself fall onto the mammal that passes beneath the branch, and seek out the area without fur, the warmest spot" (Osborne, 2003, p. 514-15)¹²⁶ – Osborne asks, "What could be more literalist, more philistine, more artless, than this sort of ethology?" (Osborne, 2003, p. 514-15). In other words, what is *creative* about the world's machinic capacities of novel causes and effect?

Osborne's point is well taken. Deleuze and Guattari's ethological explanations *do not* conform to more widespread ways of understanding creativity as that which issues forth from individuals who impose their creative ideas on inert matter. But within Deleuze and Guattari's ontological universe ethology-based aesthetics turns out not to be so anti-creative after all since their ethological methods *are themselves creative* – by their definition – insofar as they function to undermine and break with *more conventional understandings* of creativity, those that function as doctrines or moral systems of judgments, oughts, and shoulds. Osborne concurs, noting that doing ethology requires sensitivity, "great scholarship, observation, and care" (Osborne, 2003, p. 514-15). But perhaps Osborne's most salient observation – which we've already alluded to – is that the ethologist doesn't "begin with a theory" or with "*a priori* conceptualizations" of what being creative means, or what creativity is. Rather, the ethologist operates more like an artist, an observer of objects, attuned to affect's unfolding, allowing observation to befall her/him, to wash over her/him, to being *open* to new configurations, etc.

It should be becoming clear that Deleuze's ethology-advocacy sits very comfortably alongside his Spinozist sympathies which in turn sit very comfortably alongside his definition of artistic creation as a consequence of discovery through experimentation. What Deleuze develops, then, is an affecto-etholo-aesthetic-ethical ontology that advocates that the immanent world *must be engaged from a position of openness* to the ways that the new is *already underway*. Excessively anthropocentric imposition

¹²⁶ "The tick is organically constructed in such a way that it finds its counterpoint in any mammal whatever that passes below its branch, as oak leaves arranged in the form of tiles find their counterpoint in the raindrops that stream over them. This is not a teleological conception but a melodic one in which we no longer know what is art and what nature" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 185).

need not apply. Deleuze, declares Osborne, must be understood as “our paradigmatic witness against compulsory creativity” (Osborne, 2003, p. 514-15), concluding that his “ethological attitude” has “opened up the black box of creativity, [...] taken a serious look inside, [and become] our first exemplar of a philistine orientation towards the creativity explosion” (Osborne, 2003, p. 514-15).

But not content with this revision of the definition of creativity, Osborne goes on to ask whether “we even need an ethology of creativity at all?” (Osborne, 2003, p. 519); that is, why must we cling to so romantic a notion – creativity – at all? Indeed, why does Deleuze, in *What is Philosophy?* attempt to *resurrect* and *repurpose* creativity by narrowly delineating the three realms – art, science, philosophy – in which it can come to exist? Would not Deleuze, in light of his sympathies for Spinoza’s more pragmatic affective project, conclude that to look at the world through ethologically inflected glasses does not require the category of creativity at all, especially since it can so readily be substituted for the less revered concepts Spinoza (and in many respects Nietzsche) describes as positive and negative affects? Osborne, agreeing with my observation that novelty needn’t be related in any special way to creativity (nor regarded as *the product* of creativity) posits:

Perhaps what would further define such a philistine’s approach would be the *dissociation* of the notion of creativity from conceptions of inspiration and its *re-association*, so to speak, with the less romantic conceptions of invention and inventiveness. (Osborne, 2003, p. 519)

Osborne’s support for the less romantic notion of creativity-as-invention makes sense as a creativity-as-inspiration-replacement since inventions can tend to occur as a consequence of experimentation or unforeseen moments of luck or change, all of which are so important to a Deleuzian ethological ethics.

Osborne suggests, however, that invention is not merely the pursuit of novelty – since novelty is not so hard to achieve in a processual world of becoming. Instead, invention might be better defined as an activity rather than an artifact. To engage in invention, to *be* inventive, is not to discover final products but to situate oneself relative to the world, each other, and ourselves in a way that is receptive and open to un(fore)seen affective potentialities. As Osborne explains with a quote from Andrew Barry (2000), the significance of invention – as an activity that exists hand in hand

with experimentation and exploration – is inventions occur when one is open to surprise, to what befalls us, to the subtleties of materials and contexts, to the effects of affects: “What is inventive is not the novelty of artifacts in themselves, but the novelty of the arrangements with other activities and entities with which artifacts are situated” (Barry in Osborne, 2003, p. 519). The ethical dimension of inventiveness begins to emerge when we understand that the point is not to produce inventions out of the blue, but to recognize that inventions occur by our being open to surprise, by challenging and questioning convention. As Osborne explains, the very act of questioning creates a situation wherein “invention itself opens up” (Osborne, 2003, p. 519). (We could even say that invention opens *itself* up by seducing *us* into acts of questioning.) Invention, then, can be regarded as the product of an ethologically-informed, affect-attuned, ontology that recognizes that to do ethics – to be able to make decisions in a changing world – is to invent, and that invention is always the “opposite of closure” (Osborne, 2003, p. 519).¹²⁷

3.13 Mullarkey Questioning Creativity: Why Invent? Why Experiment?

[W]hy *should* we be creative? Why is change, creativity, novelty, process, or becoming to be commended? Surely not from the simple dogmatic assertion of the value of freedom allied to these terms. If, on the other hand, creativity is a value just because the universe itself is in process, then we are deriving an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’ as well as making a transcendental judgment contravening the principle of immanence. (Mullarkey, 2006, p. 40)

In the above quote John Mullarkey echoes Osborne’s critique of creativity by suggesting that Deleuze succumbs unnecessarily to more creativity and newness fetishism. Mullarkey wants to know why one of Deleuze’s “facts” about the world – perpetual process, change, or differentiation – “must be our value too” and how such

¹²⁷ Osborne again refers to the dangers of too easily permitting invention to be defined by corporate (and other stratifying) interests when he notes: “But nor is invention to be associated with quantity or product. A high turnover of novel products may not necessarily imply an escalation of inventiveness and invention. On the contrary, rapid rates of technical change may occur precisely when there is a sense that inventiveness needs to be restricted. Indeed, rapid rates of technical change may be more symptomatic of the will to lay claims to a territory precisely to ensure that others do not get there first. All this means, Barry suggests, that we should be wary of the doctrine of inventiveness for its own sake. Rather, we need to reframe the notion of invention so as to disassociate it from the quantification of production and the speed of turnover, and then to inquire more empirically no doubt where inventiveness actually occurs” (Osborne, 2003, p. 519).

a value can be made “possible in the first place” (Mullarkey, 2006, p. 40). For Mullarkey, Deleuze’s continued use of creativity as an excessively valued category contradicts his repeated emphasis on immanence. Mullarkey attacks Deleuze’s creativity and newness-fetishism by asking: “Why invent? Why experiment? Why this obsession with newness in a world that is always becoming? Why this obsession with creation in a world that is self-creating?” (Mullarkey, 2006, p. 39).

Deleuze, argues Mullarkey, is knee-deep in moralizing when he prescribes newness and creativity as activities humans ought to be engaged in, suggesting that the “moralization” of forces *already at work* in what Deleuze describes as an autoaffective world only succeeds in *separating* them from what they can do. Significantly, he suggests that it is a “fallacy” to speak of forces doing or not doing what they can do since “if they can do it, it is because they *do* do it” and “if they can’t, it is because they don’t”; he notes that Deleuze’s encouraging us to “become what you are” is easily countered by the statement, “you are what you become” (Mullarkey, 2006, p. 39).

Mullarkey’s major criticism of Deleuze centres on Deleuze’s seemingly transcendental category of virtuality¹²⁸ – that molecular field of potential that gives rise to determined, molar, actualities (that themselves participate in the creation and re-circulation of virtualities). The problem Mullarkey highlights is that for Deleuze, creativity, productivity, and the production of the new is necessary – instrumental – in order to feed the field of virtualities which endlessly proliferate, becoming actual here and there according to their own rhythms and processes. Creativity, in a sense, continuously feeds autogenetic processes of bifurcating creative production, generating endless loops of energy that require and demand (if we follow Mullarkey’s argument), that we perpetually stand in awe of, and attempt to emulate, something that’s already perpetually occurring all around us.

Mullarkey’s observations about Deleuze mirror many of the tensions that I’ve been identifying here, namely: how can we adequately speak of “creativity” and “newness” in a world that is itself in an ongoing process of relationally-defined becoming, or, how can we speak of creativity in a world that *creates itself* – and us along with it? Moreover, how can we adequately speak of newness – where would a pure newness come from? – in a world *already underway*, one we’ve been describing as consisting

¹²⁸ See Hallward, 2006.

of an extended field of affective arrangements that unfold, machine-like, in accordance with their own properties and internal (and external) auto-genetic abilities? These questions, in turn, compel us to ask whether or not we should understand newness literally, that is as constituting an ontological category all its own and as somehow distinct from the autogenetic processes of becoming so frequently described by Deleuze that is, presumably, always already underway? In turn, how can we speak of art if not as *the* all-too-human activity – one that is not especially ontologically significant – that, while focusing on the production of “new” affects accomplishes this mandate within the exceedingly *limited* horizon of human experience and human understanding (though such a horizon might seem vast to us!). All of these questions can be subsumed under a further question about whether that which is new to humans has any sort of cosmological or ontological significance at all, or whether our understanding of emergent systems and points of bifurcation (for instance) could be better understood not as *new* but as the *inevitably novel becomings* of radically immanent processes that operate within particular boundaries and according to particular capacities that we would be best advised to take more seriously. This, as Mullarkey suggests, would be an ontology of “what you see is what you get” (Mullarkey, 2006, p. 45).

Perhaps, then, insofar as Deleuze and Guattari champion the ethologist as a surveyor of immanence – as an ethicist as well – their philosophy might better be able to articulate the immanence they describe by following through with a full disavowal of their emphasis not only on newness and creativity having transcendental, metaphysical, or ontological significance, but – horror – on the ontological status of virtuality as well. Things, I would suggest, would become much clearer if Deleuze and Guattari’s ontological categories themselves were univocal and if the virtual realms of entities were not so easily regarded as categorically distinct from, or even in some way prior to, their actual counterparts. The always-under-production-newness of entities – the potential for things to affect change and to be affected by change – would thereby be regarded as an immanence within immanence, as *one* of the defining and complex sets of factors that contribute to the dispositions of things and life. Virtuality, indeed, could come to represent the intangible instantiation of relationality itself. In other words, we could understand the virtual is that which exists contemporaneously with the actual *as relation*, with the virtual relation, in turn, producing actuality *as an ongoing effect*.

As already alluded to, one of the most significant consequences of incorporating an affect-based ethological perspective into our ontological position is that it demands that we make ethical adjustments.¹²⁹ When we look out at the world from an ethological perspective we are compelled to inquire about how things work, rather than about what things *are*: what relations fit with what organism? How might we socialize in such a way that our bodies (and desires) fit with those of others? With our environment? With the earth's capacity to provide nourishment? Our decisions about how to act begin to change along with our understanding about how things work (together).

Once s/he begins to focus on how things work, on what is consequential for ubiquitous and particular expressions of change to occur, the ethologist is better equipped to imagine how various groups or compositions can be arranged so as to maximize their powers while maintaining degrees of harmony. Like arranging an artistic composition, the ethologist regards the world as one of various media with varying capacities and capable of relating in various ways: bodies, composites, substances that, at once, compose themselves *and* lend themselves to composition.

3.14 Radical Immanence and Henry's Autoaffective Ontology

[A]ffectivity does not designate any particular sphere of our life, it penetrates and founds as a last resort the entire domain of action, of "work" and thus of economic phenomena, which consequently cannot be separated from the

¹²⁹ Ansell-Pearson elaborates on some of the complexities of the relationship between ethology, ethics, and affect in Deleuze: "Before we can adopt a critical perspective on the ethics of ATP it is first necessary to unfold the innovations Deleuze and Guattari are seeking to make in the domains of evolutionary thinking and ethology. In the first case this involves moving away from genealogical and filiative models of evolution to rhizomatic or machinic ones. In the second case it involves a move away from an ethology of behaviour to one of assemblages. What these moves mean in more precise terms, and how they relate to current developments in the life sciences themselves, will be examined in detail in this chapter. Now it might be thought that I am making a spurious and non-Deleuzian separation in holding apart ethology and ethics since the two are configured in Deleuze in terms of an intrinsically immanent relation as a question of affect. However, I want to insist on the need both to appreciate the immanence and to place it in suspension. It is precisely the manner in which Deleuze stages his claims about the possibility of nonhuman becomings of the human that reveal the necessity to maintain the distinction. This will enable us to question the nature of the leap that is involved in moving from a construction of nature as a plane of immanence and consistency, which proceeds in accordance with the transversal communication of molecular affects, to the articulation of an ethological ethics that concerns nonhuman and animal becomings of the human" (Ansell-Pearson, 1999, p. 145).

realm of human existence, as it is believed possible to do today. (Henry, 2003, p. 105)

As a foil to the virtual/actual distinction articulated in the work of Deleuze and Guattari – a distinction that seems to suggest a transcendent category within immanence, as Badiou (2000) and Hallward (2006) have suggested – Mullarkey directs us to philosopher Michel Henry whose radical theories of immanence locate immanence “within a hugely extended view of the affective” (Mullarkey, 2006, p. 49). For Henry, affect goes all the way down – and up. Affect defines what is, and it is according to affective resonances that auto-genesis, or autoaffection, unfolds. For Henry there is no virtual realm at all – there is no realm of pure potential distinct from the actual; rather, there is only actuality. Actuality *produces itself* and is the source of its own actualization; further, this process of autoactualization consists purely of affects: “all modalities of life, those of theoretical and cognitive thought no less than others, are affective at their root” (Henry, 2003, p. 105).

Actuality, writes Henry, “designates the self-affection in which potentiality [i.e. virtuality in Deleuze] is actual, the reality of possibility consubstantial to all power and identical to its essence”; what is actual is, Henry suggests, not “what arrives for a moment” but whatsoever “enters that condition, what persists and remains in itself, in its infrangible self-attachment: the untiring accomplishments of life” (Henry, 1993, p. 63).¹³⁰ Henry continues: “light, power, force, and every actual form of energy never arrive,” and it is precisely *because of* their never arriving – their always-in-process-ness – that “makes them possible as such, as power, as force, as actual, efficacious forms of energy” (Henry, 1993, p. 321 in Mullarkey, 2006, p. 52).

Mullarkey observes that, similar to the ideas of Leibniz and Spinoza, the actual world is wholly adequate for Henry since “there is nothing lacking to it – it is already actual. Accordingly, because we cannot *commend* life to be or do ‘such and such’ neither can we *judge* it for not being or doing such and such” (Mullarkey, 2006, p. 52). Significantly, for Mullarkey, the implication of a philosophy of absolute immanence, of absolute actuality, is that final judgment is impossible, or must, at least, be in

¹³⁰ Henry elaborates: “The flesh which carries in it the principle of its own revelation does not ask for any other authority to illuminate itself. When in its innocence each modality of our flesh experiences itself, when suffering says suffering and joy joy, it is Life that speaks in it, and nothing has power against its word” (Henry, 2003, p. 108).

constant negotiation; what remains, then, are *contextual judgments*, or, perhaps, negotiable judgments.¹³¹

Autoaffective processes are, in Henry's vocabulary, the processes of Life. Life, he suggests, is immanent to itself, requiring recourse to no external power of becoming since life and becoming effectively describe the same creative movement. Autoaffection, for Henry, is, as Jeremy H. Smith observes, "fundamental pre-reflective experience that an 'I' has of itself" (Smith, 2006, p. 191) and is the "essence of all experience whatsoever" (Smith, 2006, p. 191-192). Smith explains that the meaning of autoaffection is, for Henry, best understood by reflecting upon aesthetic experience; Henry refers to Kandinsky's description of the "inside" and "outside" of (all) experience (Smith, 2006, p. 192). Henry's autoaffection – experiencing oneself experiencing – is similar to Kandinsky's experience "from the inside"; autoaffectivity is the opposite of experiencing "oneself or another as an object," or experiencing oneself or another "from the outside" (Smith, 2006, p. 192).

In experience, then, there is always this *potential* awareness, the awareness of experience itself, of the autopoeitic emergence of affect inherent to everything that constitutes a world: experiencing experiencing. In Henry's view to miss this aspect of experience, to view Life as an object, is simply to be ignorant of Life's autoaffective machinations, to entities' ability to become transformed, to change, to adapt. As Smith explains, Henry's phenomenological project is an attempt for us to understand, to recognize and acknowledge, that to be able to experience, for example, "shapes and colours from the inside" is "to experience their life" (Smith, 2006, p. 192). Unfortunately, too often our "everyday habitual awareness of objects" falls into a "forgetfulness of the inner life of shapes and colours";¹³² but, Smith explains, aesthetic experience "returns us to that life":

not through reflection or any kind of objectification or analysis, but through an intensification or inward growth of autoaffection itself. But Henry insists

¹³¹ Gianni Vattimo attempts with, for example, William Connolly, to describe how negotiable judgment feed into an ethical system defined by "weak thought" (Vattimo, & Zabala, 2007; Connolly, 2005).

¹³² "Our usual mode of perceiving objects concentrates its attention on the exteriority of objects as such, overlooking, turning its back on, their essential interiority. Overlooking interiority means focusing attention on objects as means to practical ends or as yielding objective information in response to analytical effort. Or it might simply mean attending to objects with the minimum effort needed to satisfy our basic everyday material needs through habitual activity. Our habitual or deliberately objectifying consciousness misses the essence of nature itself" (Smith, 2006, p. 196).

that not only shapes and colours, but objects themselves, have the same double potentiality for appearing. The world itself has an inside and an outside – and aesthetic experience is the experience of bringing the inside back to life. (Smith, 2006, p. 191-192)

Aesthetic experience also imparts a feeling; indeed, it is a feeling. Similarly, feelings of whatever kind can be said to have an aesthetic dimension. The feeling of the world, in Henry's view, reveals a world of feeling, a world constituted by its capacity to feel and to be felt, or to affect and to be affected. The "feeling tone," as Smith tells us, is for Henry not an observable object that is distanced, that is "above" or "beyond" the sensation of the shape, or the feeling of the colour that emerges in our minds "as an effect of a stimulus"; it is not "an external association" (Smith, 2006, p. 195). Rather, the feeling is *our* feeling, the feeling of the ways a thing can feel, it is the "very autoaffection of the lived-through experience" (Smith, 2006, p. 195). As Smith explains, the way a blue colour feels "is essential to the very being of that blue. That blue is absolutely inconceivable without the specific way it feels" (Smith, 2006, p. 195). Moreover, that blue is the blue that it is because it is the blue that *is* for *us*. Indeed, the way a thing or experience or thought or dream "feels" – Henry's explicit intention being to expand not only our understanding of affect, but that of the aesthetic¹³³ – is "absorbed into" and "identical to" our "own self-experience as autoaffection" (Smith, 2006, p. 195).

The ontological adequacy of autoaffectivity, of objects' capacity to feel and to be felt is already, notes Smith, "a completely positive reality," and is not simply a quality ripe for "division" or "determination into units" (Smith, 2006, p. 206). Auto-affectivity does not *need* the virtual to coax it into further becomings. Colour, for example, is not adequate based on its ability to be "spread over a surface"; rather, it is colour's ability to exist, simply, as colour, that is – argues Smith – "simply gratuitous" in its "concrete specificity"; and colour's ability to colour (and so much more) must "finally be acknowledged as unique and indefinable – and, indeed, miraculous" (Smith, 2006, p. 206).

¹³³ "Aesthetic experience of the world is precisely the kind of experience in which we are sensitive to the kinds of feelings within its appearances that Kandinsky describes. And it must be noted that neither Henry nor Kandinsky, in presenting an aesthetics, means to limit the realm of aesthetics to the realm of art. Our experience of nature is aesthetic experience just as truly. Henry, [...] is developing a theory not just of art but of all possible sensuous experience" (Smith, 2006, p. 195).

Smith observes that the meaning of a perception is always, “in a sense,” merely that of the object (Smith, 2006, p. 208). This is so, I would suggest, since an object’s affective abilities – its ability to impart meaning, to bring forth meaning – is no less a part of the object than is its shape or colour. So, any “meaning” the object might have is merely the meaning the object is – and indeed, was – capable of having. Smith suggests that “meaning” can be understood here in the same way we understand the ontological term “being.” An object’s being, “whether in the sense of its sheer being or its being determined in any certain way,” is not a “quality” or “part” of the object that exists separately from that object’s “true meaning” or “true form” but is bound up with the object, is what follows from the being of the object; moreover, *an object’s being is its becoming*. Qualities of an object, then, are not distinct from what the object (or event, etc.) is, since for there to be a distinction between an object’s qualities/capacities and its being, its true identity would force upon us the question: “what is it then that has the quality, has the parts, or has the moments? – leading to an infinite regress” (Smith, 2006, p. 209). An object, then, doesn’t *have* qualities or capacities at all; rather, for Henry objects *are* qualities and capacities; put differently, the object is the *effect* of the ways capacities and qualities *interrelate*.

As Henry explains it, affectivity “reveals the absolute in its totality” since affectivity is “nothing other than its perfect adherence to self, nothing other than its coincidence with self, because it is the auto-affection of Being in the absolute unity of its radical immanence” (Henry, 1963, p. 858–859). The revealing at work in becoming is a revealing of life to itself, an ongoing creative production of aliveness and of affects prior to “all intentionality and all world [and] prior to any ‘mediation’ by the objective world” (Smith, 2006, p. 194). As Henry describes it life is adequate to itself, to its becoming, and to the generation of the new; indeed, the new results from life’s internal and absolutely immanent and virtual-free processes of becoming, rather than from something that arrives from outside with the capacity to coax change or the “new” to life. As Henry explains:

Life reveals itself. Life is an auto-revelation. Auto-revelation, when it concerns life, thus means two things. On the one hand it is life which accomplishes the work of revelation, it is everything except a thing. On the other hand what it reveals is itself. Thus the opposition between that which appears and pure appearing, which had already been present in classical thought and which was then brought to the fore by phenomenology,

disappears in the case of life. The revelation of life and that which reveals itself in it are as one. (Henry, 2003, p. 103)

Similarly, actual affects do not derive their affectivity from an external or virtual power or force but come to be affective as a function of their internal capacities to reveal themselves *as* affect at each and every moment.¹³⁴ That is, the affect carries within it its own level of affectivity, affect's effects are revealed according to the affect's internal – immanent – capacities to affect. The reality of an object, or an artwork, as Zahavi explains, is “given through the act”; this givenness requires that it be given to a receiver, to an entity that is affected; so, givenness of whatever variety is a givenness that is felt as an effect of relation – “all conscious experiences are essentially characterized by having a subjective ‘feel’ to them, that is, a certain quality of ‘what it is like,’ or what it ‘feels’ like to have them” (Zahavi, 1999, p. 227).¹³⁵ As Zahavi notes, objects affect by being given through an “act” and, were there to be “no awareness of the act” the object's effects – its affective capacity – would “not appear at all.”¹³⁶ We do not experience shapes and colours that exist as objects with content external to our experiencing them, nor do objects' affects exist in the way that they do for us prior to our experiencing them, nor does our experience of them correlate or approximate with some external criteria by which the affect is measured; rather objects' affects and effects are realized *when experienced by us* at the same time as our experience of them is felt – we experience the world “in the absolute intimacy of our own autoaffection (Smith, 2006, p. 194).

¹³⁴ Zahavi explains: “Henry conceives of this self-affection as a purely interior and self-sufficient occurrence involving no difference, distance of mediation between that which affects and that which is affected. It is immediate, both in the sense that the self-affection takes place without being mediated by the world, but also in the sense that it is neither temporally delayed nor retentionally mediated” (Zahavi, 1999, p. 228).

¹³⁵ Zahavi explains: “To undergo an experience necessarily means that there is something it is like for the subject to have that experience. This is not only the case for sensuous experiences. There is something it is like to taste coffee, but there is also something it is like for the subject to entertain abstract beliefs, yes there is even something it is like to contemplate the problem of self-manifestation. And insofar as there is something it is like for the subject to have these experiences, there must be some awareness of these experiences themselves; in short, there must be some kind of rudimentary self-awareness.¹⁷ And as Henry would say, this way of ‘feeling’ the experience does not presuppose the intervention or mediation of any sense organ or higher-order intentional act, but is simply a question of a direct and immediate self-affection” (Zahavi, 1999, p. 227).

¹³⁶ Zahavi continues: “Henry consequently argues that we can only be conscious of objects if the objects appear, and that every object-appearance is necessarily an appearance of the object for a (self-manifesting) subject. It is only a self-manifesting subject which can be conscious of foreign objects, and it is only because we are already given to ourselves that object-manifestation becomes possible” (Zahavi, 1999, p. 226).

All of this, of course, gestures to an immanent world that can best be understood as an ever-changing *effect* of affect, and an ongoingly actualized expression of relations. The world gives of itself adequately and this self-givenness of affectivity is, in Henry's view, "immediate, direct, absolute self-givenness, not chiasmatic, non-coincidental, as in Merleau-Ponty, not ecstatic as in Heidegger, not self-temporalizing as in Husserl, not mediated as in Hegel" (Steinbock, 1999, p. 276). The world appears, reveals itself, affects, and is given to itself without even trying, without the help of an external, transcendental force, but through "the essence of manifestation" (Steinbock, 1999, p. 276). Requiring no active effort to further its revelatory capacity the world simply reveals, it just creates according to its own "rules." As Steinbock explains, "Passivity is the ontological determination of revelation" (Steinbock, 1999, p. 276). Life's autoaffective capacities, its transcendental immanence, is "non-intentional" and "self-given" in "a pathetic self-affection as in an immediate identity of, e.g., sorrow and the experience of sorrow, joy and the experience of joy" (p. 176). Steinbock explains:

Because immanence is not active or powerful in the manner of transcendence, projecting itself outward as the power to disclose, not only is it revealed in its innermost nature as passive and impotent, but I literally can do nothing about it. As transcendence, I simply take it up; I am simply given to myself, receive the gift of myself to myself as a projection beyond myself. The receptivity operative in transcendence is the power of transcendence to be affected by the world. The passive receptivity peculiar to immanence is the 'impotence' of receiving itself. This immediate, non-objectivating, passive self-givenness peculiar to revelation, which is the possibility of the essence receiving itself, is what Henry understands as self-affection or affectivity. In and through transcendence, which projects a figure/horizon and is affected by it, transcendence is already self-affected, given immediately to itself, self-affection or affectivity is the condition for something exercising an affection on me. In turn, the non-interpolative self-affection of the self, which is the revelation of the self to the self, is the self-affection of the essence. (Steinbock, 1999, p. 276)

To illustrate affect's power to effect – requiring no recourse to an external arbiter or fount of potentiality – Henry uses the image of pain. Too frequently, suggests Henry, we attribute the experience of pain to part of the "objective body," but, he suggests,

the “‘painful as such,’ the purely affective element of suffering [...] reveals itself to itself,” by which he means that it is only suffering that can reveal (to us) “what suffering is” – namely, suffering (Henry, 2003, p. 103). The non-representability of, in this case suffering, objectifies the way our experiences of the world are rich, unique, and infinitely varied and that any attempt to ponder or attempt to represent, for example, suffering – or joy, or sorrow, or an event – yields a product that has its own consistencies and qualities and that itself can only be known according to what it reveals according to its capacity to reveal combined with our – for example – capacity to be open to its revealing. Regarding suffering, Henry explains: “In the absence of any divide within suffering, the possibility of turning one’s gaze upon it is ruled out. No one has ever seen their suffering, their anguish, or their joy. Suffering, like every modality of life, is invisible” (Henry, 2003, p. 103). I should add that our capacity to suffer and to experience this suffering is one that is created by specific relationships that create the condition whereby the affects that give rise to suffering can be made actual.

For the purposes of our discussion here, Henry’s ontological commitments to an expanded affectivity and to an especially radical interpretation of immanence reaffirms our observation that art functions on registers far beyond those we might regard as representational. His emphasis on the necessity of immanence for experience to exist at all, his observation that it is only by experiencing suffering that suffering can reveal its capacity to suffer, demonstrates the *importance* of attuning our ways of knowing and of experimenting so that we can acknowledge the unacknowledged potential of objects to become. At the same time however, we must recognize limitations and affirm their adequacy in light of the contexts from which their capacities emerge. What is important here is that the immanent processes of becoming undertaken by everything are performed, always, in relation to everything else and that what is revealed is as little (or as much) a function of us (human beings) as it is a function of the shifting and changing constituents of our environments.

For Henry the interdependence of emergent and autoaffective immanence can be summed up in the following sentiment: “In order to relate everything to oneself, one must first of all be this Self to whom everything is related, one must be able to say *Ich bin Ich*” (Henry, 2003, p. 104); but, he adds, the *point* is that the apparent mastery implied by the phrase “*Ich bin Ich*” is illusory and “not at all originary”; Henry stresses that while “I am indeed myself” I am not “brought to myself in this me that I

am”; rather, it is on account of everything else, on account of the rest of the autoaffective universe, that I am in fact “given to myself, but it is not me myself who gives me to me” (Henry, 2003, p. 104).¹³⁷

The interconnectedness of Henry’s autoaffective universe situates the human agent within an expanded affective field, populated by unknowable forces and innumerable phenomena. Patricia Clough has recently argued on behalf of the sort of extended notion of affect championed by Henry when she suggests that a turn to an expanded (Spinozist) understanding of affect is necessary in order to further develop the affective turn begun in the early to mid-1990s in response to the limitations of post-structuralism and deconstruction (Clough, 2008, p. 1). Early expressions of affect-emphasizing materiality and the body too often restricted any understanding of affect to emotion, though its most significant contribution was to highlight, as Clough notes, the “dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally” (Clough, 2008, p. 1), as well as matter’s capacity for “self-organization in being informational” which, suggests Clough, is perhaps the “most provocative” and “enduring contribution” of the affective turn (Clough, 2008, p. 1).

Clough, sensing the limitations of any understanding of affect that limits itself to the “circuit from affect to emotion” that simply result in “subjectively felt states of emotion – a return to the subject as the subject of emotion,” directs her attention towards aggregating the thinking of Deleuze, Guattari, Spinoza, Bergson, etc., all of whom regard affect – while perhaps not as expansively as Henry – as “pre-individual bodily forces” that can be manipulated, imperceptible, and emergent (Clough, 2008, p. 1-2).

These forces, existing as interconnected networks of “stuff,” are, as I’ve been insisting throughout this dissertation, capable only of what they are capable. Indeed, it’s due to the sheer number of delimited but novel capabilities that complex systems can be produced. Given this recent emphasis within the affective-turn movement it seems especially urgent to ask what sort of ethical or ontological implications derive from the fact that the “stuff” of the universe is not capable of continuing to satisfy the euphoric expectations placed on newness by, for example, the aesthetic theorizing of O’Sullivan’s, or the ontological commitments of Deleuze?

¹³⁷ Henry expands: “us is. It is solely because we have first come into life that we are then able to come into the world” (Henry, 2003, p. 105).

For while Spinoza reminds us that capacities are innumerable when he notes that we don't know what bodies (composites) are capable of, it is incumbent upon us to recognize also that we must *limit* our expectations of the capabilities of entities and our attendant expectations of emancipation, let alone any sort of utopian developments. The role of limits is critical because while we may not know what bodies are capable of we can't expect a body to do *more* than what it is capable. Nor can we expect more creativity from ourselves than we are capable of creating. So it would be prudent to recognize that the autoaffective and complexly emergent capacities of things will always produce a sort of *qualified* or *limited* newness, a sort of *modest newness* that actualizes only that which was possible moments earlier, no more, no less. The revolutionary, then, or the transformative, or the creative, or the emancipatory – insofar as they seem to emerge from out of the blue, so to speak – exceed not the capacities of what came before, but only our capacities to comprehend what contributed and was of consequence to their production. Human attempts to be creative – to bring latent potentials and affects and concepts into being – must recommit to what is at hand (as any artist will tell you) so as to harness potentialities, and to explore new avenues that emergent contexts open up.

What we can say, then, about our experience of things and about our engagement with qualities and capacities is that when we experience things (and when things experience us) we are experiencing – feeling – what Smith calls “bearers of properties” (Smith, 2006, p. 211). He notes, with Henry, that for an object to be a bearer of properties it will always bear these properties in relation to something else. There is no affecting going on if there is nothing to affect; there are no properties something can give to another thing without the other thing being able to receive the properties, to respond to them: “As a bearer of properties, but in abstraction from all properties, an object is meaningless” (Smith, 2006, p. 211). To be a bearer of properties, notes Smith, is to be a “bearer of meaning” (Smith, 2006, p. 211), it is to exist (in relation), and to exist is to have “meaning and truth,” indeed “truth is what it means to exist, and meaning is the capacity to be experienced” (Smith, 2006, p. 211). Values are, as Jill Marsden channeling Nietzsche notes, “already implicated in matter” (Marsden, 2002, p. 12).

The artist – as ethologist, as seeker of meanings, as pursuer of affects, as creator of free marks – attempts to discover *more: more* world, *more* feeling, *more* meaning,

more life,¹³⁸ *more* growth.¹³⁹ The “more” being sought requires artistic effort, affective sensitivity, aesthetic skill, experimentation, and cooperation to be brought to the foreground. Artistic or aesthetic affects are actualizations of immanent affects made actual through a combination of dispositionally-driven hard work and chance, though all that ends up being revealed is what is possible.

An expanded notion of affect – as articulated by Henry, Spinoza, Clough, Massumi, and others – combined with an understanding that restricts newness to causally determined capacities that exceed our abilities to account for them, presents the artist, the innovator, and the creator with a set of problems *different* from those implied when the goal of the artist is to bring (individually) the *uncreated into being*. While this is undoubtedly a subtle distinction, it is one with ontological and ethical import. Subscribing to a more grounded or modest interpretation of what contributes to and constitutes creativity at once lowers expectations while increasing responsibility. No longer can salvation, redemption, or emancipation be expected, nor can our own individual creative capacities be relied upon (since they don’t exist) since there is no “outside” to escape to and no outside from where emancipation can come; instead, *the artist works* to create and to maintain and to configure *the world at hand*, and so generate new intensities of feeling *for* the human but not necessarily exclusively *by* the human. The artist is compelled to gaze out upon the world’s dynamism at once humbled and energized. The artist is charged with attuning him/herself to what is hidden, to imperceptible nuances, and to the slightest of affective vibrations.

The affective dimension of relations and the things they produce are too quickly limited by attempts to quantify them, attempts to take stock of affective possibility and potential. Guattari observes that the minute one chooses “to quantify an affect, one loses its qualitative dimensions and its power of singularization, of

¹³⁸ In aesthetic experience, a lived-through self-surpassing is essential to my encounter with the brilliant sky and the trees gently swaying in the wind, as objects beyond me which nevertheless somehow carry within them my own deepest feelings. And the ‘more’ essential to that self-surpassing is also inseparable from the ‘more of self’ I discover as I surpass myself through the growth of life within my own most intimate non-objective self-awareness. The object itself is not an experience, but it is nevertheless not only that which essentially offers itself to my objectivating grasp, but also that which presents itself as the bearer of an experience which leads me to discover a further inwardness which expands my life in a way I could have never foreseen (Smith, 2006, p. 215).

¹³⁹ Henry rightly describes that meaning as the discovery of ‘more’ – not ‘more’ in the sense of more objects, but more in an indescribable sense of more life, which is growth within autoaffectation itself (Smith, 2006, p. 214).

heterogenesis, in other words, its eventful compositions, the ‘haecceities’ that it promulgates” (Guattari, 1996, p. 159). The world’s affective capacities, then, must be thought of as necessarily more complex than our own capacities of quantification; the world reveals our ignorance far more effectively than our brilliance.

3.15 Affordances and the Reciprocal Limits of the New

An individual is therefore always in a world as a circle of convergence, and a world may be formed and thought only in the vicinity of the individuals which occupy or fill it. (Deleuze, 1990b, p. 110)

You do not have to classify and label things in order to perceive what they afford. (Gibson, 1986, p. 134)

The constitutive capacities of the world, then, can productively be thought of as the sum total of its relationally-generated abilities, as what the world is capable of. As Spinoza has shown us, we don’t know – in any comprehensive sort of way – what these abilities consist of, or what they can do, whether on an individual, collective, or relational level. The artist, then, with Nietzsche, must not take all-too-human habits at face value, and with Deleuze and Guattari must instead seek out new lines of flight in order, inevitably, to bring new abilities into being. Earlier we’d been describing Deleuze’s suggestion that the artist work as an ethologist, as an assessor and observer of haecceities. The artist searches for what the world is capable of (this “world” including, of course, the artist him/herself). Recognizing the affective though ultimately unknowable potential of materials to become differently, the artist attempts to become attuned to what we’ve already described as “affordances.”

Affordances and their ontological, psychological, and biological import are central, most famously, in the work of James Jerome (J.J.) Gibson (1986; 1966). For Gibson, affordances were the capacities of things. As Gibson explains: “The verb *to afford* is found in the dictionary, but the noun *affordance* is not. I have made it up”; Gibson describes an affordance as something “that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the

animal and the environment” (Gibson, 1986, p. 127). Affordances are actionable possibilities of things that can be mobilized differently relative to different relationships, stimuli, contexts.¹⁴⁰

Manuel DeLanda notes that the term “affect” is “closely related” to the term “affordance” (DeLanda, 2002a). He points out that Gibson distinguished between “the intrinsic properties of things and their affordances”; that is, affordances point to something beyond the quantifiable qualities of an individual thing, gesturing instead towards what a thing is capable of *in relation to other things*. DeLanda explains:

A piece of ground does have its own intrinsic properties determining, for example, how horizontal or slanted, how flat, concave or convex, and how rigid it is. But to be capable of affording support to a walking animal is not just another intrinsic property, it is a capacity which may not be exercised if there are no animals around. Given that capacities are relational in this sense, what an individual affords another may depend on factors like their relative spatial scales: the surface of a pond or lake may not afford a large animal a walking medium, but it does to a small insect which can walk on it because it is not heavy enough to break through the surface tension of the water. (DeLanda, 2002a)

DeLanda notes also that affordances are “symmetric” – involving both the Spinozist capacities to affect and to be affected:

Thus the assemblages ‘walking animal-solid ground-gravity’ or ‘predator-prey-hole in the ground’ reveal capacities which are dependent on, but not reducible to, the assemblage components’ properties. (DeLanda, 2002a).

The affordances of things are differently determined by the relationships involved. A paintbrush and canvas and pigment afford artmaking to the artist, but do not afford artmaking to the bird, or the infant, or the stone. Gibson points out that affordances

¹⁴⁰ “An affordance, to use the term coined by the perceptual psychologist J. J. Gibson, is a perceived feature of the environment which indicates a possible action in the environment for the perceiver. Whereas affordances have been discussed before in this context, no one has to my knowledge successfully argued that they can be both representational and non-conceptual” (Almang, 2008, p. 161-2).

can be described using the –able suffix,¹⁴¹ explaining that if a horizontal surface is basically flat, sufficiently extended, and fairly rigid the surface will *afford* support:

It is stand-on-able, permitting an upright posture for quadrupeds and bipeds. It is therefore walk-on-able and run-over-able. It is not sink-into-able like a surface of water or a swamp, that is, not for heavy terrestrial animals. (Gibson, 1986, p. 127)

He goes on to note that if we were to use the “scales and standard units” of physics to measure the characteristics and qualities of things we would be able to discern particular, relatively stable relationships or ratios; this would be to measure the object’s physical properties:

Affordance[s] of support for a species of animal [have] to be measured *relative to the animal*. They are unique for that animal. They are not just abstract physical properties. They have unity relative to the posture and behaviour of the animal being considered. So an affordance cannot be measured as we measure in physics. (Gibson, 1986, p. 127)

Affordances, then, are not easily quantified since what is afforded continuously shifts and responds to that to which it is affording something. And yet, as Hutchby points out, to ignore the affordances that “constrain both the possible meanings and the possible uses of technologies [and things]” would be to deny us “the opportunity of [...] analyzing precisely what the ‘effects’ and ‘constraints’ associated with technological [and other] forms are” (Hutchby, 2001, p. 447). So, for instance, the affordances the painter offers the canvas change as the painter moves around, or as the painter picks up a different brush, or when the painter returns to the painting in a different mood or under different lighting conditions. Similarly, those actions of the painter are changed by the mere presence of the canvas. That is, what constitutes the artist or what constitutes the canvas depends upon the artist’s relationship to the canvas and the canvas’ relationship to the artist. The quality and mutability of these

¹⁴¹ “Gibson sometimes used a characteristic linguistic construct to refer to affordances, namely, [verb phrase]-able. For example, he described a surface such as the brink of a cliff as fall-off-able, a substance such as an apple as eat-able, an object such as a stone as throw-able, an animal such as a conspecific as copulate-with-able, an event such as a burning fire as cook-with-able. In each case, the affordance property is possessed by a bearer relative to a specific organism or class of organisms” (Scarantino, 2003, p. 950).

subtleties are innumerable, but depend upon the potential afforded the canvas and painter, respectively, by the conditions in which they are found.

Affordances, then, exist at the intersection of a relationship and are brought into being for one object by the variegated receptivity of another, and by the other's capacity to recognize and thereby make use of the affordance that has been afforded.¹⁴² Affordances, I will argue, are not the latent or the virtual capacities of objects, but are effects of relations that unfold concurrently *with* ever changing capacities of relationships. That is, an affordances' coming into being happens contemporaneously with the relationship that afforded the affordance.

In other words, the capacities of things are dependent upon the affordances generated at each moment by relationships. Moreover, the capacities of things *do not exist in any sort of pre-existent state at all* – whether as virtuality or potentiality – but are generated and made possible *at the very moment of their inception* and vanish just as quickly. In other words, what is possible now could not have been possible a moment ago and *did not exist in any form* prior to its becoming actual. This description of affordances' affordances works quite well with Henry's description of the absolute immanence of affect. So, what an object or a situation affords, it affords to something or someone else. Our affordances, for example, *exist for others* and come into being *thanks to others*. As Gibson notes, an environment is a medium that affords – for others:

respiration or breathing; it permits locomotion; it can be filled with illumination so as to permit vision; it allows detection of vibrations and detection of diffusing emanations; it is homogeneous; and finally, it has an absolute axis of reference, up and down. All these offerings of nature, these possibilities or opportunities, the *affordances* as I will call them.¹⁴³ (Gibson, 1986, p. 18-19)

¹⁴² “it is important to see that affordances are not just functional but also relational aspects of an object's material presence in the world. Affordances are *functional* in the sense that they are enabling, as well as constraining, factors in a given organism's attempt to engage in some activity: for instance, walking, or hiding, photocopying a document, and so on. Certain objects, environments or artifacts have affordances which enable the particular activity while others do not. But at the same time the affordances can shape the conditions of possibility associated with an action: it may be possible to do it one way, but not another” (Hutchby, 2001, p. 448).

¹⁴³ Similarly: “A fire affords warmth on a cold night; it also affords being burnt. An approaching object affords either contact without collision or contact with collision; a tossed apple is one thing, but a missile is another. For one of our early ancestors, an approaching rabbit afforded eating

At the same time, of course, the breathing or locomotion afforded to an inhabitant *of* the environment *by* the environment not only affords life and movement to the inhabitant, but affords the environment its environment-ability, so to speak. Each capacity of a thing allows – affords – the existence of other thing’s capacities.¹⁴⁴

To begin to think of objects, contexts, human relationships, and, indeed, human creative capacities using affordances is, at once, to recognize the infinitely variable potential permutations available to us and the world in which we live; but we are compelled, too, to recognize that the panoply of options available is limited by the *specific* relationships into which we enter and the *particular* affordances these relationships allow for. Another consequence of thinking with affordances is that subject-object identities and boundaries are irreconcilably dismantled and revealed as fallacies thanks to affordances being premised upon and conditioned by ontological concepts friendly exclusively with those that regard Being as a “being with” (Nancy, 2000).

Jean-Luc Nancy, like Gibson, compels us to reconfigure the notion of Being (singular) by thinking Being as being-with. For Nancy “it is necessary to refigure fundamental ontology [...] with a thorough resolve that *starts from the plural singular of origins*, from *being-with*” (Nancy, 2000, p. 26). Nancy points out that, Being presupposes coessence – what he describes as a “being singular plural” (2000). Coessentiality, he writes, “cannot consist in an assemblage of essences, where the essence of this assemblage as such remains to be determined” since this would result in the world being effectively unrelated, being left purely to chance, and merely operating as an assembled set of essences actualizing mere uncontextualized “accidents” (Nancy, 2000, p. 30).¹⁴⁵ As Nancy explains, coessentiality, “being-with,” is not something added on to “some prior Being” but is always at Being’s ‘heart’

whereas an approaching tiger afforded being eaten. These events are not stimuli, and it is preposterous for psychologists to call them that. The question is: what information is available in the light by means of which these events can be perceived?” (Gibson, 1986, p. 102).

¹⁴⁴ “The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill” (Gibson, 1986, p. 127).

¹⁴⁵ “Coessentiality signifies the essential sharing of essentiality, sharing in the guise of assembling, as it were. This could also be put in the following way: if Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the ‘with’ that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition. This operates in the same way as a collective [*collegial*] power: power is neither exterior to the members of the collective [*college*] nor interior to each one of them, but rather consists in the collectivity [*collegialite*] as such” (Nancy, 2000, p. 30).

(Nancy, 2000, p. 30). For this reason, Nancy argues, it's "absolutely necessary" to rearrange the conventional "order of philosophical exposition" that regards the "with" and the "other" as always being subservient to any sort of Being-singular (Nancy, 2000, p. 30). Nancy's ontological argument, then, is that we must understand existence as fundamentally relational, and to recognize that any "I" or "subject" is *constituted in the first instant* by an "other."

Nancy's "being-with" resonates with Gibson's affordances. That is, like Gibson Nancy attempts to show that a capacity – or an affordance – is not so much something *some thing* is capable of, but that it is an expression of a situation of being-with, of a relationship. Gibson reminds us that an affordance is neither "an objective property nor a subjective property," or, he proposes, perhaps it is both "if you like" (Gibson, 1986, p. 129). Affordances inhabit a special conceptual category that "cuts across the dichotomy" of subjective and objective thought, helping us to understand such thinking's "inadequacy" (Gibson, 1986, p. 129). An entity's or circumstance's affordances are both "physical and psychical," but they are also "neither"; affordances straddle a divide, bridging difference with a being-with that interconnects environments and observers, actors and acted upon (Gibson, 1986, p. 129).

The affordances of things which derive from relations are as unlimited as the number of combinations the universe is capable of producing. But while affordances may differ "from species to species and from context to context" Hutchby reminds us that they can't be regarded as "freely variable" since, while a tree "offers an enormous range of affordances for a vast variety of species, there are things a river can afford which the tree cannot, and vice versa" (Hutchby, 2001, p. 447).

Further, as Almäng explains, in addition to not having complete freedom affordances have no inherent moral content or significance: "The affordances of an environment are what the environment offers, or affords to, the perceiver, be it good or bad" (Almäng, 2008, p. 165). In other words, while things have dispositions, and these dispositions do not always play well with others, there is no overarching moral significance to these disagreements, disagreements having more to do with entities not being compatible – not fitting together or adding to one another's power. Not only do the affordances of things occupy a sort of valueless, impersonal, or pre-personal realm of brute facticity – affordances are invested with value or morality by us after the fact – they also, for the most part, pass by us unnoticed. As Gibson observes, while we can without difficulty "discriminate the [physical] dimensions of

difference if required to do so in an experiment [...] what the object affords us is what we normally pay no attention to”; indeed, the unique becomings of emergent combinations and qualia are “ordinarily not noticed” (Gibson, 1986, p. 134).

We could say – if we recall Deleuze’s emphasis on Bacon’s free marks described earlier – that the artist’s experiments are attempts to liberate unnoticed affordances or to coax unfamiliar affordances into being. By flailing around and producing unexpected configurations the artist extracts what we conventionally regard as “the new,” but are in fact merely unconventional effects. Sounding much like Manuel DeLanda, who warns us against thinking of systems in terms of reified, top-down, transcendental categories rather than as composites of individual entities with particular characteristics, Gibson states that the theory of affordances “rescues us from the philosophical muddle” that arises from assuming “fixed classes of objects” (Gibson, 1986, p. 134); Gibson notes that “you *cannot* specify the necessary and sufficient features of the class of things to which a name is given,” suggesting that they only have a “family resemblance” (Gibson, 1986, p. 134).¹⁴⁶

Gibson’s affordances prioritize the fact that relationality brings beings into being. While this is not a particularly controversial position, when used as a starting point from which the machinations of thought unfold it begins to have effects, changing – for instance – the relationship between the artist and her/his materials, or altering the relationship between the painting and its subject matter. Such changes, I am arguing, gently nudge the human away from the centre of what then comes to be regarded as a wholistically or democratically or pluralistically agential and creative universe. Gibson’s affordances foreground the reciprocity of relationality, that relationships are never rigid or finished but in constant movement at both material and immaterial levels. Entities in relation create one another’s conditions, reciprocally providing the context for the next event, the next creation – always affecting and being affected because affectivity is what they *are*. Gibson explains:

What the male affords the female is reciprocal to what the female affords the male; what the infant affords the mother is reciprocal to what the mother affords the infant; what the prey affords the predator goes along with what the predator affords the prey; what the buyer affords the seller cannot be

¹⁴⁶ Gibson continues: “But this does not mean you cannot learn now to use things and perceive their uses. You do not have to classify and label things in order to perceive what they afford” (Gibson, 1986, p. 134).

separated from what the seller affords the buyer, and so on. (Gibson, 1986, p. 135)

But the careful discerning of affordances requires a great degree of not only inquisitiveness, inventiveness, and sensitivity, but also patience. Affordances, after all, are never comprehensively revealed in advance. Nonetheless, the subtle substrata of a situation that go unnoticed can certainly be mobilized to great effect by attentive, patient, and active observers. Of course, to attune others to these discoveries, to the novelty of the only-just-now-mobilized, is more difficult still. To open the eyes of others to the “new,” however, is facilitated by the newness itself. Newness, after all, needs no introduction. Novelty is its own end, its own reward.

As Gibson suggests, the “perceiving of [...] mutual affordances is enormously complex,” despite being “based on” the everyday “pickup of information in touch, sound, odor, taste, and ambient light”; referring undoubtedly to an extended affective environment he observes that the perceiving of affordances is based on “stimulus information” expressed by other things and persons who afford information of themselves “insofar as they are tangible, audible, odorous, testable, or visible” (Gibson, 1986, p. 135).

Gibson, prefiguring the “complexity turn” (Urry, 2005a, 2005b, 2006) in social theory differentiates the affordances inherent to human relations and communications as distinctly rich relative to other modes of relating. What sets human relations apart, according to Gibson’s rather impersonal theory of affordances, is their complexity and their accompanying capacity for novelty and innovation. While the person and the animal “provide mutual and reciprocal affordances at extremely high levels of behavioural complexity,” these pale in comparison to relations that incorporate textual and visual language capacities. Gibson observes: “At the highest level, when vocalization becomes speech and manufactured displays become images, pictures, and writing, the affordances of human behaviour are staggering” (Gibson, 1986, p. 137).

Gibson expands on the essentially prepersonal and pre-ethical implications of his theory when he notes that the theory of affordances is “a radical departure from existing theories of value and meaning” since it begins with “a new definition of what value and meaning *are*” (Gibson, 1986, p. 140). He argues, however, that affordances are not value-free since they always have some use or another – they are always

valuable insofar since without them events wouldn't transpire at all. Indeed, we could suggest that affordances are value-full in so far as they require no justification insofar as it is affordances themselves that afford the stuff of which values are made. Values are not extracted from affordances but are afforded by them. As Gibson explains, perceiving an affordance is not to perceive a "value-free physical object to which meaning is somehow added in a way that no one has been able to agree upon"; rather, it is to perceive "a value-rich ecological object" (Gibson, 1986, p. 140); affordances can be thought of as value-full insofar as any situation or entity has some sort of affordance(s) which, in turn, either benefit or cause injury to some object or other.

Gibson signals the unique ontological status of affordances by marginalizing some of the questions that have preoccupied philosophy for so long, questions such as: What does it mean to exist? Or, what is real? To such questions Gibson suggests that it's not whether affordances are real or not, but whether they can be perceived by other entities.¹⁴⁷ It is by being perceived and received that affordance – and by extension entities – are brought into being. I would add, too, that this comment is doubly true insofar as affordances come into being – are actualized – only within the context of a relationship; that is, affordances are received by something that is receptive and perceptive. Affordances *require* an audience. Affordances come into being alongside and intersect with and are made possible by emergent, relational processes of becoming. Affordances afford according to the perceptive capacities of the perceiver; and the perceiver perceives only according to the affording capabilities of the object or situation doing the affording.¹⁴⁸

Almäng observes that affordances are "agent-relative," they are properties of perceived objects or environments (Almäng, 2008, p. 166). The word "perceived" here is crucial and cannot be restricted to anthropocentric definitions that deny

¹⁴⁷ "The central question for the theory of affordances is not whether they exist and are real but whether information is available in ambient light for perceiving them" (Gibson, 1986, p. 140).

¹⁴⁸ "The skeptic may now be convinced that there is information in light for some properties of a surface but not for such a property as being good to eat. The taste of a thing, he will say, is not specified in light; you can see its form and colour and texture but not its palatability; you have to *taste* it for that. The skeptic understands the stimulus variables that specify the dimensions of visual sensation; he knows from psychophysics that brightness corresponds to intensity and colour to wavelength of light. He may concede the invariants of structured stimulation that specify surfaces and how they are laid out and what they are made of. But he may boggle at invariant combinations of invariants that specify the affordances of the environment of the observer. The skeptic familiar with the experimental control of stimulus variables has enough trouble understanding the invariant variables I have been proposing without being asked to accept invariants of invariants" (Gibson, 1986, p. 140).

perception – of an expanded sort – to so-called inanimate objects (or even situations). We could describe perception here as a capacity for reception at the level of the entity's inherent perceptive capacities. That is, to be perceptive is to have a capacity to be receptive, to be able to receive from an entity with which one is in relation, to have a capacity to be affected. In keeping with my penchant for extending the boundaries of terms like affect, I suggest that our understanding of perception, too, must be enlarged in order for it to become meaningful (in this context). In so doing, we can begin to take seriously the relationships between affordances and an expanded interpretation of perception. For example, it is thanks to the paintbrush's *perceptive* capacities – its capacity to be receptive to the paint or to the artist – that it becomes paintbrush-able.

This, then, is an understanding of perception that extends beyond – is not constrained by – consciousness (though it is also one that begs for an expanded understanding of consciousness as well). Affordances are what result from relational receptivity, they are the emergent consequence of a process of affecting and being affected, of perceiving and being perceived. Of course, the relationships from which affordances emerge, and of which affordances are a part, do not develop in a linear fashion, but as a multi-directional bivalency whereby it is not simply relations that produce affordances, but affordances that produce the characteristics and effects that constitute the relationship's existence.¹⁴⁹ At the same time – and again, more generally – it is not the causes (of entities and affordances, respectfully) that produce effects, but the effect's potential to exist – a potential that gets created contemporaneously with its actualization – that affords the causes. Put in temporal terms, while the past may effectively create the present, the processual unfolding of presents into a future affords the pasts continued presence as well. Put a bit more

¹⁴⁹ Scarantino writes of affordances as being related to dispositions, pointing out that any attempt to comprehensively enumerate dispositional capacities is beyond our ability: "Two insights concerning C have to be kept in mind from the literature on dispositions. The first is that the background circumstances C under which a disposition is possessed cannot be listed exhaustively, because they consist of an indefinitely large set. In fact, there is always some condition c that could be added to a specified set C such that, given C and c, any object X would no longer possess any given disposition (e.g., there are conditions under which sugar is not water soluble, Ming vases are not fragile, etc.). The second is that the list of background circumstances C cannot be left entirely open ended, because there is presumably always some set C such that, given C, almost any object X would possess almost any disposition (e.g., there are conditions under which bars of steel are soluble, pieces of diamond fragile, etc.)."

How should set C be accounted for then? A full discussion would take us too far, but the general idea I endorse is that, for what concerns affordance predicates, we should rely on a tacit understanding of C as the set of normal ecological circumstances. (Scarantino, 2003, p. 957).

prosaically, everything depends on everything else in order to unfold in the ways that everything does.

Almäng observes that since affordances are “agent relative” properties of “perceived objects” they are always *for* someone or something.¹⁵⁰ We might go so far as to say that an affordance one thing imparts to another (and the affordance to afford that the latter allows the former) exists as a sort of offering, as a sort of potential gift to be received. We might regard affordances as flexibly generous, always adapting to the requirements of situations. Indeed, it is thanks to the affordance’s own capacity to invite the perception of an other that the affording object even has the affordance (Almäng, 2008, p. 166). That is, it is by way of its ability to invite perception and reception that an affordance is able to be afford-able (as well, of course, as the affordance’s ability to back up its “invitation” with some sort of content, effect, or ability).

An expanded interpretation of perception that leans more in the direction of reception is also useful insofar as affordances are often not able to be identified by us using conventional circuits of habitual thinking; that is, our ability to create conditions whereby new affordances get created are by no means “fully and immediately available to perception” (Hutchby, 2001, p. 448).¹⁵¹ Rather, affordances are often only identified after the fact (if at all), after they are done, so to speak, doing the affording. So, for instance, an artist will only discover what paint is capable of by painting, and it is only after the fact – only after the affordance has afforded something the artist recognizes – that what *was* an affordance is able to be recognized.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ “Every organism, Gibson thought, is a perceiver and a behavior, but this is not to say that it perceives the world of physics and behaves in the space and time of physics (Gibson 1979, p. 8). What the organism is a perceiver of, and a behavior in, are environments (or niches). Gibson’s idea is that the organism and the environment make an inseparable pair, where each term has to be understood relative to the other” (Scarantino, 2003, p. 950).

¹⁵¹ Scarantino expands on this point as follows: “As I pointed out, affordances are what they are independently of whether or not they are perceivable (some may not be), and independently of how they are eventually perceived (directly or indirectly). At the same time, the relevance of affordances for the explanation of behavior crucially hinges upon their perceivability” (Scarantino, 2003, p. 954).

¹⁵² “But how do organisms pick up information? To pick up information, argued Gibson, is to become attuned to invariants and disturbances that specify to-be-perceived properties. An intuitive understanding of these technical notions is the following. An invariant is a property of the structure of ambient energy arrays 4 (e.g., the optic array, the acoustic array, etc.) instantiated when, relative to some source of change such as a moving point of observation or a moving source of illumination, the structure is left unchanged in a way that is typical of the item specified (e.g., a reflectance can

3.16 Change, Agency, and Interdependent Affordances: Outlines of a Modest Ontology

The observer may or may not perceive or attend to the affordance, according to his needs, but the affordance, being invariant, is always there to be perceived. (Gibson, 1986, p. 139)

Affordances, then, come into being despite their being or not being consciously perceived. Instead, affordances emerge out of the contexts or arrangements adequate to their emergence. If the artist, for example, is interested in teasing out the new – in being creative – it falls to him/her to seek out the not-yet-perceived invitations offered by his/her relationships. An object's capacity to afford must be taken advantage of by the artist so as not, effectively, to miss – or refuse – an open invitation. As Hutchby argues, we need to pay more attention to “the material substratum” that undergirds “the very possibility of different courses of action in relation to an artifact,” a substratum that “frames the practices through which technologies [and things in general] come to be involved in the weave of ordinary conduct” (Hutchby, 2001, p. 450). At this level, he argues “a quite different range of issues becomes relevant,” issues that require that we manage the capacities and constraints that emerge from entity's affordances (Hutchby, 2001, p. 450).

What becomes significant, when we attune ourselves to the world of affordances, to the Spinozist world wherein all creation is an expression of interdependent affecting and being affected, are the ethical implications of an ontology that regards the world as one wherein all constituents are participating in co-creative enunciations; of a contrapuntal world wherein entities *rely on one another* to bring one another into being, and where one entity cannot be valued over another out of hand since any relative value exists relative to and because of interconnected and dependent relationships.

That is to say, an ontologically-derived ethics can begin to be glimpsed when our world becomes a world wherein points and counterpoints bring *one another* into

specify the substance coal by being unchanging in the way characteristic of coal substances). A disturbance is a property of the structure of ambient energy arrays instantiated when, relative to some source of change (e.g., the change constituted by an approaching predator), the structure presents a pattern of change that is typical of the item specified (e.g., the contour of an animal can specify the event approaching predator by changing in the way typical of approaching predators)” (Scarantino, 2003, p. 953).

being and where one entity cannot be valued over another out of hand since any relative value *exists* relative to an interconnected feedback loop consisting of relations of affecting and be affected.

Deleuze and Guattari evoke the world of affordances – though they do not use this term – as a creative world wherein it is impossible to know “what is art and what nature” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 185). Deleuze and Guattari’s is an ontology that – like Gibson’s – acknowledges the harmonious interaction of its constitutive parts,¹⁵³ the variegated resonances that vibrate across immanence – what Scarantino describes as “complementarity” (Scarantino, 2003, p. 950). We could also regard such a world as one of mutual beneficence or co-generosity. Such an ontology does not enact a teleological logic, but an emergent one. One that can only be “defined” by its most recent permutations and that only unfolds according to its inherent capacities. These, I would like to suggest, are ontologies that contribute to an ethical starting point *made modest* by affordances and by interdependence.

Such an ethical stance, I will argue, will privilege negotiation over declaration, self-deprecation over justification, revision over precision, reconciliation over resentment. Modest, ontologically-derived ethical attitudes are those wherein anthropocentrism has been decentred and processes of affecting and being affected, of affording and being afforded, populate an emergent and immanent “plateau” of emergent, novel, and processual innovation (or problem solving). The human occupies this immanent domain as an experimenter and problem solver, working *with* the materials and qualities that have been afforded, without expectations that exceed the limitations of the world on offer, and with a recognition that human capacities themselves are inextricably dependent upon the nonhuman. That is, the nonhuman world is at once integral and integrated into human functioning and must be heeded and considered if the human is to exist, successfully, in perpetuity, as an

¹⁵³ Ansell-Pearson writes that for Deleuze, it is never a question “of sustaining a parochial perspective on life, or of limiting the forces of creative evolution to the concerns of the human, narrowly defined and understood”; rather, it is necessary that two things must be overcome: 1) “the blindness of science which would give us matter without ethics” and, 2) “the blindness of faith which would give us an ethics without matter” (Ansell-Pearson, 1999, p. 14). He goes on to observe that for Deleuze (and Guattari, certainly) philosophy has a practical task: to free individuals and knowledge from “the claims of superstition” since it is superstitious beliefs in all their forms (not restricted to religion) that “prevent our gaining access to a wholly ‘positive’ nature” and which “threaten all human becoming. (Ansell-Pearson, 1999, p. 14). Deleuze’s positive view of nature alluded to here is a view of nature as wholly productive, as generous, as creative, and as – at each moment – expressing itself to the maximum of its capacities (and this, despite our misguided desires that nature be more predisposed and empathetic to our own human-all-too-human objectives and desires).

organism with permeable membranes within extended affecting and affectable environments. At the same time, within such a modest ontological framework Deleuze and Guattari's work, while contributing to a modest ontological understanding, should be incorporated strategically insofar as it gestures – at times – too optimistically to the emancipatory effect of newness and the unbridled abilities of certain forms of creativity.

I'd like to suggest that such an ontological schema – one wherein the human is modestly conceived as at once created and creative, decentred, determined, and dependent – demands an ethical response equally sensitive to the interdependent reciprocal nature of all relationships. This would be an ethical logic that derives its content from an ontological perspective that regards the human as just one more effect of relationally generated affordances. This would be an ethics that begins with a recognition – and this recognition's accompanying modest ontology – that the role of the human is currently, and has always been, subsumed within a field of impersonal forces *generous enough* to grant us existence and afford us our capacities. Such an ontologically-derived ethics could result in a further challenge, for instance, to ecologically destructive understandings of the non-human world as available to us merely to be used and exhausted.

The merits of what I will be calling a modest ontological position have already been articulated, in many respects, by, for instance, Gianni Vattimo (2007, 2004, 2003, 1999, 1997, 1996, 1993), in his work on *il pensiero debole*, and even in the sinology of Francois Jullien (2007, 2004a, 2004b, 1997). The political import of modest ontological positions has, using different terms, been articulated by, for example, Connolly's work on pluralism (that describes the ethical and political effects of adopting a sort of modest, or soft, ontological position) (2005, 2002), as well as the work of Coles (1992, 1997, 2005). The relationship of these thinkers "modest" ontologies – ontologies that derive from our acknowledgement of our impotence rather than our potency, or at least from the potency that derives from our ability to acknowledge and recognize our impotent ability *to act alone* – typically address the social world, or the political world, or the ethical world. Rarely are modest ontological positions – or their implications – used to address how we think about aesthetics. Nor are modest ontological positions embraced as instructive relative to the way we understand art, or artists, or the artistic process. *What*, for example, does art become when the artist is resituated as a point of intersection within an extended

field of agential relations, or an extended field of relationally dependent and agential objects? Or better, *when* does art happen when nothing is inconsequential to its production? My suggestion is that the determined but unpredictable novelty of the world – the perpetual emergence of different determinations – has significant implications for politics, our understanding of the social, ethics, and aesthetics that deserve further reflection.

Our task, then, is to articulate: (1) why a modest ontological position is necessary and adequate response to life's complexity; (2) how a modest ontology can inform our attempts to account for, and situate, art and art making within an extended field of creating relations and agents; (3) what, assuming we subscribe to the adequacy of the modest-ontology-precepts, sort of attitudes, choices, decisions, or stances most creatively respond to, and engage with modest ontological demands?

As we proceed into the next section my argument will be that *if* we regard the world as a realm of extended and interdependent agency where creative capacities are produced by the intra-relation of human and non-human actors alike we are poised to relinquish our understanding of ourselves as more valuable or special than other beings and entities. That is, a modest ontology *can* be regarded as an inevitable response to our experiences of and encounters with a world of which we are but an *effect*. This realization, I will suggest, necessitates that we respond to our encounter with the world with an *attitude* of openness and generosity and that this openness, in turn, can contribute to our becoming true artists in a Nietzschean sense. Moreover, this process of becoming-artist needn't be restricted nor fetishized, deriving more from the actions that follow from modest ontological commitments than social or cultural demands or expectations. In other words, my suggestion will be that an ontologically-informed attitude of openness and generosity puts us in position, ready to accept and participate in the creative events that befall us.

PART 4: MODEST ONTOLOGIES AND MAGNANIMOUS CREATIVITY

4.1 Assuming a Modest Ontology

[T]he aim is not to rediscover the eternal or the universal, but to find the conditions under which something new is produced (creativity). (Deleuze, 2006a, p. vi)

[T]he chief error in philosophy is overstatement. (Whitehead, 1978, p. 7)

The object of philosophy is to create concepts that are always new. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 5)

I have engaged, thus far, with an analysis of the radical plurality that coalesces to generate what we call human creativity (indeed, going so far as to suggest that much of what we understand to be human creativity is neither specifically human nor, conventionally, creative). In this final section – Part Four – I will be examining what *living* with the ontological commitments we’ve been exploring would, or could, look like. That is, what sort of an ethic (or ethics) does an ontology of extended relationally-dependent agency demand or compel us toward? How are we to respond to a world whose capabilities are – and will remain – perpetually unknowable? How might we begin to negotiate a world defined by relations and affordances rather than individuals? We might observe that in the face of such an unpredictable and interdependent world our ethical capacities, or resoluteness, might be overwhelmed and disoriented. So, what sort of ethical precepts can we derive from an unknowable, but radically relational and creative, universe? What stable referents can we use in a world both determined and novel? What sort of ethics are demanded by an ontology made modest by acknowledging – and foregrounding – our ever adaptable ignorance and our defining dependencies?

My suggestion that an open and generous ontologically-derived *attitude* is itself artistic, or that “real” artists in the Nietzschean or Deleuzean sense are those who are able to look and act beyond convention by being open and by creating openings, requires some unpacking. Whether or not this *attitude* requires the concurrent

production of artistic *objects* will be left open for debate. What I'll be suggesting is that those who for one reason or another subscribe to modest ontological positions can be described as being, in a Nietzschean or Deleuzean sense, *artists* insofar as their ontological *attitudes* give rise to a *style* of life open to cliché-free and unconventional encounters with the world and its surprises. This style of life is one that exhibits openness, humbleness, and, I would like to suggest, a sort of magnanimity born of ontologically-generated forgiveness. Modest ontologies, then, must be thought of as products of receptivity and recognition, existing as humble *responses* to a radically decentred human self and a profoundly relational world. The modest ontologist, or artist, recognizes that agency is distributed across relations (expressed, even, by relationships themselves) and that "individuality" is nothing but an interpretation *by us* of an effect of actively emergent¹⁵⁴ environments. The artistic, by this account, is a human category that is defined over and against human conventions. This is an unstable category, of course, in so far as human conventions are more often than not *defined* by using other human conventions. Nonetheless, according to the Nietzschean/Deleuzean account of artists we'll be examining here making a painting is no more an indication of someone being an artist than not making a painting. Furthermore, some paintings will inevitably be more artistic than others, though already we are slipping into a logic of judgment rather than of openness.

The ethico-ontological position I will be dealing with here can be described as a sort of "weird realism" (Harman, 2007b),¹⁵⁵ one wherein entities – both human and non-human, material and immaterial – gain an independent life all their own while engaging not with anything directly, or finally, but with one another's endlessly changing affordances, a world wherein the human has not so much been de-privileged and re-integrated with its environment and the anything-but-inconsequential creative forces that surround him/her at any time, but has been

¹⁵⁴ As Mullarkey notes: "There is no *ontological* status to emergence" (Mullarkey, 2007, p. 45).

¹⁵⁵ "Instead of the dull realism of mindless atoms and billiard balls that is usually invoked to spoil all the fun in philosophy, I will defend a weird realism. This model features a world packed full of ghostly real objects signaling to each other from inscrutable depths, unable to touch one another fully. There is an obvious link here with the tradition known as occasionalism, the first to suggest that direct interaction between entities is impossible. There is another clear link with the related skeptical tradition, which also envisions objects as lying side-by-side without direct connection, though here the objects in question are human perceptions rather than independent real things. Yet this article abandons the solution of a lone magical super-entity responsible for all relations (whether God for Malebranche and his Iraqi forerunners, or the human mind for skeptics, empiricists, and idealists), in favor of a vicarious causation deployed locally in every portion of the cosmos" (Harman, 2007b, p. 187).

transformed altogether into always changing and always *particular* manifestation of affordances and inclinations that interact not with other *things*, but with other thing's *qualities and capacities*. Beings, then, or individuals – insofar as they are mutable combinations of affects and affordances – do not, in any stable sense, *exist*, but come to be recognized as existing (by us) by the relative consistency and recognizability of the capacities their relations afford; similarly, the beingness of constellations of capacities (insofar as they can be identified) is given purpose and possibility by the uptake of its affordances by other constellations of forces, etc. We must resist – as philosophers and as artists – our tendency to determine the agential capacities of things merely based on our all-too-human access to them. Similarly, we must resist the temptation to attribute capacities to individuals since, as I've been describing, individuals are unable to have any capacities of their own, or that pre-exist the productive power of their relations. As Karen Barad explains, agency is not something “someone or something has”; similarly, capacities “cannot be designated as an attribute of subjects or objects (as they do not preexist as such). Rather, agency is the:

enactment of iterative changes to particular practices – iterative reconfigurings of topological manifolds of spacetime-matter relations – through the dynamics of intra-activity. Agency is about changing possibilities of change entailed in reconfiguring material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production, including the boundary articulations and exclusions that are marked by those practices in the enactment of a causal structure. (Barad, 2007, p. 178)

By challenging conventional definitions of “the individual” and of “capacities” I am certainly not interested in placing arbitrary limits on what we can do. Extending agency and distributing it across changing contexts and environments is not meant to take agency away from us as humans. Instead, my objective is to articulate a richer way of imagining agencies, one wherein the extension of agency to human *and* non-human actors adds immeasurably to the options available to us as we act, and are acted upon, in our everyday lives. As Barad notes, agency – whether artistic or otherwise – is inevitably transformed once it is cut loose from its “traditional humanist orbit” (Barad, 2007, p. 177).

So far in this study my goal has been to bring together various strands of scholarship and theory that speak to the ontological position that believes with, in this case, Bergson that there is “a thread, however thin,” that relates the “smallest particle of the world we live in to the whole of the universe, to the duration immanent to the whole of the universe” (Bergson, 1998, p. 10-11). This thread Bergson identifies is all too often invisible to us, and is rarely regarded as useful to us. It is a thread, however, that when recognized (even abstractly) functions to undermine (in a productive way) our own sense of our creative accomplishments, of our artmaking, and of our philosophies by emphasizing that the “we” or “I” that creates is nowhere to be found, but can be fleetingly glimpsed along the filament of which the “I” is a part. Radically undermining our creative accomplishments (as well as our high esteem of our own capacities to know how or why such and such exists, functions, etc.), by removing the hard boundaries between events, entities, and ourselves (i.e. being modest about our claims, position, and interpretative abilities relative to the universe and other beings/entities), has the potential to encourage us, I will suggest, to be more open to the ways the world *reveals* itself to us if we let it do so. By being generously responsive to that which is not human – by acknowledging the agential capacities of non-human actors and the creative power of relationality itself – we will be in better position to become attuned to the invitations and opportunities the world around us presents to us. A modest ontology, then, appeals to the world’s generosity to fill in for what previously was our own rather inflated regard for ourselves: receiving rather than taking, listening rather than speaking, sharing rather than taking. A modest ontology is one that regards the world as an “inexplicable and inexpressible force,” and one that transforms this “inexplicability and ineffability” into a “principle” (Mullarkey, 2007, p. 54).

Here, then, we are deriving *ways of thinking* and acting from a committed understanding of *ways of being and becoming*. Our understanding of the way the world becomes derives, in turn, from a reinvigorated focus on causation which in turn builds upon a reassessment of the nature of agency and creativity. My suggesting has been that causation is necessary for anything to become (obviously), and that causation, when combined with the world’s complexity, yields a sort of unpredictable, determined, and never-ending unfolding of novelty; that is, complex cosmic and local processes of cause and effect are unceasingly – and unpredictably – creative, always producing absolute newness (as opposed to what could be described as local

newness, or newness-for-us). That is, from an ontological perspective the production of the new is nothing new.

Graham Harman has recently observed that causality has not been a “genuine topic of inquiry since the seventeenth century” (Harman, 2007b, p. 188). He suggests that debates over causality or determinism have tended to be “yes-or-no” disputes about whether causal necessity exists or not, and whether or not these causal processes can be known. Harman observes that what’s been missing is an “active discussion of the very nature of causality” (Harman, 2007b, p. 188). This active discussion, states Harman, must move beyond the observation that because object A imposes itself on object B, object B changes “physical position or some of its features” (Harman, 2007b, p. 188). After all, such an observation tells us little or nothing about this (causal) relationship other than to point out – in the most basic of terms – that object A has (in some way or another) affected object B. Little is known about *why* A was attracted to B, or *why* B reacted to A in this way or that, or *the meaning* of A’s relationship with B, etc. Harman acknowledges (or rather, laments) the fact that descriptions of the causal relationships among inanimate objects have largely been “abandoned to laboratory research, where their metaphysical character is openly dismissed” (Harman, 2007b, p. 188) and points out that philosophy has been far too absorbed by the “relational gap between humans and the world – even if only to deny such a gap” (Harman, 2007b, p. 188).

When thinking about, in this case, philosophy, creativity, agency, and ethics it is important to be generous towards the thin threads and strands of thought that connect theoretical systems. In this project I have attempted to look *across* what is for me a diverse but interrelated philosophical landscape in order to extract complimentary approaches for thinking about creativity, becoming, and, finally, ontological and ethical commitments. What I am committed to, in light of my theoretical foraging, is an understanding of creativity and agency that is extended, determined, and unceasingly novel. Newness and novelty are, according to this view, recognized as the only game in town. As Deleuze observes: “According to the law of nature, repetition is impossible” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 6); he follows, of course, by explaining that “what is produced, the absolutely new itself, is in turn nothing but repetition” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 113). Repetition, in this equation, insofar as it is “the absolutely new,” is defined as not only “nothing” but, *given its ubiquity*, as “impossible” (or at least not really worth mentioning).

Taking seriously this interrelatedness has the potential to compel us to adopt an ontological stance that is at once reflexive and, crucially, modest. We are compelled to become ontologically modest, I suggest, because it is incumbent upon us to adapt to our recognition of the fact that we always *were* decentred, determined, and dependent beings (i.e. just like everything else) whose beingness is rarely regarded (modestly) as an ever-changing effect.

This modesty, in turn, leads not so much to a set of precepts or beliefs as it does to new perspectives, new attitudes, and ethical responses radically receptive to the realities and demands of otherness. These realities in turn, alter our understanding of the nature of our relationships and of our responsibilities.

In light of the world's ongoing production of novelty I have suggested that the status of the sort of "newness" described – differently – by a Deleuze (lines of flight) or Badiou (Events) must be bracketed off and differentiated from the more general newness that unfolds at each and every moment (or that, by unfolding, *creates* each and every moment – change being not subordinate or produced *by* time, as such, but being the *creator* of time itself). ¹⁵⁶ It's important too, I've suggested, not to look to newness itself as some sort of value, but, instead, to recognize that in an ultimate sense *newness persists* whether we desire it or not and whether we will it or not, and that a more important determinant of "the good" might be to understand, encounter, or embrace newness as a mysterious, generous, and ubiquitous gift – a gift that keeps on giving. My objective has been to outline a "creative ontology" with *lived* implications, one that has the potential to alter how we think about artists, philosophers, and ethics.

¹⁵⁶ Deleuze's reference to the formal difference between the new and "the new" – as outlined in the following passage – seems to hint at "the new" being that which is unrecognized *by us* (and how might this relate to anthropocentric sentiments?): "Nietzsche's distinction between the creation of new values and the recognition of established values should not be understood in a historically relative manner, as though the established values were new in their time and the new values simply need time to become established. In fact it concerns a difference which is both formal and in kind. The new, with its power of beginning and beginning again, remains forever new, just as the established was always established from the outset, even if a certain amount of empirical time was necessary for this to be recognized. What becomes established with the new is precisely not the new. For the new – in other words, difference – calls forth forces in thought which are not the forces of recognition, today or tomorrow, but the power of a completely other model, from an unrecognized and unrecognizable *terra incognita*" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 136).

4.2 Ubiquitous Newness: Becoming is Already Becoming

[H]ow an actual entity becomes constitutes what that actual entity is.
(Whitehead, 1978, p. 166)

When does the new happen? Are we equipped to identify specific instantiations of newness? Do we feel it when it happens? Do we acknowledge it once it's past? Must the new be new for ourselves only, or for others? Can the ordinary be new, or only the remarkable? Is the significance of a new event based on its size or on its capacity for rupture and violence? What is the *not* new? These are all questions that seem of great and continuing concern to philosophy and to thinkers of creativity. They are also unanswerable in any final sense and could almost be regarded as not being questions worth asking in light of the degree to which when thinking newness we (and everything else) are also living and enacting and generating newness at the same time. How can we deduce what it is that newness *is* in light of our (and everything else) *already doing it*, as Deleuze would say, repetitively and unceasingly.

Deleuzian newness is often described as the most common thing in the world, as that which is present at each step of each entity at all times.¹⁵⁷ Deleuze reminds us that – at the most basic level – every present passes “in favour of a new present”; indeed, the coexistence of pasts and presents – producing unique combinations – itself generates new relationships across time and space.¹⁵⁸ The centrality of this Deleuzian reality – the reality of the repetition (i.e. creation) of difference (i.e. newness) – compels Deleuze to suggest that the most fundamental philosophical task is to recognize repetition – that which is conventionally regarded as producing sameness – as synonymous with difference. We must make, states Deleuze, “something new of repetition itself”; this “making,” Deleuze goes on, is “a matter of acting” – a sort of will or performed making – that (conceptually if not causally or materially) makes “repetition as such a novelty” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 6). All production, then, produces

¹⁵⁷ “On the one hand, the ‘new’ seems to be one of the most obvious phenomena in the world: every dawn brings forth a new day, and every day brings with it a wealth of the new: new experiences, new events, new encounters. If the new means ‘what did not exist earlier’ then everything is new” (Smith, 2008, pg. 1).

¹⁵⁸ “Every present passes, in favour of a new present, because the past is contemporaneous with itself as present. A second paradox emerges: the paradox of coexistence. If each past is contemporaneous with the present that it was, then *all* of the past coexists with the new present in relation to which it is now past” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 103).

difference (newness) and this repetition of difference must itself be recognized as novel. So, while difference and newness and creativity¹⁵⁹ are always happening, they are not always *recognized* as happening, resulting in our attempts to create newness by performing it, enacting it, and labouriously bringing it into being. Newness, then, comes to us – is recognized – as a sort of a surprise to unsuspecting humans who all too regularly flee complexity (the reality of difference’s repetition) in pursuit of wholeness, oneness, consistency and other newness-denying thought paradigms.¹⁶⁰ Newness is not something that is the engine of existence’s going forward, but has become understood as something that we can judge to exist or not exist after the fact.

As Ian Buchanan has argued, the Deleuzian new (and striving for this newness, as a sort of value in and of itself) can perhaps best be understood as utopian. Buchanan suggests that describing the Deleuzian “new” as utopian is not only “the best” choice of words, but that shying away from such a description would be “reactionary” (Buchanan, 2001, p. 31).¹⁶¹ Smith observes that the conditions of the new were of

¹⁵⁹ “One could, for instance, pose the question of the new in terms of the question of transformation or change. When artists create a painting or a piece of sculpture, they are simply rearranging matter that already exists in the world in a new way. Such a view of novelty would be merely combinatorial. Melodies are made out of notes, paintings are made out of pigments, and sculptures are hewn out of stone. This would be a simplified caricature of the hylomorphic schema. Creation is the imposition of a new form (morphe) on a given material or matter (hyle), even if matter contains a certain potentiality for the form. Here, novelty is found on the side of the form, and matter is the passive receiver or receptacle of this newness. In this case, novelty would be little more than the rearrangement of matter in the universe into ever new forms. The question of whether such novelty would eventually be exhausted would rest on metaphysical speculation about the finitude or infinity of matter (and time) in the universe, which is ultimately pure – and hence empty – speculation” (Smith, 2008, pg. 2).

¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth Grosz elaborates on our discomfort with newness as follows: “The concept of the new raises many anxieties. While it is clear that newness, creativity, innovation, progress are all terms deemed as social positives, the more disconcerting notion of unpredictable, disordered or uncontrollable change, which lurks within the very concept of change or newness, seems to disconcert scientific, philosophical and cultural ideals of stability and control. Predictable, measured, regulated transformation seems a readily presumed social prerequisite; upheaval, the eruption of the event, the emergence of [End Page 38] new alignments unpredicted within old networks, threatens to reverse all gains, to position progress on the edge of an abyss, to place chaos at the heart of regulation and orderly development. How is it possible to revel and delight in the indeterminacy of the future without raising the kind of panic and defensive counter-reactions that Foucault envisages a supervising, regulating power needs in order to contain unpredictability, the eruption of the event, the emergence of singularities, and the consequent realignments of power” (Grosz, 1998, p. 380-9).

¹⁶¹ While it is true Deleuze resists calling this process of striving for newness utopian, I would argue it is not only the best word for it, it is also reactionary to shy away from it. Deleuze’s reluctance to use the term is problematic, I think, because it isn’t clear that it doesn’t signal a fear of it. ‘Utopia’ Deleuze says, ‘is not a good concept because even when opposed to History it is still subject to it and lodged within it as an ideal motivation’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 110). My feeling, though, is that Deleuze’s reluctance to endorse the concept of utopia can only be understood in terms of the context of the times in which he wrote, and should not be taken to imply a wholesale rejection of utopian thinking (Buchanan, 2001, p. 31).

primary concern for Deleuze, but that this concern should be *distinguished* from “problems of change, causality, or emergence” in order to be repositioned as a “fundamental” ontological concept: “Being = Difference = the New” (Smith, 2007, p. 3). Smith’s observations, however, take a turn when he notes that, despite newness equaling Being (in its entirety) – as in, the “real” is the “new” – its conditions are ours to discover (as though the conditions for Being are lying in wait or distinct from ongoing processes of novelty production); Smith observes: “The properly Deleuzean question would therefore be: what are the ontological conditions under which something new can appear in the world? But this raises a second set of issues: what exactly does it mean to speak of the conditions of the new?” (Smith, 2007, pg. 3).

Smith’s interpretations of Deleuzean newness seem rather at odds, one gesturing towards its emancipatory powers, the other to its ubiquity (and presumably its figuring in acts both emancipatory *and* mundane). This tension, between the ubiquity of newness and its being synonymous with Being signals, it seems, an aporia, one wherein philosophy’s task is to name and identify what *is* or *is not* new, or what *is* or *is not* an Event.^{162 163}

It is not my intention to propose solutions to the mysteries of this aporia, suffice it to say that it seems to perpetuate the sort of anthropocentric perspective Deleuze fought so long to overcome in so far it seems to suggest that new Events can be brought about *over and above* the newness of repetitive differentiation. The mere re-patterning of a system (a Deleuzean event) need not necessarily be granted special ontological status when compared to other more seemingly mundane events.

¹⁶² Smith underemphasizes Deleuze’s philosophical call to arms when he observes: “Insofar as Deleuze’s project constitutes a search for conditions (or a search for sufficient reason), Deleuze’s philosophy can be said to be a transcendental philosophy. Obviously the question of knowing how to determine the transcendental field is very complex” (Smith, 2008, pg. 5).

¹⁶³ On the topic of Deleuze’s Event Protevi writes: “Diachronic emergence, or creativity in the production of new patterns and thresholds of behaviour, is what Deleuze will call an ‘event’, which is not to be confused with a mere switch between already established patterns or with the trigger or ‘external event’ that pushes the system past a threshold and produces the switch. The Deleuzean event repatterns a system. The key to the interpretation of Deleuze in DeLanda’s *Intensive Science* is that the virtual is the realm of patterns and thresholds, that is, those multiplicities, Ideas, or abstract machines that structure the intensive morphogenetic processes that produce actual systems and their behaviours. A behaviour pattern, or a threshold at which a behaviour pattern is triggered, needs to be ontologically distinguished (or ‘modally’ distinguished) from behaviour, just as singularities are distinguished from ordinary points on the graph of the function.¹² Thus patterns and thresholds are virtual, while behaviour is actual. An event, in creating new patterns and thresholds, restructures the virtual” (Protevi, 2006, p. 23).

Certainly, any belief in *our* ability to discern when and where “newness” occurs – if it is not bracketed off as being *newness for us* – or the conditions of Being itself does not jibe with the modesty of the ontological position I am proposing. Rather, a modest ontological position finds more sympathies with the less anthropocentric and more generalizable interpretation of Being that is concurrently articulated by Deleuze – namely, Nietzsche’s view that everything is an expression of impersonal forces, an expression of something like Nietzsche’s ubiquitous and often misunderstood “will to power.”

For his part, Deleuze notes that for Nietzsche the will to power is “ascribed to force” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 49), is synonymous with force. Echoing my skepticism towards Deleuze’s argument that the conditions of Being – of repetition and difference – are philosophy’s to discover, Deleuze quotes Nietzsche as saying “Who therefore will[s] power [i.e. what are the conditions of the new?]? An absurd question, if being is by itself will to power” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 50). Deleuze, continuing in this vein, reminds us that every force has an “essential relation to other forces, that the essence of force is its quantitative difference from other forces and that this difference is expressed as the force’s quality” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 50); in other words, the will to power is the single (unknowable) element “from which derive both the quantitative difference of related forces and the quality that devolves into each force in this relation” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 50).

The attractiveness of Nietzsche’s argument (will to power = Being [i.e. becoming]) is that it is exceedingly general and can incorporate the ongoing generation of newness without needing to get into too many particulars and without being bogged down by specific cases, let alone utopian or emancipatory concerns (save for a concern to be *rid* of said concerns). Further, Nietzsche’s will to power can be said to be restrained or *modest* insofar as it is, as Deleuze says, a “plastic” principle that, despite its totalizing function, encompasses no more than what it conditions, that “changes itself with the conditioned,” and that “determines itself in each case along with what it determines” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 50). Deleuze goes on to point out, as I’ve been doing here, that the will to power, being the engine of newness, creativity, and becoming is “never separable from particular determined forces, from the quantities, qualities

and directions,” and that it is “never superior to the ways that it determines a relation between forces, it is always plastic and changing” (p. 50).¹⁶⁴

Here, then, the occasionally excessive valorization of newness by Deleuze (and our ability to identify its conditions – as if Being itself can be understood as somehow conditioned) is diluted as newness is spread thin and wide across the landscape of a becoming that becomes in keeping with what it can do and in ways that humans needn’t be able to predict or understand (nor could they if they tried). Indeed, Deleuze’s description here of forces and becoming as *determined*, and his observation that conditions never exceed the conditioned but are both determined (i.e. in a process of becoming different) at the same time, expresses the sort of airtight immanent ontology I’ve been describing wherein excesses and outsides have no place in immanence, while, at the same time all events are novel and new despite the fact that, as Smith observes, “the new is never produced *ex nihilo* and always seems to fit into a pattern” (Smith, 2007, pg. 17).

4.3 Speculative Realism’s Weird Vision of Reality

All relationships are superficial. (Harman, 2007b, p. 195)

Deleuze’s vacillation between the new as singular event (the conditions of which are knowable) and the new as being in general (as a determined process of solutions to the problems of particular conditions¹⁶⁵) objectifies Deleuze’s own struggle to subscribe, at the same time, to both Spinozist determinism as well as the emancipatory potential of the transformative new. This is a tension that straddles the line between what can be understood as a subtly anthropocentric ontology, and one that, by fully decentering the human, can be folded into a modest ontological position. In other words, Deleuze’s emphasis on human knowledge, creativity, and capacity to create lines of flight betrays his Spinozist sympathies that declare that we don’t know what the body is capable of and that reality is just a causal process of forces affecting and being affected. This tension between micro and macro

¹⁶⁴ Whitehead’s version of this sentiment states: “the final ‘satisfaction’ of an actual entity is intolerant of any addition” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 45).

¹⁶⁵ Whitehead echoes Deleuze’s observation as follows: “it belongs to the nature of a ‘being’ that it is a potential for every ‘becoming’” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 22).

creativities, between anthropocentrism and extended agency, and between causality and freedom (etc.) has recently been one of the preoccupations of a philosophical school known as *speculative realism*. Here I will give particular focus to Graham Harman's work on what he has called weird realism.

I turn to Graham Harman's recent philosophical work in order to venture further in the direction of arguing for a decentering of the human (and of human knowledge) in order to make the case for modesty as an appropriate response to our ontological "position." For Harman it is precisely the *unknowability* of the world that must be emphasized and foregrounded. Drawing on Heidegger's discussion of tools and of processes of revealing/concealing Harman posits that the qualities and capacities of things, as well as the nature of causation, are profoundly unknowable and must be recognized as such. This unknowability, this emphasis on our own ignorance in conjunction with an emphasis on the vastness of each and every thing (i.e. what it can do) restructures our relationship not only to the world around us but to ourselves, including our understanding of our capacities for creativity and art making. By emphasizing the unknowability of cause and effect our own successes and achievements become, in some respects, not necessarily our own and must be regarded as issuing forth from a much more extended constellation of forces or, in Nietzsche's terms, from the will to power.¹⁶⁶ As Harman states, the gulf between our *experience* of objects (in all its superficiality) and our *knowledge* of objects creates "an absolute gulf between the things and *any* interaction we might have with them, no matter whether that interaction be intellectual or merely manipulative" (Harman, 2002, p. 1). Harman's argument, it must be noted, does not single out humans as *uniquely* ignorant in regards to the knowability of things; indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that things themselves withdraw from *each other*, each into their own "dark subterranean reality" (Harman, 2002, p. 2).¹⁶⁷

Despite Harman's emphasis on the profound unknowability of the constituents of reality, his object-oriented philosophy is not receptive to the ideas about relationality

¹⁶⁶ Harman observes: "Accordingly, we are finally in a position to oppose the long dictatorship of human being in philosophy. What emerges in its place is a ghostly cosmos in which humans, dogs, oak trees, and tobacco are on precisely the same footing as glass bottles, pitchforks, windmills, comets, ice cubes, magnets, and atoms. Instead of exiling objects to the natural sciences (with the usual mixed emotions of condescension and fear), philosophy must reawaken its lost talent for unleashing the enfolded forces trapped in the things themselves. It is my belief that this will have to be the central concern of twenty-first-century philosophy" (Harman, 2002, p. 2).

¹⁶⁷ Harman continues: "Even inanimate things only unlock each other's realities to a minimal extent, reducing one another to caricatures" (Harman, 2002, p. 2).

we've been promoting. For Harman all relationships are "superficial" (Harman, 2007b, p. 197). The future of philosophy, he suggests, lies in an understanding of objects as perpetually withdrawing from "all perceptual and causal relations" (Harman, 2005, p. 20). Harman argues that the question is not how individuals can be thought of as existing within networks of relation, but how relations occur at all in a world in which discrete objects exist in their own "unsoundable" depths (Harman, 2005, p. 20). In Harman's view, beyond any object's "tangible presentation" or performance "lies its veiled *being*, a deeper reality that never comes fully to presence" (Harman, 2005, p. 22).

Harman argues that relational theories are not adequate for describing "the full reality of objects" (Harman, 2005, p. 248) because insofar as objects are dependent and defined by relations they hold "nothing in reserve beyond [their] current relations"; it follows, he goes on, that since relationally-defined objects can never have "unexpressed properties" there is no reason to believe that "anything new can ever emerge" at all (Harman, 2005, p. 82). My contention, however, is that individual entities have *no inherent properties*; rather, entities have their properties manifested and determined for them at each moment *through* their relations. Harman's search for "the ceaseless alchemy underway in the interior of objects" (Harman, 2005, p. 19) is, despite the recent receptivity to speculative realist theories, a search that has little chance of locating something that I will argue does not even exist.

Harman suggests that if we "define objects as inherently deeper" than their respective "states of affairs" then "no recourse to a [Deleuzian-inspired] disembodied virtual is needed" (Harman, 2008, p. 382). I suggest instead that Deleuze's virtual is a useful concept that is due for a revision. That is, the virtual should be understood not as an unactualized zone of potential that exists alongside the actual, but as the *performative moment of relationality itself*. I propose a meta-critique of the concept of virtuality – a term often inconsistently defined – to argue that because individuals and their capacities are actualized differently at each moment according to the relations in which they find themselves, their capacities do not pre-exist their actualization, but are generated at the very moment of actualization through what these relations afford (Gibson, 1986). In other words, my argument is that the virtual is that which exists contemporaneously with the actual *as* relation, and the virtual relation, in turn, produces actuality as an ongoing *effect*. This revised virtual no longer contains the potentialities of individuals but produces individuals as the

products of relations. The relational ontology that stems from this revision of virtuality not only accounts for how art comes into being but also serves as a new way for imagining ourselves.

Harman's philosophy, then, rejects the notion that humans have any sort of special access to reality, themselves, or other entities. Instead, humans and human consciousness are regarded as one set of entities among many, and as being on "exactly the same footing" as all other animate or inanimate entities. For Harman, this is step one – the deprivileging of people. Channeling Spinoza's point that we don't know what we're capable of (or what anything else is capable of), Harman contends that objects "hide from one another endlessly" (2007b, p. 189-90). Harman's argument here, not unlike my own, is that despite Deleuze's observation that conditions do not exceed the conditioned, and that novelty and creativity are the defining modes of being, our ability to know these processes and to have privileged access to them effectively is nil. This is because all relations between entities – and between our own component parts, presumably – are superficial caricatures – mere glimpses – of relation's, and by extension entities', potential.¹⁶⁸ That being the case, I again disagree with Harman about the significance of relations. It may be that we don't have access to a comprehensive understanding of relationality, but this does not preclude the notion that individuals do not and cannot exist without or beyond relation.

Nonetheless, in Harman's view, deconstructing causality re-energizes philosophy, particularly philosophy's role in a world where the natural sciences have assumed pride of place thanks to their perceived ability to define the potential of objects based on a signposting of their characteristics and qualities. Harman argues that for "several centuries" philosophy has been "on the defensive" relative to the natural sciences and now occupies a position of "lower social prestige" and – more troublingly – "narrower" subject matter (p. 190).¹⁶⁹ For Harman, the task of philosophy in the twenty-first-century is not to discover the conditions for the new

¹⁶⁸ As Whitehead observes: "the actual entity is the real concrescence of many potentials" (Whitehead, 1978, p. 22).

¹⁶⁹ Harman continues: "A brief glance at history shows that this was not always the case. To resume the offensive, we need only reverse the longstanding trends of renouncing all speculation on objects and volunteering for curfew in an ever-tinier ghetto of solely human realities: language, texts, political power" (Harman, 2007b, p. 190).

(as if they could be discovered) but to “speculate once more on causation” (Harman, 2007b, p. 189-90).¹⁷⁰

In order to do so we must first recognize that what we experience of ourselves and of objects when we experience causation – or relation, I might add – is merely *one side* of a potentially multifaceted exchange. In other words, our experience of relation is an experience of a distortion: “We distort when we see, and distort when we use” (Harman, 2007b, p. 193); similarly, all other instances of relating distort – dogs, for example, “do not make contact with the *full reality* of bones, and neither do locusts with cornstalks, viruses with cells, rocks with windows, nor planets with moons” (p. 193, my emphasis).

Significantly, this distortion is not due to a *deficiency* in human consciousness so much as it is an *appropriate* response to relationality *per se* which itself always exposes less than it conceals. Experience, then, due to its narrowness, distorts our understanding of what objects (and we) are capable of. Objects, then, possess, in every relation, qualities which – while being inherently determined and determining – have the capacity to exceed those qualities exhibited during the duration of the relationship itself. In other words, what we experience in our relationship with things are the *current* emergent and mutable responses of *particular* capacities-in-relation that “float along the surface” whilst concealing the “shadowy depths” (Harman, 2007b, p. 195).¹⁷¹

Recognizing the disturbing nature of a philosophy – or an understanding of creativity – that prioritizes our ignorance over our understanding – or that describes understanding as a form of ignorance, or, indeed, ignorance as a form of understanding – Harman acknowledges that on the surface it might seem that there is little need for such a “weird vision of reality” since it is “easy enough” to think of the world as consisting of “brute pieces of inescapable solid matter,” or “‘primary qualities’ supporting a series of more dashing, volatile human projections” (Harman, 2007b, p. 211). We’d better prepare ourselves to be disturbed, however, since for

¹⁷⁰ Harman explains: “Vicarious causation frees us from such imprisonment by returning us to the heart of the inanimate world, whether natural or artificial. The uniqueness of philosophy is secured, not by walling off a zone of precious human reality that science cannot touch, but by dealing with the same world as the various sciences but in a different manner. In classical terms, we must speculate once more on causation while forbidding its reduction to efficient causation” (Harman, 2007b, p. 189-90).

¹⁷¹ “All relationships are superficial” (Harman, 2007b, p. 195,197).

Harman just such a post-Heideggerian view of the world renders more conventional alternatives obsolete (Harman, 2007b, p. 211).

Harman's philosophy of "speculative realism" attempts to re-energize matter, and in so doing gestures towards a correlation between our capacity for ignorance (which is infinite, presumably) and our capacity for wonder (our capacity to be amazed). That is, "speculative realism's" emphasis on the unknowability of things and of relations forces us to consider our amazement in the face of, for instance, remarkable feats of creativity or novelty, as being symptomatic of the overwhelming unknowability all around us. In other words, our capacity to be surprised or amazed does not so much demonstrate our ability to identify value or significance, as it does our penchant to be amazed at the very propensity of Being to be creative.

Once again, Harman's argument that things' qualities and capacities recede from view might invite the conclusion that things are thereby wholly independent of one another by their being unknowable to one another; that is, one thing's characteristics might be thought of as being uniquely its own and as inaccessible to other beings. This, however, would be a mistake as far as I'm concerned (and would, of course, run counter to the argument we've been making all along that it is relation and interconnection that gives definition to beings and Being). Whitehead summarizes my radically-relational position when he states that "each actual entity includes the universe, by reason of its determinate attitude towards every element in the universe" (Whitehead, 1978, p. 45).

Similarly, Harman's doctrine of unknowability, while emphasizing the concealed nature of things' capacities and characteristics, does not preclude the *significance* of these concealed capacities for a world of things-in-relation. That is, not only might a concealed capacity be crucial to a particular relationship, the relationship itself creates the conditions for the very capacities that are concealed. That is, conditions change in step with the conditioned, generating feedback loops; the production of novelty recasts the conditions from which novelty emerged, generating a sort of re-novelification. In other words, whether or not a thing's capacities are hidden or revealed, these capacities are the product of a relationship and *would not even exist* (in any form whatsoever) without the relationship that gave rise to them. In this way, things and their capacities remain connected. What a thing is capable of exists only by there being some other thing upon which this capability can be enacted.

Creation requires relation, and artists require materials, contexts, environments, inspiration, subject-matter, an audience, etc. In turn, all created entities – including both art and artists – derive their identities not by having inherent characteristics or capacities *in isolation* but rather *because of relation*. In other words, any creative act, any differentiation, any characteristic at all of a thing exists relative to something else. Capacities of things, then, can be understood as qualities of relationships. Creation and creativity also require givenness, that something be given so that when it enters into relation with other (given) things it might yield creation. The given, then, must be regarded as the fount of creation, and creation must – conversely – be regarded as that which emerges and is determined by the given¹⁷² (and of course, as Whitehead observes, the not-given must be regarded as synonymous with impossibility¹⁷³).

4.4 The Determined Givenness of Whitehead's Creativity

The universe is thus a creative advance into novelty. (Whitehead, 1978, p. 222)

If you abolish the whole, you abolish its parts; and if you abolish any part, then *that* whole is abolished. (Whitehead, 1978, p. 288)

For some, nature is mere appearance and mind is the sole reality. For others, physical nature is the sole reality and mind is an epi-phenomenon.... The doctrine that I am maintaining is that neither physical nature nor life can be

¹⁷² Whitehead explains the relationship between creativity and the given as follows: “the actual world, insofar as it is a community of entities which are settled, actual, and already become, conditions and limits the potentiality for creativeness beyond itself. This ‘given’ world provides determinate data in the form of those objectifications of themselves which the characters of its actual entities can provide. This is a limitation laid upon the general potentiality provided by eternal objects, considered merely in respect to the generality of their natures. Thus, relatively to any actual entity, there is a ‘given’ world of settled actual entities and a ‘real’ potentiality, which is the datum for creativeness beyond that standpoint” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 65).

¹⁷³ More on Whitehead’s understanding of givenness: “Returning to the correlation of ‘givenness’ and ‘potentiality,’ we see that ‘givenness’ refers to ‘potentiality,’ and ‘potentiality’ to ‘givenness’; also we see that the completion of ‘givenness’ in actual fact converts the ‘not-given’ for that fact into ‘impossibility’ for that fact. The individuality of an actual entity involves an exclusive limitation. This element of ‘exclusive limitation’ is the definiteness essential for the synthetic unity of an actual entity” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 45).

understood unless we fuse them together as essential factors in the composition of ‘really real’ things whose inter-connections and individual characters constitute the universe. (Whitehead, 1938: 205)

Understanding the novelty generated by creation as fundamentally relational, as I’m arguing, and as fundamentally unknowable, as Harman argues, certainly undermines our own conventional claims to possess unique creative capacities (as exclusively ours), not to mention our own claims to knowledge, understanding, and, of course, any sort of stable truths. We are left with, at best, what Stephen Colbert has described as “truthiness.” We are left too with a newness that arises from the pure potentiality inherent to the unfolding of the immanent actual world (from that which is both concealed and unconcealed). Whitehead’s “philosophy of organism”¹⁷⁴ can be instructive on this topic. In this short section Whitehead’s thinking is described in order to help bolster our claims that an ontology of modesty is a most appropriate position given our knowledge of our lack of knowledge of the world and given our understanding of the intra-relationship¹⁷⁵ of things, and how our own understanding of these intra-relationships are constituted by the network of intra-relations that prefigure and precede any subsequent analysis by us.

Whitehead observes that all new creations arise out of “the total universe”¹⁷⁶; these creations¹⁷⁷ – which are ongoing and everywhere – in turn *feed back into the universe*, perpetuating complexity and assuring that *new* newnesses will emerge. As Whitehead argues, every “actual entity springs from that universe which there is for it”; causation, for Whitehead, is nothing other than “one outcome of the principle that every actual entity has to house its actual world” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 80).

¹⁷⁴ “For Kant, the world emerges from the subject; for the philosophy of organism, the subject emerges from the world – a ‘superject’ rather than a ‘subject’” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 88).

¹⁷⁵ Karen Barad has described the reciprocal relationships that constitute our everyday lives (and everything else) as relationships of “intra-action” (Barad, 2007).

¹⁷⁶ “Each task of creation is a social effort, employing the whole universe. Each novel actuality is a new partner adding a new condition” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 223).

¹⁷⁷ Halewood and Michael explain that one of Whitehead’s most important terms is creativity: “‘Creativity’ is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact’ (Whitehead, 1978: 21). ‘For the fundamental inescapable fact is the creativity in virtue of which there can be no “many things” which are not subordinated in a concrete unity’ (p. 211). Hence, creativity operates as that which explains the process through which diverse prehensions become one thing. It also indicates Whitehead’s insistence that such a process is not accomplished only by humans but as an integral aspect of the becoming of all moments of facticity. It is in this sense that Whitehead uses the term creativity to describe the activity which characterizes the coming to be of any thing which exists” (Halewood and Michael, 2008, p. 42).

Whitehead, adding to our modest ontology argument that has so far been premised upon our ignorance of the conditions of becoming, limits these very conditions and their creative potential when he notes that no “actual entity” rises beyond, or exceeds, “what the actual world as a datum from its standpoint – its actual world – allows it to be” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 83). In other words, *all* acts of creation are limited and constrained, or enabled and made possible, by the generosity – or the allowances – of *pre-actualized* environments.¹⁷⁸ The “character” of the novelty a given context or set of pre-conditions allows is “governed” by what Whitehead calls its “datum,” and there is no transgressing or exceeding what the limits of the datum allow: “The datum both limits and supplies” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 110). An entity’s character, or the quality of a given expression of creativity, is determined and depends on “that of its environment,” which in turn is “the sum of the characters” of the “various [...] actual entities which jointly constitute that environment” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 110).

Whitehead’s world, while undoubtedly “self-creative,” is also limited by its constraints since all processes of self-creation are, in a sense, guided by the inevitability of their pre-conditions to pursue, effectively, their ideals of themselves (insofar as the limitations *on* creation can be thought of as, at the same time, producing a sort of inevitable “ideal” toward which the creativity will move).¹⁷⁹ This reciprocal dependence,¹⁸⁰ where the creative affords to the created its characteristics and where the created, essentially, *permits* the creative to fulfill its creative capacities

¹⁷⁸ “Throughout his philosophical career, Whitehead was intent on arguing against what he described as the bifurcation of nature. He describes this position as follows:

[One] way of phrasing this theory which I am arguing against is to bifurcate nature into two divisions, namely into the nature apprehended in awareness and the nature which is the cause of awareness. The nature which is in fact apprehended in awareness holds within it the greenness of the trees, the song of the birds, the warmth of the sun, the hardness of the chairs, and the feel of the velvet. The nature which is the cause of awareness is the conjectured system of molecules and electrons which so affects the mind as to produce the awareness of apparent nature. (Whitehead, 1964, p. 30-31)

Whitehead views the tacit acceptance of such a theory as having severe consequences for our understanding of nature. Furthermore, it has led to the division of academic inquiry into discrete realms that deal with subject matters so diverse, so different, that they are unable to communicate—indeed, they might as well be talking about different universes. For example, the material (natural) world has been set out as the province of science, while subjectivity and the experiences and interrelations of thinking subjects (humans) have been given over to social theory or the humanities. This has led to problems for both fields of inquiry (Halewood, 2005, p. 59).

¹⁷⁹ “The world is self-creative; and the actual entity as self-creating creature passes into its immortal function of part-creator of the transcendent world. In its self-creation the actual entity is guided by its ideal of itself as individual satisfaction and as transcendent creator” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 85).

¹⁸⁰ “Each actual entity bears in its constitution the ‘reasons’ why its conditions are what they are. These ‘reasons’ are the other actual entities objectified for it” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 215).

results, ontologically speaking, in a sort of air-tight immanence of which we are but one not so integral component amongst a distributed set of intra-connected forces. Provocatively, Whitehead notes that any actual entity – or creative expression – is “nothing else than what the universe is for it, including its own reactions” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 154).¹⁸¹

We can understand this reciprocity as creating an environment not only of mutual dependence,¹⁸² but of profound indebtedness insofar as our *very existence* is reliant upon the existence of everything else, and where the knower and the known are, effectively, indistinguishable (Halewood and Michael, 2008, p. 32). How else to respond to such a situation (predicament?) than with gratitude, wonder, and, perhaps, a modicum of modesty?

The objectification of the unknowability and ubiquity of the conditions of creativity (whether human or non-human) puts a limit on our claims to knowledge, agency, and creativity. Of course, novelty and innovation themselves have not diminished in any absolute sense, but come to be considered from a different perspective, one that reveals the degree to which these processes are shared *amongst* a panoply of actors and agents, capacities and dispositions. Creativity becomes an expression of a relationship, of a shared intra-action between actors who, as Harman explains, inter-relate without knowing what each individual or relation will be capable of. Novelty, nonetheless, continues to be produced without ceasing.

Karen Barad, like Harman, insists that existence is not an “individual affair” since individuals never “preexist their intra-relating” (2007, p. ix). Barad, drawing on her work in theoretical physics, states that “time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action”; this being the case, it is fundamentally impossible to differentiate “in any absolute sense” between “creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future” (Barad, 2007, p. ix). Such an understanding of creation, as indiscernible and shared, is another instance of the

¹⁸¹ Whitehead describes: “an inter-relation of individuality and generality without which neither can exist nor survive. In doing so he puts a fascinating twist on the rather tired old macro vs micro debate. For Whitehead, both are distinct moments of process” (Halewood and Michael, 2008, p. 41).

¹⁸² “According to the ontological principle there is nothing which floats into the world from nowhere. Everything in the actual world is referable to some actual entity” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 244).

human being needing to be decentred in response to a world that we acknowledge is capable of more than we're able to understand. This presents an interesting conundrum, one wherein we are forced to give in order to get, where our inflated self-concept as the dominant creative being must be overruled if we are to become *more* responsive to the creative forces that are creating all around us (and that, indeed, create us).

These ways of decentering the human are not, I would like to argue, cause for lament insofar as they actually open up *new* spaces for thinking and *new* potential avenues for becoming that have the potential to enrich, rather than impoverish, the human, or that have the potential to serve, in a broad sense, human interests (especially insofar as these interests are best served by acknowledging our interdependence with nature, etc.). Not only that, but such philosophical sentiments have the potential to open up a new space for thinking the human as a being that can *succeed* by *sharing* the planet rather than by dominating it. There is an ecological element to this ontological argument that leaves much to be explored. One path of inquiry could explore how mythologies of "free-will" have contributed to ecological myopia due to their allowing us to perpetuate the assumption that we can and should operate according to our will, rather than our – and nature's – limitations.

When the human is compelled by ontological commitments that demand of him/her a degree of modesty, what has conventionally been understood as "nature" – that foil against which we elevate ourselves and evaluate others – receives new and fertile attention. The recent surge of theory foregrounding the idea that the human world is not distinct from the natural one (actor-network theory, for example), or that agency is best regarded as distributed across human and non-human actors, or that – as Whitehead notes – nature is inherently social (Halewood and Michael, 2008, p. 34), or that humanism, as such, has had its day has served to complicate our attempts to locate what it is that makes us distinct relative to other entities and species. This self-serving quest itself seems unproductive at best and destructive at worst. Rather, our self-interest could be regarded as a particular evolutionary quirk we just have to deal with, for better or for worse. While not necessarily requiring disavowal, this quirk can be contextualized by a more disinterested and objective philosophical position that makes more modest demands on ourselves (perhaps relieving us of some existential angst in the process).

4.5 Contemporary De-Anthropomorphizational Derivations

If winds, currents, glaciers, volcanoes, etc., carry subtle messages that are so difficult to read that it takes us absolutely ages trying to decipher them, wouldn't it be appropriate to call them intelligent? How would it be if it turned out that we were only the slowest and least intelligent beings in the world? (Serres, 1995: 30)

Many contemporary authors have taken up, in their own way, the Whiteheadian/Deleuzian project of de-anthropomorphization, attempting to move beyond the descriptive dimension of their arguments to examine the *ethical* import of such anti-anthropocentric ontologies. Here I will begin by briefly mentioning four of them.

Nigel Thrift, for one, has argued for an understanding of the world as manifesting *distributed* forms of intelligence, what he has termed “intelligencings” (Thrift, 2005, p. 463). He suggests that the reality of these intelligencing “can and do teach us how to be” and therefore have “an important ethical dimension” (Thrift, 2005, p. 463). Thrift's goal is to shift our conventional notion of ourselves as intelligent to other actors, and more specifically to other actors-in-relation (for it is only through intra-relation that actor's intelligencings are expressed). As Thrift observes, “intelligence is not a property of an organism but of the organism and its environment” (Thrift, 2005, p. 464). Thrift's ontology draws its influences from biological discourses insofar as his efforts move beyond “obvious organismal boundaries” towards a recognition of what he terms the “superorganismal,” which refers to the idea that organisms are extended beyond the rigid confines we sometimes feel compelled to put them in.¹⁸³

Keith Ansell-Pearson echoes Thrift's extension of boundaries in his vitalism-inflected observation that behaviour can no longer, in light of developments in philosophy and science, be “localised in individuals” but must be treated “epigenetically as a function of complex material systems” that cut across “individuals (assemblages) and which transverse phyletic lineages and organismic boundaries (rhizomes)” (Ansell Pearson,

¹⁸³ “They are extended in space as different territorial configurations with different effectivities and in time as different forms of process with different temporal signatures” (Thrift, 2005, p. 464).

1999, p. 171). For Ansell Pearson this demands a re-articulation of agency as something distributed across time and space, always actively feeding back in novel ways and so contributing to the world's creative unfolding.¹⁸⁴

Like Ansell Pearson and Thrift, N. Katherine Hayles has spent much effort arguing that the human can no longer be regarded as “the source from which emanates the mystery necessary to dominate and control the environment”; rather, the “distributed cognition” of “the emergent human subject” must be seen as just another metaphor for “the distributed cognitive system as a whole, in which thinking is done by both human and nonhuman actors” Hayles (1999: 290). A further expression of distributing widely what we understand to be our own unique human faculties can be found in Alphonso Lingis' work, wherein he describes how what we are capable of is no thanks to ourselves but utterly reliant upon everything else. Lingis observes, “Not only do objects make thought do-able,” they also “make thought possible. In a sense,” Lingis goes on, “as parts of networks of effectivity, objects think” (Lingis, 1998: 99).

The theoretical work being done to unsettle the division between us and the world, or agents and objects, is also finding fruitful expression in the realm of eco-theorizing wherein the overwhelming prospect of our own extinction as a result of our own myopically ecocidal actions has obliterated the perception that it is *useful* and *in our best interest* to distinguish humans and nature; indeed, we are realizing more each day how such conventional dualism could mean the difference between life and death.

How we think about our relationship with the rest of the world has become a most compelling issue inside¹⁸⁵ and outside¹⁸⁶ of the academy, with social, political,

¹⁸⁴ “The challenge is to show that nature consists of a field of multiplicities, assemblages of heterogeneous components (human, animal, viral, molecular, etc.) in which creative evolution can be shown to involve blocks of becoming” (Ansell Pearson, 1999: 171).

¹⁸⁵ Lorimer provides some examples: “Amid the dissatisfaction with the idealist excesses of the cultural turn in geography and in the social sciences more generally there is a growing interest in thinking beyond this, albeit caricatured, dualist understanding to appreciate the role of nonhumans, broadly defined. This movement has many strands and has been expressed in a desire to ‘rematerialise’ geography (Jackson, 2000; Latham and McCormack, 2004; Lees, 2002; Philo, 2000) and to ‘ecologise’ social science (Hutchins, 1995; Ingold, 2000; Latour, 1998; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998; Murdoch, 2001; Scoones, 1999; Thrift, 1999), to examine ‘more-than-human’ or posthuman geographies (Braun, 2004; 2005; Castree and Nash, 2004; Hinchliffe, 2003; Whatmore, 2002), and to acknowledge the creative ‘push’ of the body (Grosz, 1994; Latour, 2004; Massumi, 2002; Radley, 1995) to explore the nonrepresentational dimensions to social (and ecological) interaction (Dewsbury et al, 2002; Thrift, 2000), to cite but a few examples. As I will

aesthetic, philosophical, and, as I have been suggesting, ethical significance. What these emergent areas of debate and discourse reveal is the degree that the conventional discursive divisions between ourselves and our environments, between active and inert, between subject and object, between alive and dead, have exposed the degree to which our senses (and subsequently, our ontologies) have a propensity to function not as an accurate mirror of reality but as a reality “filtering mechanism” (Lorimer, 2007, p. 916), a mechanism better at *annulling* potential relationships and modes of agency than exploring or embracing them; that is, our senses and ways of understanding the world are premised more on logics of *exclusion* and *division* than *inclusion* and *radical immanence*. We prefer compartmentalizing things into individual categories rather than delving into the relationality that defines them. While this has perhaps served us well in the past, in the face of contemporary concerns it is no longer tenable. Isn’t it odd that it takes an apparently imminent ecological catastrophe to compel us to see something other than ourselves in the mirror?

The increasing emphasis on our being embedded within, and a product of, nature sees a resurgence of everything from Spinozist pantheism to Whiteheadian identification of the fallacious “bifurcation of nature”¹⁸⁷ being taken up by theorists across the disciplines.¹⁸⁸ Formerly niche ways of understanding nature – and its attendant influences and creative capacities – have suddenly taken on new and potent metaphysical significance, operating as a foil for outdated metaphysical

demonstrate below, all of these movements provide useful materialist resources for exploring the agency of nonhumans” (Lorimer, 2007, p. 912).

¹⁸⁶ Lorimer describes some of the complexities at work as the conceptual and conventional boundaries between human and non-human agents: “In our contemporary world of avian flu, genetic modification, and climate change, nonhuman agency is both a commonsense observation and a tautology. That corporeal, geotechnical, and pathological processes affect human individuals and societies is indisputable. However, in acknowledging this agency we blur the distinction between the human subject – possessed of causal power and rational abilities – and the messy substrate of the object world – generally reduced to resources and risks to be managed by modern science. In so doing we unsettle one of the most pervasive foundations of modern thought: between the human and the nonhuman, subject and object. On what grounds can we include the nonhuman in our theoretical and therefore ‘ethical’ frameworks?” (Lorimer, 2007, p. 912).

¹⁸⁷ Halewood notes that: “one of the prime motivations and diagnoses of Whitehead’s thought is that of the ‘bifurcation of nature’. Whitehead describes this as the fallacious doctrine whereby ‘Nature’ is viewed as comprised, dually, of ‘the nature apprehended in awareness and the nature which is the cause of the awareness’” (Whitehead, 1964 [1920], p. 31).

¹⁸⁸ Halewood vouches for Whitehead’s analysis when he observes that: “It is clear that the implications of Whitehead’s identification of the ‘bifurcation of nature’ as permeating, influencing and insinuating our experience and concepts could have a significant impact on a wide range of issues in social theory” (Halewood, 2008, p. 3)

dualisms.¹⁸⁹ Tim Ingold, for example, speaks of the need for a re-animated version of animism as one way of confronting the disenchantment of the world and our separation from it. For Ingold, a reinvigorated animism has the potential to open us up to the ability of the emergent world to astonish. Ingold notes how animism encourages an attitude of world inhabitation rather than of distant observation. An animist perspective, he suggests, is – like a modest ontological perspective – a “way of being that is alive and open to a world in continuous birth” (Ingold, 2006, p. 9).¹⁹⁰ For Ingold a re-animated world is one wherein the “Western tradition of thought” re-assumes its ability to be astonished by acknowledging, generously and with wonder, that the world is active, emergent, agential, and alive (Ingold, 2006, p. 9). An animated world is one wherein “dynamic, transformative potential” is distributed across the entire “field of relations” filled with “more or less person-like or thing-like” beings who perpetually bring “one another into existence”; this animacy, states Ingold, is not a derivative of an infusion of “spirit into substance, or of agency into materiality,” but is an *a priori* animacy that is “ontologically prior to [...] differentiation” (Ingold, 2006, p. 10).

In support of the modest ontological approach – one that is open to, and embraces, the world at the expense of our understanding of ourselves as being on top of it, so to speak – it’s important to emphasize that a modest ontology *can* be regarded as an *inevitable* onto-ethical response to an engaged receptivity to the creative capacities of human and non-human actors alike – particularly those non-human actors we call relations. It’s as though a modest ontology is the product (and perhaps not initially a desirable one) of a world full of active, affecting and affected, entities – a sort of forced modesty as punishment for the overly grandiose delusions of the past.

Any initial response to modest ontological conclusions as undesirable, however, misinterprets the merits of modesty and remains trapped by anthropocentric predilections. Feelings of resentment toward modest ontological precepts reveal the tensions that exist between us and what we think of as nature, but also between our modest and grandiose selves. Resentments have no place in an ontology of openness

¹⁸⁹ As Whitehead says: “Wherever a vicious dualism appears, it is by reason of mistaking an abstraction for a final concrete fact” (Whitehead, 1933: 244–5).

¹⁹⁰ In this animic ontology, beings do not propel themselves across a ready-made world but rather issue forth through a world-in-information, along the lines of their relationships. To its inhabitants this weather-world, embracing both sky and earth, is a source of astonishment but not surprise” (Ingold, 2006, p. 9).

to otherness – an ontology wherein our self-interest is tempered by a recognition of our shared existence. A more positive consequence of openness and de-centering “the human” could be, as Ingold argues, the accompanying astonishment and wonder that could result from not putting “the human” first, ontologically speaking. Ingold states: “Astonishment, I think, is the other side of the coin to the very openness to the world that I have shown to be fundamental to the animic way of being” (Ingold, 2006, p. 18). He suggests that this sense of naïve (or generous, depending how you understand it) wonder is possible if we can commit to “riding the crest of the world’s continued birth” (Ingold, 2006, p. 18).

Unfettered openness – the kind that comes about when we cease trying to assert ourselves and our cosmic importance onto existence – results, also, in our becoming vulnerable: vulnerable to ourselves, to others, to dangers, to being disappointed. Ingold observes that an attitude of openness, wonder, modesty, *might* appear (to ourselves or others) as a form of “timidity or weakness,” or as proof of a lack of “rigour” deriving from “primitive” beliefs: “The way to know the world, they say, is not to open oneself up to it, but rather to grasp it within a grid of concepts and categories. Astonishment has been banished from the protocols of conceptually driven, rational inquiry” (Ingold, 2006, p. 18). Ingold asks whether the animist’s avoidance of answers is inimicable to science, to the pursuit of knowledge?¹⁹¹ On the contrary, of course. Rather, recognizing our lack of answers has always opened us up to new questions, new ways of knowing, and new ways of being.

My argument, then, is that *if* we regard the world as a realm of extended and interdependent agency where creative capacities are produced by the intra-relation of human and non-human actors alike we are poised to relinquish our understanding of ourselves as more valuable or special than other beings and entities. That is, a modest

¹⁹¹ Ingold continues: “Are animism and science therefore irreconcilable? Is an animistic openness to the world the enemy of science? Certainly not. I would not want my remarks to be interpreted as an attack on the whole scientific enterprise. But science as it stands rests upon an impossible foundation, for in order to turn the world into an object of concern, it has to place itself above and beyond the very world it claims to understand. The conditions that enable scientists to know, at least according to official protocols, are such as to make it impossible for scientists to be in the very world of which they seek knowledge. Yet all science depends on observation, and all observation depends on participation that is, on a close coupling, in perception and action, between the observer and those aspects of the world that are the focus of attention. If science is to be a coherent knowledge practice, it must be rebuilt on the foundation of openness rather than closure, engagement rather than detachment. And this means regaining the sense of astonishment that is so conspicuous by its absence from contemporary scientific work. Knowing must be reconnected with being, epistemology with ontology, thought with life. Thus has our rethinking of indigenous animism led us to propose the re-animation of our own, so-called ‘western’ tradition of thought” (Ingold, 2006, p. 19).

ontology *can* be regarded as an inevitable response to our experiences of and encounters with a world of which we are but an *effect*.

Modesty, here, derives from our self-consciously reassigning the human to a less dominant position within a non-hierarchical landscape of mutually dependent “agents.” Moreover, it would not be a stretch to suggest that subscribing to a modest ontology *is itself* an ethical act if we assume that it has the potential to lead the subscriber to a more open relationship with things based on the realisation that our capabilities are defined by our relationship to them and the affordances these relationships allow.

Modesty – both ontological and ethical – is the inevitable (and perhaps not *initially* desirable) demand of a world full of relationally dependent entities and effects. This, I would like to suggest, is an inevitable modesty that too easily could be interpreted as punishment for our overly grandiose delusions of the past. However, any initial response to modest ontological conclusions as undesirable overlooks the merits of modesty itself and risks remaining trapped by anthropocentric predilections. Indeed, feelings of resentment toward modest ontological conclusions reveal the tensions that exist, not only, between us and what we think of as nature, but also between our modest and more grandiose selves. Resentments, however, have no place in a modest ontology premised upon openness to otherness – an ontology wherein our self-interest is tempered by a recognition of our shared existence.

4.6 *Amor Fati* and the Inevitability of Modesty

Flower Power, Black Power, Girl Power. Thing Power: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle. (Bennett, 2004, p. 351)

Thing-power is a force exercised by that which is not specifically human (or even organic) upon humans. (Bennett, 2004, p. 351)

We are walking, talking minerals. (Bennett, 2004, p. 359-60)

The potentiality pregnant in our recognition of our indebtedness to things, and to the creative potential of the world in which we are embedded – a world that, in effect, uses us as a channel through which to express creatively *itself* – was recognized by Paul Klee who felt that his paintings were “images of nature’s potentialities” (Klee, 1962, p. 183). Similarly, Nietzsche recognized that our interpretation of ourselves and our environments are not accurate or “true,” but creative – useful fictions: “O my brothers, is not everything in flux now?” (Nietzsche, 1978, p. 201).

Jane Bennett and William Connolly find in Nietzsche’s acknowledgment and embrace of flux – and in the Nietzsche-inspired writings of Ilya Prigogine (2003, 2003 – with Stengers) and Isabelle Stengers (1997) – an ethically profound and ontologically explosive expression of the “humanature” (Goin, 2006) organism that locates creativity not so much *within* beings as *constitutive of* being. The flux famously identified by Nietzsche, note Bennett and Connolly (reiterating the position we’ve been developing here), need not connote a universe devoid of regularity or stability (Bennett, Connolly, 2002, p. 151). That is, Nietzschean flux is not something we can judge as bad; rather, it is our interpretation of this flux that reveals our own (in)capacity to account for the world’s creative complexity; indeed, the negative assumptions we make about the flux reflect the fact that “even if we were to bring the most refined laws we are capable of formulating to the onset of the universe or biological evolution, we would not be able to predict the exact future course of either” (Bennett, Connolly, 2002, p. 151). The flux we perceive is a consequence of our inability to keep track of – let alone control – the worlds erupting around us,¹⁹² the “course of nature” that is “separate from our perception of it” (Bennett, Connolly, 2002, p. 151). Let’s turn to Nietzsche for an explanation:

[I]n truth we are confronted by a continuum out of which we isolate a couple of pieces, just as we perceive motion only at isolated points. . . . The suddenness with which many effects stand out misleads us; actually it is only sudden for us. In this moment of suddenness there is an infinite number of processes that elude us. And intellect that could see cause and effect as a

¹⁹² “‘Causality’ eludes us; to suppose a direct causal link between thoughts, as logic does—that is the consequence of the crudest and clumsiest observation. Between two thoughts all kinds of affects play their game; but their motions are too fast, therefore we fail to recognize them . . . ‘Thinking’ as the epistemologists conceive it, simply does not occur: it is quite arbitrary fiction, arrived at by selecting one element from the process and eliminating all the rest” (Nietzsche, 1968b, p. 263-64).

continuum and a flux and not, as we do, in terms of arbitrary division and dismemberment, would repudiate the concept of cause and effect. (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 173)

The world's so-called flux is also the product, observe Bennett and Connolly, of the poor fit between our perceptual capacities and a world "not necessarily designed to correspond to them" (Bennett, Connolly, 2002, p. 151).

Taking Nietzsche's perspectivism seriously requires, I will suggest, that we take seriously his call for us to "*Amor fati*" (to love our fate). This love has profoundly ethical implications (more on this later) and invites us to release our grip on our coveted anthropocentric attitudes. Nietzsche's call for a willed loving of life's challenges and joys – in all of its messiness – provides us with a way of thinking meant to help us overcome resentment, resentment towards ourselves, towards others, and towards the world which is always assaulting us (to the point of death). Loving our fate – loving all of existence in a way that regards existence as effectively inevitable (in light of what it is capable of) and as a creative expression beyond good and evil – is Nietzsche's most powerful tool in his effort to equip us for creative living in the world, a type of living that is up to the task of a world that is always already (creatively) underway and always *nothing but* flux (despite appearances).

Becoming free of resentment by acknowledging – and, indeed, loving – the ebb and flow of becoming itself requires that we be open to the newness that comes to us from the outside and that we channel as we become in conjunction with the world. As Bennett and Connolly argue, Nietzsche's resentment-free embrace of a non-anthropocentric world view produces a sort of head-space all its own, one that invites us to look out at the world in a way that is "more responsive" to all of the "natural/cultural processes by which brand new things, beings, identities and cultural movements surge into being" (Bennett, Connolly, 2002, p. 151). By dissolving boundaries, being open, and finally loving we not only insert ourselves into the creative becoming of being but, in the same instance, create a new way of understanding this becoming, a new way of being *more* receptive to the Deleuzian "lines of flight" flying all around us, a world Prigogine describes as one "where the possible is richer than the real" (1997, p. 72).¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Regarding the fluctuating nature of causality in such a world, Prigogine states that while nature is infinitely capable of producing novelty (especially as far as we're concerned) it is a world that lies

For Prigogine our experience of nature – and our interpretation of flux – should leave room for, and be receptive to (the implications of) a world where there's ample room for “both the laws of nature and novelty and creativity” (Prigogine, 1997, p. 16). Indeed, the very expectation that we can have special access to some sort of rational “sense” located under discernable and researchable layers of noise that will enable us to discover the direction – the “trajectories” – at work in the universe may be, simply, wrong-headed. As Prigogine explains: “It is not a question of recognizing that we are incapable of calculating [...] trajectories; rather, it is a question of realizing that the trajectory is not an adequate physical concept for these systems” (Prigogine, 1984, p. 152).

In response to our inability to adequately account for reality using the vestiges of 19th century science (and philosophy), a “multi-layered conception of culture and thinking” (Bennett, Connolly, 2002, p. 157) is required that disperses the agential powers of creation across a wider set of actors and is able to account for the ways nature does not stand apart from, but is absolutely mixed into “every layer of culture” even as this understanding addresses our own capacity to create the evocative and stimulating “modes of intellectuality and artistry of which the human animal is capable” (Bennett, Connolly, 2002, p. 157). Such a feat will only be accomplished, argue Bennett and Connolly, if we divest ourselves, if we relinquish and let go of, the dominant ways of understanding “nature” and “culture” since that now infamous coupling only “impedes” creative¹⁹⁴ “thinking about thinking” (Bennett, Connolly, 2002, p. 157).¹⁹⁵

somewhere between “the two alienating images of a deterministic world and an arbitrary world of pure chance. Physical laws lead to a new form of intelligibility as expressed by irreducible probabilistic representations” (1997, p. 189).

¹⁹⁴ “Thinking is creative. If it is part of nature, in the broadest sense of the latter word as the largest whole in which we are encompassed, then the experience of creativity in thinking provides a piece of testimony in support of the idea that other aspects of nature are so disposed as well” (Bennett, Connolly, 2002, p. 159).

¹⁹⁵ “The alternative picture of thinking we pursue, with help from Nietzsche and Prigogine, is that of a multilayered activity of creative production situated in a zone of indiscernibility between “nature” and “culture,” as those two terms have become intercoded in recent Euro-American thought” (Bennett, Connolly, 2002, p. 157).

4.7 Thing Power, Cave Paintings, and Non-Human Creativity

I attribute to Nature neither beauty nor ugliness, neither order nor confusion. For things can only be called beautiful or ugly, orderly or confused, in relation to our imagination. (Spinoza, 1994, p. 63-4)

A response to the demand that we surmount the dominant modes of understanding the so-called human so that we might (again? for the first time?) liberate our ability to think creatively about thinking (and think creatively about creativity) is developed by Jane Bennett who suggests that we nurture an empathetic and awe-struck appreciation of what she calls “thing-power” (Bennett, 2010).¹⁹⁶

Bennett’s thing-power¹⁹⁷ is developed as a philosophical or ontological response to what she recognizes as the “vitality, willfulness, and recalcitrance” of nonhuman entities and forces (Bennett, 2004, p. 347). This recognition of the power of things – in addition rather than at the complete expense of human-power – brings with it, for Bennett, “ethico-political import” (Bennett, 2004, p. 347). Bennett’s thing-power draws, as I have been doing, on Spinoza, Deleuze, Latour, and others to propose a sort of lively materialism (Bennett, 2004, p. 347) that articulates what she admits is a “speculative onto-story,” and an admittedly “presumptuous” effort to comment on the all too often invisible and insensible nonhuman forces that flow “around and through” us (Bennett, 2004, p. 347).¹⁹⁸

One of the facets of Bennett’s argument in favour of thing-power is her explanation of why we might be compelled to adopt thing-power as a mode of understanding things and our relationship to them, as well as the type of response that might be appropriate when a belief in thing-power is dancing in our heads. Bennett suggests

¹⁹⁶ “I want to give voice to a less specifically human kind of materiality, to make manifest what I call thing-power. I do so in order to explore the possibility that attentiveness to (nonhuman) things and their powers can have a laudable effect on humans. (I am not utterly uninterested in humans.) In particular, might, as Thoreau suggested, sensitivity to thing-power induce a stronger ecological sense?” (Bennett, 2004, p. 348).

¹⁹⁷ “Thing Power: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle” (Bennett, 2004, p. 351).

¹⁹⁸ “Thing-power materialism figures materiality as a protean flow of matter-energy and figures the thing as a relatively composed form of that flow. It hazards an account of materiality even though materiality is both too alien and too close for humans to see clearly” (Bennett, 2004, p. 349).

that thing-power is a perspective that promotes the “acknowledgment, respect, and sometimes fear of the materiality” of *the thing*, and provides us with a fledgling vocabulary for discussing how things are not only “out there,” but are also very much ourselves (Bennett, 2004, p. 348-9).¹⁹⁹ ²⁰⁰

Bennett warns us, however, that if any “respect” we might have for things derives from “fear” of their capacities or power an ontology that encourages an openness to things will, inevitably, find things being received with suspicion rather than joy. Similarly, if nature and things have to be exceedingly impressive to *deserve* our consideration we’re left repeating the expectations that gave rise to our *lack* of recognition for thing-power in the first place. In response to Bennett’s concerns about fear and respect my modest proposal is that things be encountered from a position of responsive humility – a position that recognizes that *things are all we’ve got*, whether they command respect or not. Further, the observation that things are complex, unable to be explained or accounted for, or as agential entities is not a function of awe or fear, but merely of observation and, again, an openness to otherness. The question, then, is not whether wonder or humility is a more or less accurate response – how are we to know? – but what sort of response is more *useful*, more *productive*, and will yield the most sustainable and creative response *for, and from, us*.

So in some respects it is the utter *ordinariness* or *banality* of the realization that we aren’t the fanciest things in the universe that might be most worth recognizing. There’s no particular point to continue to go around patting ourselves on the back, congratulating ourselves for our brilliant insights, feats of creativity, and our alert senses. One could go so far as to say that it is this banality itself that is so amazing, the fact that *it is utterly ordinary* that unaccountably complex processes of relationality are the mode of everyday life and that we ourselves are overwhelmingly complex in the most ordinary way possible, not as exception but as rule. We have always been impressively ordinary “walking, talking minerals” (Bennett, 2004, p.

¹⁹⁹ “It emphasizes those occasions in ordinary life when the us and the it slips into each other, for one moral of this materialist tale is that we are also nonhuman and that things too are vital players in the world” (Bennett, 2004, p. 348-9).

²⁰⁰ “Thing-power materialism, as an adventurous ontological imaginary, offers a picture of matter as so active, intricate, and awesome, that it’s no disgrace to be made up wholly of the stuff oneself. In this onto-tale, humans and their thoughts, like other things, are part of a mobile set of material assemblages, and no term like “soul” or “spirit” is needed to express the (sometimes noble, sometimes destructive, sometimes ineffable) complexity of human acts or desires” (Bennett, 2004, p. 364).

360). Indeed, if any of the deterministic flirtations articulated earlier have any resonance it's because in some respects we could declare that there are no, and have never been, any particular "exceptions" to the rules, insofar as there are no affects that aren't affected, no consequences that aren't caused, and no entities – or "things" – without relations.

Significantly, Bennett alerts us to the idea that describing the human as one object amongst others – as a mere thing, agential or not – risks humans (etc.) being regarded as objects to be used instrumentally for this or that "dehumanizing" end (Bennett, 2004, p. 360). However, were such an event to occur Bennett's retort is that it would be unethical (Bennett says "immoral") since the abuse of the human would be done in pursuit of domination and according to a logic not responsive to thing-power. This criticism, of course, invites comparisons with the ethical risks of subscribing to Nietzsche's will to power. But the goal of thing-power is not so much to demote humans as to promote the world's complexity and the way it intertwines with us. The dangers of instrumentalization could be avoided "when the blurring of the human/nonhuman distinction is combined with the attempt to enhance the ethical standing of things" (Bennett, 2004, p. 360). That is, unethical expressions of domination would not, for Bennett, be a necessary consequence of a recognition of thing-power, but of something else.²⁰¹

Bennett emphasizes that her thing-power perspective is not so utopian as to imagine that self-interested behaviour on the part of human beings can be eliminated. But she does have a belief in thing-power's ability to engender "a more enlightened self-interest" that responds to our embeddedness within a "natural-cultural-technological assemblage" (Bennett, 2004, p. 361). Thing-power, she posits, as a non-anthropocentric way of thinking, will contribute to new ways of thinking, acting and relating. As Bennett explains:

Thing-power materialism, as an adventurous ontological imaginary, offers a picture of matter as so active, intricate, and awesome, that it's no disgrace to be made up wholly of the stuff oneself. In this onto-tale, humans and their

²⁰¹ "The danger of reducing subjects to "mere objects" is most acute, I think, in a materialism in which things are always already on their way to becoming trash (where materiality is conceived as the dead other to life). Thing-power materialism, in contrast, figures things as being more than mere objects, emphasizing their powers of life, resistance, and even a kind of will; these are powers that, in a tightly knit world, we ignore at our own peril" (Bennett, 2004, p. 360).

thoughts, like other things, are part of a mobile set of material assemblages, and no term like ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ is needed to express the (sometimes noble, sometimes destructive, sometimes ineffable) complexity of human acts or desires. (Bennett, 2004, p. 364)

Continuing with the same thought Bennett describes how thing-power, a form of materialism, places its central emphasis on the “closeness, the intimacy, of humans and nonhumans”; she argues that it is this heightened “sense,” or state of awareness (or consciousness?) that has the potential²⁰² for thing-power to contribute to her goal of a sustainable “ecological ethos” (Bennett, 2004, p. 365).

The pre-historic cave paintings of France – Lascaux being the most famous – are often regarded by philosophers as fantastic sites for encountering seminal acts of human creativity. They also, I would like to suggest, can be understood as particularly noteworthy sites for observing the aesthetic effects of thing-power. In this case the “thing” in question is the site of these paintings itself – the verdant Dordogne region of south-west France – and the seductive caves that pierce its once underwater cliffs.

The cave paintings of France are routinely identified by philosophers and theorists (Nancy, Bataille, Lyotard, Merleau-Ponty, Guattari) as sites not of thing-power so much as sites where, as Nancy surmises, “*Man began*” (Nancy, 2006). For Nancy, the materialization of the cave painting’s visibility – “the calmly violent silence of a gesture” – revealed, “the strangeness of the being, substance, or animal that traced it, and the strangeness of all being in him. At this, man trembled, and this trembling was him” (1996, p. 74). According to Nancy’s somewhat anthropocentric understanding of these sites, the act of artistic creation, the act of capturing life’s forces and depicting them in pigment, was the beginning of *our* beginning.

²⁰² “My primary goal has been to give expression to thing-power. This is not the same as questing for the thing-in-itself. I don’t seek the thing as it stands alone, but rather the not-fully-humanized dimension of a thing as it manifests itself amidst other entities and forces. My contention is that this peculiar dimension persists even inside the ubiquitous framing of human thought and perception. I have also suggested that a playful, naïve stance toward nonhuman things is a way for us to render more manifest a fugitive dimension of experience. In the moment of naïveté, it becomes possible to discern a resemblance between one’s interior thinghood (e.g., bones) and the object-entities exterior to one’s body. In the sympathetic link so formed, which also constitutes a line of flight from the anthropocentrism of everyday experience, thing-power comes to presence. In developing the idea of thing-power, my aim was to enliven the debate over materiality-what it is and does. It is important that “materiality” be a contested term in political theory, especially as it replaces “reality” as the name for the stuff to which theory must be tied if it is to make a difference”(Bennett, 2004, p. 366).

However, the centrality given to the all-too-human gesture described by Nancy ignores the attendant *agency* of the site – the *thingness* of the environment – that afforded the occasion for these cave paintings in the first place. My reading of these sites as expressions of thing-power was developed and reinforced during the summer of 2007 when I went on a field research trip sponsored by the Department of Sociology to the Perigord Noir section of the Dordogne region of France in search of whatever it was that Deleuze, Bataille, and Nancy were talking about, and to see for myself the site and context where these extraordinary visual compositions came into being.

What was especially striking about the Perigord Noir region was how lush it was with vegetation and how craggy and alive was its topology. It's no wonder, I thought, that this verdant environment was where early humans were drawn and where they felt compelled to create the Sistine Chapel of Prehistory – Lascaux. One doesn't want to get overly melodramatic, but my overall impression was of the environment itself being so compelling, so inviting that one can't imagine how prehistoric protohumans *could have resisted* its pull, its invitations. These protohumans did not so much *choose* to inhabit Perigord Noir, as were chosen by Perigord Noir itself – thing-power at work; they did not *will* themselves there, but succumbed – in effect – to the region's physical riches and to the potential the verdant landscape would, no doubt, afford. The lush landscape generously offered, and the soon-to-be-humans couldn't help but accept.

More remarkable, however, than the landscape and natural environment are the caves themselves; they are everywhere, these holes in the rock, beckoning us to come inside, to be enveloped by solid stone, to cloak ourselves in damp darkness. The Vézère River Valley, which contains 147 prehistoric sites and 25 decorated caves, used to all be underwater. The caves themselves, of course, were carved out as water rushed through and found its way through what would later become cliffs. These protohuman/protopainter individuals were handily seduced by the endless depth and the sheer number of caves – they plunged right in, despite exceedingly difficult spatial restrictions, not to mention the lack of light. Indeed, as the local cave-painting guides will tell you, some of the floors of today's caves have been lowered 3 feet for tourists since prehistory's painters used to crawl on their bellies in darkness, sometimes painting images on their backs on a cave wall inches from their nose, in a

passage 2 feet high, hundreds of meters from the cave opening. The strangeness of their painting studio does not seem to suggest that they were intent on pursuing paths of least resistance. Nonetheless, the cave's themselves must have had a strangely strong and alluring power, offering challenges to the painters that were rewards in themselves.

The thing-power of the caves, however, did not end at their opening. Imagine, for example, the wonderful resonances and sounds cave-things afforded – their peculiar resonances; imagine too the ways the flickering flames of the cave-painters would make the cave's walls come alive and become animated; the dancing flames, in turn, to allow the undulating walls to become suggestive, to become-animal – a sort of suggestive menagerie of enlivened stone.

In sum, the caves themselves had the capacity, in the right circumstances, to animate images of the animal world outside. Perhaps the painter's pursuit of the cave's depths can be understood as a pursuit of the animals the torch's flames revealed. Indeed, we might imagine that had it not been for the compelling play of light on the walls of the dark cave these protoartists would never have been *inspired* to create anything at all. These paintings-in-darkness, then, can be understood as inextricably bound up with light's capacity to reveal, with rock's capacity to dance, and with flame's capacity to animate.

Objects, when given ideal circumstances and when situated in particular relationships, are capable of innumerable things. Given the right circumstances the rocks of a cave wall, upon encountering a protohuman, a flame, and an outside environment full of animals that resemble the flicker of shadows revealed by the flame dancing on the wall's surface, can become the surface of a painting. This "humanature" (Goin, 1996) assemblage – human, cave, darkness, fire, reality beyond the cave, response to latent form in the rock, gave rise to a situation that produced certain conditions that themselves gave rise to relations that generated what could never have been predicted. We could even say that the caves themselves seized upon the affordances afforded by the human, the flame, and so on to express a new capacity: the cave's capacity – its thing-power – to inspire art, to become a canvas, to mystify generations of tourists. We might ask: Did the cave painters use the cave, or the cave use them? Can the creative agent and act be isolated?

The human/flame/pigment/cave hybrid, then, by co-mingling and interacting reveals not only the artistic capacities of what were to become human beings, but the capacity of rock, of colour, of flame, of darkness. Here, amidst this relationship, something new was created.

What is being described here, then, is a world of reciprocating relations, of affording and affordances – a world where the capacities of humans are determined and, indeed, created by the affordances afforded by nonhumans. To begin to think of things using Bennett’s concept of “thing-power” requires that we, at once, recognize the agential capacity of the world of things. Significant too, however, is that we are compelled to recognize that the panoply of options available to ‘things’ is restricted by the specific relationships into which they enter and the particular affordances (or limits) these relationships allow.

So, insofar as things are merely composed of their respective qualities and capabilities – by what they can do – their existence relies on the existence of other things upon which their capabilities can be exercised. In other words, we humans did not – with that fateful gesture described by Nancy – create ourselves or will ourselves to become artists. Rather, this creative expression, this becoming human, is itself only possible with the help of thing-power. We did not, in those caves, create representations, rather we responded to certain conditions, to a set of affordances that were brought into being by us, just as we humans were brought into being by them. Cave paintings can be understood as a sort of inevitable solution to a problem, as the consequence of a collision, an effect of intersections, and as an expression of the power of things to draw out that which is creative within humanature environments.

4.8) Art Making Within an Extended Field of Agents: The Contingent Character of Creativity

The world is neither true nor real but living. And the living world is will to power, will to falsehood, which is actualized in many different powers. (Deleuze, 1983, p. 184)

Defining the present in isolation is tantamount to murdering it. (Klee, 1963)

I have always suffered only from the “multitude.” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 509)

Taking things seriously, and even playfully, by embracing and engaging distributed forms of agency – and the relationships understood to constitute them – literally reshapes how we understand the landscape of things we take to be lying before us. Insofar as this reshaping re-imagines the agential landscape we’ve inherited from philosophy’s and Western society’s past it is something new, a sort of *tabula rasa* upon which our actions will have a profound effect. Again, I must emphasize that an emphasis on thing-power or agential extension or radical relationality is not meant to undermine the creative capacities of humans, but to *extend them*, to help us to discover that we have creative partners we were not aware of, and that these non-human agents can, in turn, *teach us* something about how to exist within, and navigate through the world in keeping with the world’s own dispositions, to which we must become more attuned (see, for example, recent research on biomimicry: Benyus, 2002; Chapman, 2005; McDonough, 2002).

Mullarkey’s recent book on “post-continental” thought (2006) closes with an especially apt statement on the contingent nature of creativity and the ways that “thing-power” matters. The passage is worth quoting at length:

When philosophers are ‘generous’ enough to say of literature, painting, film, architecture, science, or the Internet, that they too think, what is mostly meant is that they are capable of illustrating philosophical concepts. It is the conceptual artist’s or the scientist’s kinship to something called ‘philosophy’ that elevates his or her subject-matter to the conceptual level. What we are saying – and what a Post-Continental thought indicates – is that philosophy

must take up the challenge of renewal and acknowledge the possibility that art, technology and even matter itself, at the level of its own subject-matter, in its own actuality, might be capable of forcing new philosophical thoughts onto us. With that, however, there might also come a transformation of what we mean by philosophy and even thought itself. The non-philosophical condition of thought, so-called, is not a discrete state or privileged domain, but a contingent and indefinite process. It is the process whereby *any* subject-matter can facilitate philosophical reflection, be it through folding back on itself, belonging to itself, or affecting itself. The medium or language of the process keeps changing; only the flexuous shape of the process remains constant. If we have discovered anything, it is that transcendence, that which is the outside both literally and figuratively, is multiple and relative, and comes in types that depend on one's frame of immanence. And that frame, the place where one takes a stand, is never permanent. (Mullarkey, 2006, p. 193)

The weird realism, agential extension, speculative realism, and thing-power we've been examining have been described as a series of *reasons* for adopting an ontological position that begins with and is informed by modesty. This is not a false modesty, nor an excessively morally-grounded humbleness, nor is it one bent on self-deprecation, etc. Rather, this modest attitude is a very materially-informed conclusion based on a belief that creativity is ubiquitous and continuous and that our own capacity to be a creative agent within this interconnected field of novelty is a function not of our own wonderfulness, but of an extended range of actors in relation upon which we are utterly dependent. Creativity, as already stated, is the world's most common characteristic, so common that the most repeated act in the world's becoming is the creation, as Deleuze reminds us, of difference or novelty. To create is to repeat. Regardless of one's moral leanings, it strikes me that this whole paradoxical state of affairs is infinitely humbling – interdependent, ongoing, creativity; recontextualizations rather than brand new *ex nihilo* constructions (Pennycook, 2007, p. 580).

Modesty, however, is not the *conclusion* of a modest ontology but the *beginning*. To be modest – or humble – in the face of overwhelming and uncountable creative events, and in the face of our dependency for our capacities on those things with which we are in relation, is also to be open to ubiquitous creativity, to be willing to

listen rather than act, to participate and share in creation rather than to impose one's all-too-human desires in order to naïvely intervene in already-underway creative processes. This is not to suggest that an anthropocentric imposition of human creativity on the world (rather than a creating *with* the world) produces *less* novelty; novelty, after all, will be created with or without us. I am suggesting instead that an openness and a modest attitude in the face of creation is more likely to create a sort of human-favourable creative *environment* that is in the best interest of the human and the nonhuman world. My promotion, then, of modest ontologies is motivated, in part, by ecological concern.

But basically my hunch is that a modest ontology, open and receptive to non-human agents and agency, has a greater likelihood of producing a *sustainable ontology* and, perhaps, a sustainable world that includes human beings. While this all sounds unrealistically utopian, it is certainly no more fantastical than the ontological fantasies our cultures have been relying on thus far, not to mention the limited and myopic understandings of what it means to be creative, and of where creativity comes from. An understanding of creativity that works and reasons *with* the assumption that nothing is inconsequential to creative acts – like painting – is one that recognizes *how* creativity is shared, generated, and dependent upon dependence, or relationships. When nothing is inconsequential everything becomes, according to its relationally generated capacities, affordances, dispositions, a *necessary* participant in creation.

We've arrived at this modest ontological position by beginning with painting, and by asking, "What about painting is inconsequential?" The answer to this question is that *nothing* is inconsequential to the creation of a painting insofar as every creation is dependent upon a relation, and any relation is dependent on further relations, such that one of the defining materialist conclusions we can posit is that everything is, effectively and practically, connected. This immanent rhizomatic network is profoundly integrated and no part of the network is able to act or exist in isolation. And since an entity's characteristics only exist relative to its effects on other entity's – that is, since an entity is the sum of its relationally-generated affordances and their effects – all entities depend on the existence of other entities in order to be creative, to differentiate, and to become.

Painting, when viewed from this ontological perspective, becomes a product of multiple agents (not just the artist) and also becomes *one* instance of creative expression in a world defined by an ongoing repetition of novelty, of creativity, and of difference. This co-integration, I have been suggesting, is grounds for a conception of the human as dependent (and as necessarily humbled). The human can at best be taken as an environmental *effect*, as an entity *granted* capabilities by the components from which it is composed – components and elements and entities that pre-exist it, coming together to assemble the human for a brief while before moving on to other preoccupations.

The contingent character of human creativity could, I am suggesting, not only be responded to more appropriately with a little ontologically-derived modesty, it could reap benefits from the ethics that derive from this modest ontological attitude. That is, by foregrounding and embracing our *dependence on the generosity of things*, by recognizing the creative power of the non-human, by being open to the outside that – after all – *is us*, the human artist-creator is in position to pursue a path that could lead to further creative – and even sustainable – collaboration between human and non-human worlds. That is, by clinging less strongly to anthropocentric ontologies the resulting openness to intra-action can result in *new* and unconventional encounters, making the field of potentialities larger merely by our being more open to them. Indeed, the simple choice on our part to be open and modest and humble is *itself* productive of novel actualizations that would not, had we not been so modest, otherwise have come about.

So, choosing to be open to externalities, to be responsive to the forces that afford existence, *is itself* a creative act. By letting go of the notion that we are *uniquely* creative, that we *will* novelty into existence, we concurrently create a new set of potentialities, a new paradigm. Recognizing that it is impossible for us to account comprehensively for the variables that will give rise to the future, that it is impossible to account for the variables that gave rise to the present, and that it is impossible to account for the variables and actualities that did and are giving rise to the past, frees us from our belief in our own powers to know, to achieve teleological objectives, and to judge. Coming to terms with the fact that our free choices are reactions and responses to a determinate set of circumstances (including the determinations we impose on ourselves) allows for creative becomings that would not have otherwise emerged. Pursuing a process of disenchanting the human we find a more sustainable

and shared enchantment. In other words, perhaps the *least* creative component in the human-nonhuman assemblage is *ourselves* and our stuck-in-a-rut ways of seeing and understanding the world. Deleuze and Guattari remind us that we are, after all, merely a set of mental and physical “contemplations” of our worlds; they suggest that contemplations are like “habits” and that the “I” that we are is habitual (and must be overcome for the habits to change) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 105).

From this perspective the human becomes an impossibility and, in fact, a great impediment. The all-too-human human must be cast aside, leapt over – to use Nietzschean imagery. For Nietzsche to be a creator is to be – by necessity – an “annihilator” and a “breaker of values”: “whoever must be a creator in good and evil, verily, he must first be an annihilator and break values. Thus the highest evil belongs to the highest goodness: but this is creative” (Nietzsche, 1978, p. 116).²⁰³

If we – and especially our modes of thinking – are our greatest impediment, our greatest impossibility, we must, to use a colloquial phrase, *get over ourselves*. Deleuze reminds us that the artist or creator who isn’t “grabbed around the throat” by sets of “impossibilities” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 133) is no creator at all. If, as I’ve been arguing, the human itself is an impossibility than the creator who does not recognize that s/he is limited, determined, indebted, dependent, will have a hard time moving beyond the conventional(ly human).

In Deleuze’s view, a creator is someone who recognizes and creates “their own impossibilities,” someone for whom limitations are acknowledged, and thereby transformed into possibilities. For Deleuze, our creation of impossibilities “creates possibilities” since, without them – without sets of impossibilities – we will never have “the line of flight, the exit that is creation” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 133). What we’ve been emphasizing all along, and what Deleuze does not mention, is that what we leave behind as we create the new are the limitations we place on ourselves as we go on to pursue the capacities and affordances already available to us but unable to be known in advance. What is left behind are the old understandings, the old human-all-too-human *interpretations* of things, the old way of construing restricted relationships; what is encountered or uncovered is the creative (non-human) world

²⁰³ Nietzsche continues: “Thus the highest evil belongs to the highest goodness: but this is creative” (Nietzsche, 1968a, p. 228).

as we allow ourselves be to subsumed by and within it. What are lost, then, are paradigmatic clichés.

The artist, by doing away with the human – with the human as independent, distinct from nature, willful creator – is freed from having to compare him/herself *to* the human, to speaking in language and signs that the human understands. By tuning in to the potential to think differently, the artist literally opens up a different toolbox of affordances with which to experiment; by becoming in tune with the reality – if not the specificities – of the “complete conditions” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 159) of creation, and of our own generative capacity to *cooperate with it* the artist is able to become open to the world’s generosity and, in so doing, can be understood as being generous with him/herself who s/he has come to regard – by eschewing human aspiration in favour of, as Deleuze and Guattari would say, “becoming X” – him/herself as *more* than human, as a creative *component* within a wider, intra-connected creative machine.

The creator does not create over and above, or over and against the creation and novelty underway everywhere; instead, the creator-artist becomes *attuned* to ubiquitous creation, open to it, connected to it, determined by it. The artist is always passing through creativity’s creations, teasing out capacities, playing with hidden forces, extracting what seem like excesses, wringing out reality’s abilities. The artist is an attuned being, attuned to affect, affordance, and intra-connection. The artist is open to an outside that is not him/her, but that defines and determines what s/he is capable of. These capabilities are not known or able to be predicted in advance. Were that to be so what would be created would not be art, would not add to the realm of human experiences, human symbols, human expression. Art *requires* the artist, *uses* the artist, in order to actualize itself. The artist, in turn, by being open to change and novelty create without knowing it, and creates without knowing what it will become. Why cling to the observable, to the graspable when a sort of enlightened ignorance reveals far more options?

The artist as modest ontologist, then, cooperates with the affordances made available by the world. By recognizing and embracing the fact that the world is an expression of novel becoming the artist recognizes that there will never be a final word, a final (creative) act, an ultimate work of art, a definitive human expression. The artist demotes the human and in so doing becomes open to receive what the world has to

offer, becomes willing to travel down hidden paths of desire that the world's disposition and propensities open up. The convention and cliché avoiding artist, then, is modest, is open to what is not him/her, acknowledges that change is out there, that it must be extracted, that new visual and non-visual languages are discovered through experimentation.

4.9 Nietzsche Through the Back Door: Becoming-Artist and the Demands of a Modest Ontology

Our Ultimate Gratitude to Art – If we had not approved of the arts and invented this sort of cult of the untrue, the insight into the general untruth and falsity of things now given us by science – and insight into delusion and error as conditions of intelligent and sentient existence – would be quite unbearable. (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 218)

The ontologically-informed openness to the world – and the accompanying modest attitude that I have been describing, I am arguing – is, from a Deleuzian and Nietzschean perspective, the appropriate disposition, style, or *attitude of the artist*. This artistic attitude of openness, experimentation, and modesty, however, is a suitable *style of life* for more than just “the artist” (who we understood conventionally as the painter, the poet, etc.). Indeed, such an attitude – deriving as it does from what I’m calling a modest ontology – can apply equally to *all* of us. Moreover, philosophers such as Deleuze, Foucault, or Nietzsche routinely urge us – whether we’re making paintings or not – to make of our lives *lived* and *embodied* works of art by adding *style* to our character, etc. In fact, making works of art of our lives is an ethical act, one that finds one predisposed to negotiation, experimentation, and again, openness to an outside and to the non-human. As Deleuze explains:

establishing ways of existing or styles of life isn’t just an aesthetic matter, it’s what Foucault called ethics, as opposed to morality. The difference is that morality presents us with a set of constraining rules of a special sort [while] ethics is a set of optional rules that assess what we do, what we say, in relation to the ways of existing involved. (Deleuze, 1995, p. 100)

Such an attitude of openness demands that we not assert ourselves and that we acknowledge our contingent character and the contingent character of creativity and, indeed, of life itself. This is the attitude I am arguing is modest, one that does not resist the outside; does not rigidly cling to anthropocentric narratives, prescriptions, definitions, and limitations; and does not assert itself by making rigid judgments. Deleuze again:

It's no longer a matter of determinate forms, as with knowledge, or of constraining rules, as with power: it's a matter of *optional rules* that make existence a work of art, rules at once ethical and aesthetic that constitute ways of existing or styles of life (including even suicide). It's what Nietzsche discovered as the will to power operating artistically, inventing new "possibilities of life." (Deleuze, 1995, p. 98)

As Deleuze points out, when we think of life-styling and re-making our lives as works of art we inevitably encounter Nietzsche's vociferous writings on becoming overhumans, on moving beyond what he regarded as petty human concerns: "We want to experience a work of art over and over again! We should fashion our life in this way, so that we have the same wish with each of its parts! This is the main idea!" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 241). Nietzsche, here, is being brought into this project through the back door. Not as a theorist whose work put us on the path towards a modest ontology, but one whose work *becomes* evocative in particular ways as the outlines of a modest ontology are given shape. In other words, by articulating how relationally dependent material and immaterial realities perpetually produce novelty in creative ways we are in position to return to a rather unconventional Nietzschean position – which I will examine more closely in this and subsequent sections – as an adequate response to a radically realistic interpretation of the world's unfolding.

We've returned to the artist through the back door as well in so far as the artist is no longer the painter or the poet; rather, the artist is – potentially – us. The artist, according to the ontological argument I've been developing is not something one *enacts* by engaging in certain behaviours (painting, playing an instrument, etc.); rather, we become-artist as an effect – as a sort of *consequence* – of our engagement with, and understanding of, the world at an ontological level. That is, there is a link – I am suggesting – between ontological belief and artistic ways of being. Artists of the Nietzschean variety are those beings who have freed themselves from the all-too-

human attempt to become distinct from nature, to become an independent being who bestows creativity upon others and the world rather than recognizing that it is s/he who has been, is, and will be a *consequence* of creativity itself, of creative forces that have seized him/her and that provide the artist with innumerable – though determined – relationally-derived creative capacities.

Art, and becoming-artist, requires that we become comfortable with the “untrue,” with fiction, with creative embellishment. Artists need to be comfortable living beyond convention. The artist, in the face of the facts and unknowability of the world’s creative forces – What to paint? How to paint it? What colour? What effect? Who’s the audience? Does anyone care? – does not resist, does not feel the need to control, to limit, to judge. The artist realizes that to create, to have novelty flow through, or use, him or her, s/he must *choose* to cultivate an attitude, an ontological position, a stance towards the world, that embraces the world’s *inability* to be captured, its fickleness, its unwillingness to be defined. This artistic attitude requires that we believe in the earth’s unknowable *potential* to create and that we believe in our own potential to harness, direct, embrace, discover, adapt to, and channel these forces. It demands, as Canning notes, a “new kind of receptivity” and a welcoming of the other’s “real (expressible) desire” (Canning, 2001, p. 87); as Canning describes it, it is the *truly* creative who choose to act according to an “ethical law of mutuality” that, being derived from an ontological understanding of the inherent and emergent creativity of existence, chooses to “receive the other, *a priori*, who receives me”; what follows this choice is an exchange, a relationship in which “we interact – as do all particles in the universe interact – to create (and destroy) each others’ worlds, each ‘held open’ by affirmation of the reality of the other (versus the closed, mutually excluding monads of post-modern – cynical-nihilist – psychosis)” (Canning, 2001, p. 87).

I would like to propose that along with the modest sentiments I’ve been describing there is a plethora of associated “attitudes” or beliefs that need to be chosen in order to *allow* the human, or oneself, to *become-artist*. Again we are articulating a sort of Nietzschean position through the back door. We are saying that on the one hand becoming-artist demands that we make a choice. This choice, however, is not to become-artist, or to become creative. In fact, one does not become any more of an artist through an act of the will, through a great gesture of creativity that if one did nothing at all; rather, one *allows* oneself to become artistically creative by becoming

aware of the creativity that *precedes* any act of the will, that *precedes* any choices, and that *generates* our very ability to choose and to create. What the artist chooses, then, is the attitude of the artist – the acts follow suit.

Artists must also be patient. They must wait, observe, be open, combine, and embrace relationships. This patience is also necessary insofar as all too often that which is created by the artist interfacing with the environment is not recognized by the public, by the people, by those who are required to respond to the new creation. As Deleuze observes, art does not address a people that is “presupposed” as already being there, but addresses a people yet to come, contributing to the “invention of a people” (Deleuze, 2005, p. 209).²⁰⁴

What the artist becomes attuned to is a sort of ecosystem of creativity of which s/he is an expression, a sort of feedback loop of novelty and co-generation. Becoming attuned to these processes is premised upon openness and receptivity to nonhuman forces, to othernesses without essence, to the ways relations give rise to what we experience as individuated forms of expression. To encourage humans to be receptive to this ecosystem of intra-action, this ecotopia of relational receptivity, we need to develop adequate tools and concepts for the task, hence my emphasis on the importance of modesty.

Modesty here is not about passivity; indeed, modesty and patience *must be made to look brave* if we are to embrace this proto-Deleuzo-Nietzschean artistic attitude. Weird realism, or speculative realism (described earlier), theories of emergence, actor-network theory, process philosophy, Nietzschean aesthetics, Spinozist interpretations of affect, Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizomatics, and so on are all instructive in this regard. What these perspectives all share is a recognition that aesthetics, ethics, embodiment, affordances, dispositions, and ontologies (etc.) are, themselves, mutually supporting and reinforcing. These theories, in turn, lend themselves to more pragmatic efforts to develop an ontological framework with which to engage creatively with a multitude of contemporary realities – not least

²⁰⁴ Richter explains Deleuze’s observation as follows, relative to writing in the theoretical humanities: “Like all writing, writing produced in the theoretical humanities relies, by definition, on an imagined reader who does not yet exist, an unknown reader who may or may not one day discover the text like a message in a bottle that has washed ashore in another time and place. A stranded text such as this, its author’s signature faded, is capable of signifying, if it does anything at all, apart from any consideration of its creator, that is to say, in the absence of any authorial control being exercised over its ethical imperatives and political marching plan” (Richter, 2005, p. 4).

pressing ecological realities – insofar as the non-human world is identified as the context out of which all else emerges. Moreover, foregrounding our dependence on non-human relations places greater emphasis on limits, not only our own but those of the earth. Emphasizing limits too, of course, is an exercise in modesty. The sky is not the limit – neither for ourselves or the earth. Each can be exhausted, and our creative response to a world of limits becomes more restricted as the options available to us and the earth atrophy as a result of ecological or attitudinal exhaustion.

For Foucault, whose work developed in his later career into an exploration of techniques of self-care and self-fashioning, our understanding of ourselves must be informed by our assessment of our limits, of our limits as humans, as creators, as organism, as social subjects. In “What is Enlightenment?” Foucault describes the “critical ontology of ourselves” in a way that is congenial to our understanding of the creative human I’ve here been describing. For Foucault, any critical ontology of ourselves must be thought of as an “attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life” wherein our critique of ourselves is framed within a genealogical – or “historical analysis” – of the “limits that are imposed on us”; at the same time, in the face of these limits we must “experiment with the possibility of going beyond them” (Foucault, 1984, p. 50). In other words, it is crucial to know the conditions of one’s emergence in order to begin producing new conditions in order to go elsewhere.

Foucault recognized that existence is conditioned by having always to contend with the extreme limitations imposed on us at each moment. Foucault’s reminder reinforces my argument that regardless of how any future ontological commitments unfold, they must be grounded in an attitude or an ethos of modesty that *takes limits seriously*. This modesty, in my view, is the primary ontological choice that, by defining what we *don’t* believe, defines us as open to creation, to artistry, to novelty, to experimentation, to patience, to listening, to becoming, and to others. Richter extends Foucault’s observation when we writes:

Because true thinking always points beyond itself, is always also something other than merely itself, even when it attempts to remain with itself, it

remains open: open to being pointed elsewhere and open to being thought in another place and by an Other. (Richter, 2005, p. 7)²⁰⁵

Modest ontologies, then, take *limits* seriously because they are built upon an understanding of the world as a realm of mutual reliance and interdependency. Following Deleuze and Guattari, adherents to modest ontologies would regard “universal history” as “the history of contingencies, and not the history of necessity. Ruptures and limits, and not continuity” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 1983). Moreover, a modest ontology is an ontology that acknowledges that what a body can do is itself limited by the networks of relation a given body enters into. As Deleuze and Guattari explain: “We call the latitude of a body the affects of which it is capable at a given degree of power, or rather within the limits of that degree. Latitude is made up of intensive parts falling under a capacity, and longitude of extensive parts falling under a relation” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 256-57).

Limits, it should be noted, occupy an under-discussed dimension of Deleuze (and Guattari’s) work, functioning as the bulwark encountered when a body, for example, finally discovers what it is capable of. Deleuze’s emphasis on the importance of appreciating the role played by limits is exemplified in the following passage:

[I]t is not a question of considering absolute degrees of power, but only of knowing whether a being eventually 'leaps over' or transcends its limits in going to the limit of what it can do, whatever its degree. 'To the limit', it will be argued, still presupposes a limit. Here, limit no longer refers to what maintains the thing under a law, nor to what delimits or separates it from other things. On the contrary, it refers to that on the basis of which it is deployed and deploys all its power; hubris ceases to be simply condemnable and *the smallest becomes equivalent to the largest* once it is not separated from what it can do. This enveloping measure is the same for all things, the same also for substance, quality, quantity, etc., since it forms a single

²⁰⁵ Richter continues: “Only the thinking that is non-self-identical, the thinking that thinks thinking as that which points beyond itself, would then remain faithful to the idea of transformation, the view that the last word has not been spoken and that the world could be – and indeed deserves to be – entirely different. The thinking of thinking, then, would indeed be a thinking without common measure. This thinking of thinking affirms the absence of a common measure that would allow us in advance to judge this or that singular act of thinking and therefore strives to preserve its weak but present hopefulness, an ephemeral prayer that could be disappointed at any moment” (Richter, 2005, p. 7).

maximum at which the developed diversity of all degrees touches the equality which envelops them. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 37)

By adopting an attitude of modesty – an ontology of openness and even of humbleness – we pre-emptively prepare ourselves – we artists! – for the unexpected, for the new, for the unforeseen. We position ourselves as receptive, as ready to embrace we know not what. This, notes Richter, is a receptiveness that generates a “preparedness” for that which thought “is not normally prepared to think” (Richter, 2005, p. 11). By being *prepared* to receive the unknown or the unknowable by having adopted a modest attitude that recognizes the limits of our and the world’s abilities, the tenuousness and contingent nature of our boundaries, of our identities, of what we could (or should) be capable of we are ready for that which “eludes thought” (Richter, 2005, p. 11).²⁰⁶ A modest ontology, then, does not know, or *need* to know, what may befall it. To be modest, in this way, is to be almost naïvely open, childlike. As Picasso once quipped: “It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child.”

4.10 Spinoza’s Self-Interested Co-Creation

Concretely, if you define bodies and thoughts as capacities for affecting and being affected, many things change. You will define an animal, or a human being, not by its form, its organs, and its functions, and not as a subject either; you will define it by the affects of which it is capable. (Deleuze, 1988, p. 124)

Despite the thrust of my dissertation project and the aesthetic theory of Deleuze, for example, there is no special correlation between painting (etc.) and creativity. Instead, painting can be regarded as a sort of placeholder for discussing the conditions of creativity. At the same time, however, there is little correlation between

²⁰⁶ Richter continues: “To do and make things that we do not know requires that we remain open to their unpredictable futurity and significations. Knowing it and not knowing it at the same time, we both honor and betray the infinite responsibility of having to explain ourselves and our thinking without quite knowing how, of having to give an account of what it is we are doing or creating even when that something resists our efforts at explanation” (Richter, 2005, p. 12).

creativity as it is typically understood in our everyday lives (as an expression of individual ingenuity in service, often, of economic imperatives) and the creativity, style of character, or artistic self-creation and expression described by Nietzsche, Deleuze, and this project. In fact, what qualifies as “creative” for these *unconventional* thinkers is wholly different, lying *on the other side* of a very particular ontological undertaking and as a product of a very particular way of being in the world. This way of being is a product, once again, of an ontological attempt to re-enchant the anti-anthropocentric, to avoid judgment and closure, and to be open to becoming, change, and otherness. Human creativity, as we’re thinking about it here, is not accessed directly as though it were a thing lying in wait for our arrival, but emerges as a consequence of openness, commitment, modesty, and experimentation. The truly creative person – the artist – attempts to become attuned to the unconventional, the non-cliché and, as a consequence, chooses to be committed to a particular ontological and ethical attitude. Indeed, the truly creative individual, from a Deleuzo-Nietzschean perspective, seems to be the one who is prepared to identify and leap over all-too-human attitudes, moralities, narratives, conclusions, and, most significantly, limitations. For Nietzsche and Deleuze (and myself, I suppose) the true artist, the person who has added style and artistry to his character is no longer even human, in any conventional sense, having relinquished human preoccupations and other narrow anthro-objectives.

We are calling this attitude a modest one, and its attendant ontology a modest ontology. However, a modest ontology and its attendant ethics needn’t compel us to relinquish self-interest. Indeed, by saying no to human immodesty, modest ontological attitudes must be regarded as an unconventional attempt to *benefit* the more-than-human creator who seeks new, beneficial relationships by relating and being open to others, radically open. In other words, by relinquishing our desire to differentiate ourselves from others (i.e. non-human becoming) according to a hierarchical structure that favours the human over the non-human we can enter a new, more creative space that is shared with others, that does not shun cooperation, that strives to be free of resentment, that embraces change, and that consciously participates in intimate co-creative activities.

The centrality of co-creativity as a counter intuitive expression of self-interest was championed by Spinoza. Spinoza suggests that not only are freedom and creativity achieved by our being able to do what we are capable of doing, freedom and creativity

are also achieved by recognizing the ways we are determined and, notably, the ways we are determined, defined, *and* enabled, by others. Spinoza's theories of what humans can do, as Smith observes, are simultaneously description *of* the human bent on deflating "human pretensions of exceptionalism" (Smith, 2005, p. 7). For Spinoza the human world is not distinct from, nor could it exist separate from, the world in general.²⁰⁷ Spinoza is less impressed by our capacity to dominate and control nature and the world "than by our dependence on and embeddedness within it" (Smith, 2005, p. 8).

Spinoza's perspective on existence is meant to be liberating by being descriptive and explanatory; Spinoza provides a rather atypical ontological account of becoming so that his readers might better understand the conditions of their existence and thereby become free of the burden of desiring the impossible. Recall that Spinoza is interested in our accessing what we can *do*. His ontology, then, is painstakingly designed to be put to work so that they are better able to "adapt uncomplainingly" to the harsh realities – the harsh imperatives and determinations – of existence (Smith, 2005, p. 8). That is, for Spinoza part of being free is to be able to adapt, through understanding, to necessity. As he explains it:

But human power is very limited and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes; so we aren't unrestrictedly able to adapt things outside us to our use. When things go against us, if we are conscious that we have done our duty, that we hadn't the power to avoid those things, and that we are a part of the whole of Nature, whose order we follow, then we shall patiently put up with events that go against our advantage. If we understand this clearly and distinctly, the part of us that is defined by understanding – the better part of us – will be entirely satisfied with this and will try to stay satisfied. For to the

²⁰⁷ "Most of those who have written about the affects and men's way of living write as though their topic was not natural things that follow the common laws of Nature but rather things that are outside Nature. Indeed they seem to think of man in Nature as a kingdom within a kingdom. They don't think of man as following the order of Nature, going through his life in accordance with the causal forces at work within him and impinging on him from the outside; rather, they think that man acts upon and interferes with Nature, having absolute power over his own actions and being determined only by himself. And they don't explain human failings in terms of natural causes, but instead invoke I know not what vice of human nature which they bewail, or laugh at, or sneer at, or (as usually happens) curse. And the people who are regarded as godly are the ones who know how to censure most eloquently and cunningly the weakness of the human mind. It is true that some very distinguished men (to whose work and diligence I admit that I owe much) have written many admirable things about the right way of living, and given men advice full of prudence. But no-one, so far as I know, has determined the nature and powers of the affects, nor what the mind can do to moderate them" (Spinoza, 2004, p. 50).

extent that we understand, we can't want anything except what is necessary, and we can't be satisfied with anything except what is true. To the extent that we rightly understand these things, the efforts of the better part of us are in harmony with the order of the whole of Nature. (Spinoza, 2004, p. 118-19).

In other words, to *understand* things correctly, for Spinoza (and in support of the position being developed here), we must open ourselves to others *so that* we might begin to participate and create as members of “a democratic community”; we must recognize where our “creativity” and “agency” come from, that it is fundamentally enabled and “enhanced by joining with others” (Smith, 2005, p. 8). For Spinoza, it is crucial that we relinquish our illusions of independence by cultivating a greater understanding of the conditions of our creativity. Doing so, it must be made clear, is in our interest. That is, subscribing to a modest ontology and embracing a modest view of our *inherent* abilities by openly engaging with the capacities of others is not only an act of “modesty” – in conventional terms – but an act that is selfish, in a good way. This “modesty,” then, is an *active* form of *self-interested modesty*, a modesty that results from a realization of creativity's character, a modesty that conceptually reorganizes relationships of affecting and being affected in support of a more sustainable and pleasurable and co-creative future.

Spinoza observes that if two people appropriately disposed to one other by the right attitude of openness interact with one another “they compose an individual twice as powerful as each of them separately” (Spinoza, 2004, p. 93). There is nothing, he observes, more useful to someone than someone else.

Minds, however, are conquered not by weapons but by love and nobility. It is especially useful to men to relate closely to one another, binding themselves by whatever bonds are apt to make them one, and – another absolute rule – to do whatever will strengthen their friendship. (Spinoza, 2004, p. 116)

That which is to our greatest advantage would be a situation wherein we consciously work to get along, wherein we recognize – and embrace – the capacities of one another, relinquishing our desires to go it alone or to do it ourselves. Spinoza writes:

So there is nothing more useful to a man than a man. Men, I repeat, can wish for nothing more helpful to their staying in existence than that all men should

be in such harmony that the minds and bodies of them all would be like one mind and one body; that all together should try as hard as they can to stay in existence; and that all together should seek for themselves the common advantage of all. (Spinoza, 2004, p. 93)

For Spinoza *this* is what reason and freedom look like – like a community of co-creative forces free of resentment thanks to “understanding,” open to one another, to what befalls them, and to the mutually-supportive newnesses that are always on their way. Spinoza was convinced that it is reason itself that provides us with the ability to look beyond our immediate, short-term, concerns towards an open future that will, undoubtedly, be determined by the state of relationships between ourselves and others and between others and others as these relationships unfold from moment to moment. Reason’s foresight enables the reasonable person to recognize that working *with* others (whether human others or non-human others) and supporting others will – *in time* – give rise not only to congenial relationships, but to greater social complexity, to an intensification of creative interconnections. We are best rewarded, then, by putting the needs and desires of others alongside our own, by regarding the interests of others as being synonymous with the interests of ourselves. As Spinoza explains, anyone who lives “by the guidance of reason” works as hard as s/he can to not be seduced into conflict in the pursuit of short-term personal gain. The reasonable person “tries as hard as he can to repay any hate, anger, and disdain that others have toward him with love or nobility” (Spinoza, 2004, p. 104).

The realities that others experience must be regarded as functioning within a wider context and as being determined by forces that – although unable to be comprehensively understood – *are* able to be empathized with. Indeed, it is precisely the incomprehensibility of life’s forces that makes empathy, modesty, and a generosity of understanding so crucial. The ability to resist one’s own irrational desires – desires that regard one’s own opinion or position as more significant than it is – requires that the rational person recognize that his/her own interests are, in fact, best served by being responsive to the interests of others. After all, Spinoza observes, because thinking this way leads one to understand that “all things follow from the necessity of the divine nature, and happen according to the eternal laws and rules of Nature” there remains nothing that is even worthy of “hate, mockery or disdain” (Spinoza, 2004, Ethics, p. 105). Spinoza reinforces this point by stating that those who are governed by reason – those who “seek their own advantage” (Spinoza, 2004,

p. 93) – want for others what they want for themselves and are therefore, he says, “just, honest, and honourable” (Spinoza, 2004, p. 93).²⁰⁸

Spinoza’s vision of fostering complex, intra-related environments as a means of being able to actualize what one is capable of – what one is capable of creating – does not end with the social relations and merely cognitive understanding. That is, it is not simply complex *social* relationships that contribute to one’s being able to fulfill one’s potential; rather, one is best able to tap into the opportunities created by complex environments if one’s *whole body* and *being* (so to speak) are intimately engaged in interdependent relationships on a multitude of levels. Entering into relationships adds to one’s ability to act. In Spinoza’s view, not just our minds but our bodies too must be engaged from all sides, being themselves complex systems whose creativity can be enhanced by entering into complex relationships in order to actualize what *they* are capable of. He explains, at length, that the maintenance of all the body’s functions is important because:

the greater a body’s ability to affect and be affected by external bodies in a great many ways, the more the corresponding mind is capable of thinking. [...] Indeed, the human body is composed of a great many parts of different kinds, requiring a steady intake of various kinds of food so that the whole body may be equally capable of doing everything that its nature permits, and thus so that the mind can be capable of conceiving many things. But the power of a single man would hardly be sufficient for him to bring this about for himself, so what is needed is for men to help one another to get what is needed for the support of life. (Spinoza, 2004, p. 118)

A balanced diet of food, bodily pleasures, social relationships.... What Spinoza regards as most useful to humans ends up itself being a cliché: we find strength and safety in numbers. What he is also suggesting is that in numbers we will have a better chance of maximizing what we are capable of, what we can do: “Men [and women] are most useful to one another when each man most seeks his own advantage for

²⁰⁸ “Those are the dictates of reason that I said I would sketch here, before starting to demonstrate them in a more laborious geometrical way. In sketching them I have been trying to attract the attention of those who believe that the principle Everyone is bound to seek his own advantage is the basis not of virtue and morality [pietas] but of moral laxity! Having now briefly indicated that this is the reverse of the truth, I shall now get back to demonstrating that with the same method that I have been using all through” (Spinoza, 2004, p. 93).

himself” (Spinoza, 2004, p. 98). Spinoza is describing here a simple situation wherein adding complexity adds to the potential for (creative) combinations.

Selfishness – counter-intuitively achieved by expanding one’s ability to act in concert with others – is here understood as a virtue *because* it is virtuous, it is reasoned, it makes sense, it is open to others, and it does not resist the ways existence is defined by its determinations. We should recall too that his emphasis on recognizing our reliance upon others does not exclude, but is a consequence of, our ongoing relationship with the world’s (determined) change and becoming, etc. As Smith reminds us, for Spinoza freedom and determinism are not opposed but mutually reinforcing: “To the extent that we understand the causes of our behavior, the better able we are to take control of them” (Smith, 2005, p. 12-3). To understand and appreciate and even embrace our occasional impotence in the face of determinations is not to stand passively or helplessly before them (Smith, 2005, p. 12-3). Instead, this knowledge, as Smith notes, functions to *increase* our creative capacity insofar as this knowledge itself has its own sets of affordances, propensities, and capacities.²⁰⁹ That is, the mere act of embracing openness produces new creative forces with their own dispositions and potential “lines of flight.” We might say that creativity generates creativity, if what we mean by creativity is a *change* to conventional habits and clichés. Yielding to determinism yields its own – new – set of determinations.

Taking the point-of-view, situation, and experience of other’s seriously (and we’ll here be suggesting that non-human entities have “points-of-view,” etc., that are worth acknowledging) has increasingly become, on the coattails of post-Nietzschean, post-Deleuzean, and post-morality critique, a well articulated ethical (and in our case aesthetic) position of some significance. Writers like Bennett (2010), Connolly (2005), Coles (1992, 1996, 1997, 2005), Latour (2005), Vattimo (1993, 1997, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007) and more all extol the merits of incorporating and recognizing the significance of multiple perspectives in general, and one’s ability to consider, embrace, critique, and engage with more than one “subject position” at once. These theories, as William Connolly explains regard the uniqueness of human agency as

²⁰⁹ “More than any other philosopher, with the possible exception of Plato, Spinoza attributes a genuinely transformative and emancipatory aspect to knowledge. When I understand the cause for some piece of compulsive or habitual behavior, I am in a better position to control for it in the future. Such knowledge also increases my sense of responsibility, as the more I understand the causes of my actions, the greater is my ability to choose what I shall do. Knowledge, then, is not simply a passive affect but an active power that is fully articulated within the causal order of which it is a part” (Smith, 2005, p. 12-3).

rather

“exaggerated”:

[W]e worry that such hubris finds expression in the domains of imperialism, destructive economic patterns, failures to engage multiple affinities between us and other aspects of nature, and self-contained theories of morality. (Connolly, 2008, p. 244)

These positions, then, promote pluralistic – rather than individualistic or isolationist – perspectives as a way to articulate a sort of “weak thought” (Vattimo, 2006) that reckons – with Spinoza – that we are only able to operate at the maximum of our abilities when we are compelled – whether ontologically or ethically or both – to act *with* the others (human and non-human) who *produce the conditions for our actions and creativity* in the first place.

4.11 Bicameralism and Collaborative Creativity

When one speaks of humanity, the idea is fundamental that this is something which separates and distinguishes man from nature. In reality, however, there is no such separation: ‘natural’ qualities and those called truly ‘human’ are inseparably grown together. Man, in his highest and noblest capacities, is wholly nature and embodies its uncanny dual character. (Nietzsche, 1976, p. 32)

The openness to other perspectives (again, let’s not restrict ourselves to human perspectives) I’m describing here is an expression of bicameralism. To be bicameral is to hold multiple or opposing views as a means of seeking a deeper, more open, more nuanced understanding of a state of affairs. One’s relationship to any of the perspectives on offer is less important than the act of incorporating them into what one understands to be a greater good, namely the very act of incorporation, of being open to revision and discussion. This view, as James Williams notes, is not about becoming tolerant – with its implied superiority – but of becoming genuinely empathetic, becoming able to identify and even take advantage of the forces at work in the position, attitudes, and actions of others – whether human or not (Williams, 2008, p. 141). To embrace bicameralism as an ethical position in itself is to embrace, like the creator in Nietzsche’s or Deleuze’s writing, ambiguity as a “positive good” or as a potent zone of potential (Williams, 2008, p. 141). Like the beneficent co-

conspirators of Spinoza's ideal world of interrelation the ideal bicameral situation is one wherein both parties recognize the significance of bicameralism itself in any effort to creatively come to an agreement that has the potential not only to avoid conflict, but to benefit both parties.

Bicameral relations, then, must be enacted from positions of strength. This strength, however, is not strength that is derived from the weakness of others, but is achieved, as Spinoza reminds us, through understanding the relationally-dependent conditions of one's own "individual" creativity. This is an understanding that recognizes that individuals can expand their creative power – their ability *to do* – by embracing rather than distancing; moreover, the unforeseeable must be pursued rather than avoided. Further, one must be strong – by being "weak" or "modest" – to articulate a bicameral position because it certainly brings with it its own sort of risk; that is, by becoming open and by seeking to multiply creativity-enhancing relations through experimentation (etc.) one risks becoming open to potential harm. Pursuing the new, then, is a risky endeavour. Nonetheless, creation is hoped for and pursued through radical collaboration with the hope that destruction and violence and conflict can be averted (Williams, 2008, p. 141).²¹⁰ Like artistic expression the bicameral experience, by negotiating with otherness, evolves ambiguously, operating according to its own capacities and dispositions (Williams, 2008, p. 143).

Williams observes that any bicameral exchange will, necessarily, generate novel arrangements and solutions to problems because, as all parties interact according to their abilities, ideas and relationships that had been excluded or unforeseen become present through ongoing processes of negotiation:

Finally, if we are to search for novel solutions to actual conflicts, this can only take place by introducing ideas at present excluded from the situation. New thought, new wagers, original constructions and novel images are the

²¹⁰ "I would therefore prefer to say that bicameralism embraces ambiguity in politics, because ambiguity is a positive good; it does not therefore ask for tolerance in return, but sets an example for a system of mutually assured risk taking, where each side is sufficiently ambiguous, questioning of its own certainties and open to other positions, to ensure the security of all. When you stare across the table, your eyes meet a foe strong enough to set itself against its own beliefs and imaginative enough to experiment with yours. There is therefore a generous and unavoidable risk in bicameralism, toned down by its paradoxical bent. We do not throw away our deepest beliefs or bow to potential oppressors; we wager claims to infallibility and to absolute certainty in return for an entry to another possible world, one that could make its way into our hearts and minds, but does not at the moment of the wager" (Williams, 2008, p. 140-41).

condition for the forward momentum of time. Such momentum cannot be consistent with ideas of present absolutes. (Williams, 2008, p. 149)

Williams notes that like with the process of artistic creation, these open-ended bicameral or multicameral negotiations demand the creation of “novel occasions that resist the fixity of any given actual world” (Williams, 2008, p. 149).

The article by Williams in which these observations of his are published is entitled, “How to be Bicameral: Reading William Connolly’s Pluralism with Whitehead and Deleuze.” In this article Williams makes explicit the potential to connect the ethical pluralism of Connolly with the rhizomatics of Deleuze and the processual organicism of Whitehead. This relationship, as I am attempting to make explicit, is one wherein aesthetics, becoming, ethics, and creativity (and determinism, propensities, etc.) are all inextricably linked, and to again recall Barad’s term, intra-related.

Quoting Whitehead, Williams emphasizes the benefits for ethics (and for our purposes here: aesthetics and creativity) that a pluralist attitude inaugurates insofar as it represents an antidote to rigid politics, hierarchical aesthetic logics, and dominant ideologies, etc.:

No element is in fact ineffectual: thus the struggle with evil is a process of building up a mode of utilization by the provision of intermediate elements introducing a complex structure of harmony. The triviality in some initial reconstruction of order expresses the fact that actualities are being produced, which, trivial in their own proper character of immediate ‘ends’, are proper ‘means’ for the emergence of a world at once lucid, and intrinsically of immediate worth. (Whitehead 1978, 340–341)

Williams remarks that Whitehead’s statement creates a space wherein small shifts and changes can have large and significant effects since they are not being undone by the distance and vastness of the infinite poles of oppositional ontologies. That is, each small gesture has value and significance when the playing field upon which discussion or bicameralism is occurring is recognized as *itself* shifting ground sensitive to the smallest inputs and feedbacks.

The objective of bicameralism is, for those of us interested in collaboratively creative solutions, to have the strength to *be open* so that new options can emerge, to subsume our own desires by attuning ourselves to the more potent affordances, dispositions, propensities, characteristics, and tendencies at work in the creating and creative world that has created us. Existence's paradoxes can be productively engaged. Ambiguity is a strength if what we want to create are new relationships, new becomings. Williams cautions that we must not fall for "negations and contradictions" but must (like the artist!) create "new words and concepts that open up the debate" (Williams, 2008, p. 153). In other words, don't ever assume "that a pluralist exchange can be over":

Be suspicious of all claims to the last word; they are necessarily false. Embrace paradox and contradiction, since only through them can new and liberating senses flow into conflict and scission. (Williams, 2008, p. 153)

The ethicist becomes artist, the artist an ethicist.

4.12 Creative Self-Fashioning and Loving our Fate

One is an artist at the cost of regarding that which all non-artists call "form" as content, as "the matter itself." To be sure, then one belongs in a topsy-turvy world: for henceforth content becomes something merely formal – our life included. (Nietzsche, 1968b, p. 433)

Supplemental rationality. – All things that live long are gradually so saturated with reason that their origin in unreason thereby becomes improbable. Does not almost every precise history of an origination impress our feelings as paradoxical and wantonly offensive? (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 9)

The vanity of existence is revealed in the whole form existence assumes: in the infiniteness of time and space contrasted with the finiteness of the individual in both; in the fleeting present as the sole form in which actuality exists; in the contingency and relativity of all things; in continual becoming

without being; in continual desire without satisfaction; in the continual frustration of striving of which life consists. (Schopenhauer, 1970, p. 51)

Nietzsche is the philosopher who most intricately and expressively emphasized the relationship between artistic creation and styles of living, between ontological positions and our ability to be creative with nature, between aesthetics and a deliberate and peculiar form of ethics. Nietzsche sought to reveal the hollowness of the idols of old in order to create – to concoct – a people-yet-to-come, a resentment-free “creative class” who weren’t so much human (in any conventional sense) as they were forces of nature.

Nietzsche, using aphorism and bombastic rhetoric, tries to shake us from our slumber – our guilt ridden, resentment-filled lives – in order to transform us into beings – over-humans – who embrace change (rather than cling to the same), who embrace a world composed of creative *lies* (rather than unquestioned truths), and who harbour no resentment towards others, nor to the forces in the world that – inevitably – will destroy us (rather than cultivate morality-laden hierarchies and comparative schemas).

All of these strategies – strategies meant to liberate us from the cloying tendrils of convention and what passes for “culture” are encapsulated in Nietzsche’s most insistent demand – that we embrace wholeheartedly that which befalls us in life, that we love our fate, that we *amor fati*.

In a section entitled, “Why I Am So Clever,” from his autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche euphorically extols the virtues of loving our fate:

My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be other than it is, not in the future, not in the past, not in all eternity. Not merely to endure that which happens of necessity, still less to dissemble it – all idealism is untruthfulness in the face of necessity – but to *love it....*” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 509)

Or in his notes compiled as *The Will to Power* he explains:

The highest state a philosopher can attain: to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence – my formula for this is *amor fati*. (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 536)

With this call *to love our fate* Nietzsche presents us with a complex challenge. The challenge is something like this: In order to become a great human being you have to perform – indeed, you have to *will* – the most creative act imaginable: you have to love the life that will (ultimately) destroy you, you have to embrace a journey that inevitably results in your demise, you have to adore a world based on fictions, lies, and untruths, you have to love the unlovable, and most importantly you have to convince yourself that you *desire* that which befalls you, that to which you are *fated*. In order to be worthy of this creative act we must, in turn, become artists.

Nietzsche, of course, recognized (given his host of ailments and disappointments and eventual unfortunate demise) that life is hard. It is so hard that in order to *love* it we have to resort to stupendous acts of willing, we have to choose and decide to say “yes!” to something that is, at times, intolerable and unfathomable.²¹¹ We are tasked, then, with *creating* value where none – in any final way – exists.

Nietzsche declares that in order to *create* value out of illusions, we have to believe in our inner fantasy-worlds while, at the same time, reflexively being conscious of their being a fiction, a set of metaphors;²¹² indeed, we have to forget almost all the conventional fictions that constitute our all-too-human existence while, concurrently, making – and loving – the fictions we make for ourselves, and with and by others. Nietzsche explains that it is only by forgetting – indeed, choosing to forget – “this primitive world of metaphor” that we can hope to live “with any repose, security, and consistency” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 119). Nietzsche explains at length how forgetting can only be achieved by acknowledging that we are always already “artistically creative” subjects creating within a world that is itself “a work of art that gives birth to itself” (Nietzsche, 1968b, p. 419):

²¹¹ Of course, Nietzsche’s understanding of life as an unrelentingly unappealing proposition is taken to another level with his doctrine of the eternal return.

²¹² As Nietzsche famously reminds us, all is in fact metaphor: “What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms-in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins” (Nietzsche, 1999b, p. 146).

Only by forgetting this primitive world of metaphor, only by virtue of the fact that a mass of images, which originally flowed in a hot, liquid stream from the primal power of the human imagination, has become hard and rigid, only because of the invincible faith that *this* sun, *this* window, this table is a truth in itself – in short only because man forgets himself as a subject, and indeed as *an artistically creative* subject, does he live with some degree of peace, security, and consistency; if he could escape for just a moment from the prison walls of this faith, it would mean the end of his ‘consciousness of self.’ He even has to make an effort to admit to himself that insects or birds perceive a quite different world from that of human being, and that the question as to which of these two perceptions of the world is the more correct is quite meaningless, since this would require them to be measured by the criterion of the *correct perception*, i.e. by a *non-existent* criterion. But generally it seems to me that the correct perception – which would mean the full and adequate expression of an object in the subject – is something contradictory and impossible; for between two absolutely different spheres, such as subject and object are, there is no causality, no correctness, no expression, but at most an *aesthetic* way of relating, by which I mean an allusive transeference, a stammering translation into a quite different language. (Nietzsche, 1999b, p. 148)

This forgetting Nietzsche is referring to, of course, is not some sort of passive phenomenon that *will* happen in time, but an active and creative form of forgetting that is *willed*. We forget the world of all-too-human metaphors because we choose to ignore them, because we, *as artists*, will be *disposed* to forget them. The goal is to creatively cultivate *new habits* or *instincts* that break with the past insofar as they cultivate a new *willed* world of metaphor and artistry that is embraced not for its proximity to reality or truth, but for being false, fiction, illusion: “We cultivate a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that the first nature withers away” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 138). As Nietzsche explains, it is only by *forgetting* or ignoring (since this implies that a sort of *willing* is involved in this process) the fact that we are *always already* “an *artistically creating* subject” that we can persist in our lies in a world that is *always already* lying to us (in so far as there exist no stable or context-free truths).

Becoming and embracing who we are – creators of fiction – is, for Nietzsche, what is synonymous with freedom. We are free to be creators of fiction because as artists that is what we already are. Indeed, we are incapable of *not* being creators of fiction – artists – and it is only by *recognizing* this and then *embracing* this fact that we are able to be free of it. It is only by *loving* our fate – *amor fati*! – that we begin to be able consciously to create ourselves *as* works of art, to create with a reckless abandon not tied to convention or to the past. It is only by loving our fate that we begin to be able to experiment without convention's restrictions, make free-marks in pursuit of the unknown newness sought by what we call *the artist*. Unfortunately, as we know, this is difficult. Habits are hard to break. Being open to creativity while choosing to forget the past we once believed in is not a simple matter; indeed, one wonders what Nietzsche ultimately means by forgetting. Is this yet another metaphor, another fiction we must ignore in order to move forward, to create? Nietzsche notes that for humans it's hard enough just to admit that insects or birds perceive "an entirely different world from the one that man does"; he observes also that questions bent on determining which perceptions of "reality" are "more correct" are entirely "meaningless," only able to be responded to by appealing to some previous criterion of "*correct perception*" – a criterion which, of course, "*is not available*" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 119).

Nietzsche notes, too, that criticism and naysaying by itself is never a true challenge: "Oh, pulling down is easy; but rebuilding!"²¹³ (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 13). It strikes me, though, that the rebuilding Nietzsche requires of us with his cry of *amor fati* is a rebuilding that will proceed only once a sort of willed ontological paradigm shift has occurred, only once we are inclined to perceive the world as a becoming that *merits* no resentment, a world that is – as Spinoza has explained – merely *a result* of its processes, rather than a world whose processes are a result of some ill-intentioned or destructive force. In other words, to overcome resentment requires a special type of *artistic* understanding; ideally, from such understanding comes openness and from openness comes a sort of resentment-free love for what becomes. The artist, for Nietzsche, must *become* non-human by moving beyond the conventional concerns of

²¹³ Nietzsche continues: "And pulling down seems easier than it is. We are determined in our innermost being by the impressions of our childhood, the influence of our parents, our educations. These deeply rooted prejudices are not so easily removed by reasoning or mere will. The power of habits, the need to strive for higher ideals, the break with all that is established, the dissolution of all forms of society, the question whether mankind hasn't been deceived for two thousand years by a phantom, the sense of one's arrogance and rashness: all struggle against one another in an uncertain strife until, finally, painful experiences and mournful events lead our heart back again to the old childhood beliefs" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 13).

the all-too-human. He explains: “The artist belongs to a still stronger race. What would be harmful and morbid in us, in his is nature” (Nietzsche, 1968b, p. 430).

As Brodsky states, the notion of *amor fati* identifies “a project of becoming well disposed to life and ourselves which is partially defined in terms of the ideal of loving life and our respective fates” (Brodsky, 1998, p. 35). This project, he goes on, requires us “to come to grips with life and ourselves”; this is done by engaging in a series of interconnected activities of “self-discovery, self-fashioning and self-love” (Brodsky, 1998, p. 36) – by being open to life. It is up to us to give meaning and vitality to life “in view of the character of life and of the complex ways people depend on their pasts and the environments in which they live” (Brodsky, 1998, p. 54-5).²¹⁴

This conclusion of Nietzsche’s, this need for openness to *fate* – to the mechanistic unfolding of the potential of things – derives from his decision to understand the world as Will to Power, as an intra-connected network of intra-related non-personal forces. These forces are at once blameless, remorseless, and free of any intention to harm – they just do what they are capable of:

‘Beauty’ is for the artist something outside all orders of rank, because in beauty opposites are tamed; the highest sign of power, namely power over opposites; moreover, without tension: – that violence is no longer needed; that everything follows, obeys, so easily and so pleasantly – that is what delights the artist’s will to power. (Nietzsche, 1968b, p. 432)

Transforming this realization of the world as a burgeoning field of impersonal novelty and (ultimately determined²¹⁵) creativity into an act of love is, for Nietzsche, what is

²¹⁴ Brodsky continues: “This project is immensely important for Nietzsche because he believes that the usual ways in which people have tried to achieve this goal have and must fail. He believes that the otherworldly religious or metaphysical views which formerly gave meaning to human life are untenable and that the various socio-political movements and ideals which promised to replace them had either already failed or have no likelihood of succeeding. That leaves us with our selves and our world and the project of coming to love them. Now it might be observed that Nietzsche was not the only thinker who came to this conclusion and favored this project. That of course is true. But even if he was not alone in favoring this project he surely is among the very few thinkers who defined it in exceptionally demanding but realistic terms” (Brodsky, 1998, p. 54-5).

²¹⁵ Regarding Nietzsche’s attitude to determinism, or fatalism, Brodsky writes: “But Nietzsche objects that if, as the fatalist holds, everything is fated then we are as much fated to resist as to accept our fates and the fatalist’s advice is of no use to us. He also claims that while the logic of fatalism is based on a radical separation of us and our fates which makes it possible for the fatalist to advise us not to resist these fates when we might be inclined to do so, no such radical separation exists. So a distinction the fatalist requires to state his position is unavailable to him and we have no

required of us and of himself; of himself he writes: “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 thing beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth!” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 227).²¹⁶

It must be insisted that Nietzsche’s foregrounding of the relationship between fate and creative self-fashioning is potentially counter-intuitive, and undoubtedly a bit confusing. How can creativity come about in a world that unfolds according to fate? Again, however, we have to recall that there needn’t be any opposition between a fated future and that future’s ability to be creative and to produce novelty (i.e. to create the new). Fate needn’t negate change, emergent behaviour, becoming, or difference. Similarly, fatedness needn’t imply that that which is fated is moving *towards* some predetermined goal; rather, that which is fated here is understood as describing that which could not have been otherwise in light of the novel conditions of its emergence. As Nietzsche says: “fate is nothing else but a chain of events” so that “man, as soon as he acts, creates his own events, determines his own fate; that, in general, events, insofar as they affect him, are, consciously or unconsciously, brought about by himself and must suit him” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 16).

We can speculate as well that insofar as Nietzsche (or Deleuze or Spinoza or Whitehead) regards the world and existence as a single plane of immanence, the world’s ability to produce change is not an ability that is relative to stability (or change) being produced in some other-worldly, or separate, sphere of existence. That is, insofar as the immanent world’s changes are internal and related only to internal – as opposed to external – realities, the status of “fate,” or the meaning of a fated becoming is not in opposition to any *other* reality or possibility. In other words, the significance of ours being a world that is fated is *insignificant* insofar as there are no other alternatives. Our immanent world is immanent only to itself; there are no

reason to take the position seriously. If this is Nietzsche’s position, i.e., if he holds that human behavior is determined but not determined or pre-determined in ways which warrant advising people to resign themselves to what they take to be their fates instead of resisting what they find undesirable in the world and in themselves, has he any reason to talk of fate and the love of fate? The answer based on what we find in *Gay Science* where the notion of *amor fati* is introduced is that there is ample reason for him to do this. For if we think of a person’s fate as that part of herself which is obdurate, then it can be argued that one of the main themes of *Gay Science* concerns the interplay between a person’s fate, her knowledge and love of that fate and the ways in which she can deal with it” (Brodsky, 1998, p. 38-9).

²¹⁶ Nietzsche continues: “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” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 227).

actual alternatives available. At the same time, it's a world that is as creative a place as possible, always operating at the maximum of what it is capable of. There is nothing to compare it to or judge it against (despite the apparent reality of our desires and "needs," what for Nietzsche, would be excessively anthropocentric disposition deriving from self-interested figments of our imagination).

The world, then, changes relative to itself as that which changes. Fatedness is all we've got – our only option. But this observation – this reality – is, as Nietzsche observes, ultimately irrelevant (since in this ontology there are no alternatives). So, fate and creativity – call it what you will – are simply two methods of describing what remains a process of change and differentiation. Nietzsche explains:

In freedom of will lies, for the individual, the principle of emancipation, the separation from the whole, absolute limitlessness. But fate places man once more in an organic relation to the total development and requires him, insofar as it seeks to dominate him, to a free counteractive development. Absolute freedom of will, absent fate, would make man into a god; the fatalistic principle would make him an automaton. (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 17)

This no-alternatives-position, then, is why we must love our degree of fatedness – we have no choice. And since love, if we are wanting to think pragmatically, is more productive or sustainable or useful or valuable than hate, we must respond to the question of loving vs. hating by embracing the world of fateful becoming that, after all, gives us to ourselves.

Solomon argues that Nietzsche's fatalism and his self-making are, in the end, "two sides of the same coin and not at odds or contradictory" (Solomon, 2002, p. 63). In other words, in Nietzsche's view for creativity to continue one's fate must perpetually be overcome. That is, we are always faced with the challenge of moving past or of overcoming the way we most recently were an incarnation of fate; or, stated according to the vocabulary we've been developing here, just as fate is that which forces us to encounter our limits, it is also the condition that we must choose to overcome if we are to move to the next fated moment (if we are to continue to be creative). As Grillaert explains, fate for Nietzsche is a "necessity" that allows the will to operate:

[Fate] is the eternal force of resistance, of opposition against free will. Fate and free will are two opposing, antithetical forces whose specific significance and characteristic lies precisely in this opposition. For like the notion of the spirit is inconceivable without the idea of reality, like the concept of good cannot be separated from evil, free will is unthinkable without fate. (Grillaert, 2006, p. 51)

We could elaborate by observing that insofar as human beings have what could be described as dispositions or inclinations, they experience or exhibit agency or free will in situations wherein these dispositions are able to navigate a world of limits in a way that enables human dispositions to do what they are capable of. Worth mentioning, of course, is that any act that expresses human willing will be determined by the real world since we don't have capacities that exceed the immanent realm. For this reason free will must necessarily be limited because what we are capable of is always enabled or disabled by what is at hand. We can see here how creativity and the expression of this more bounded version of willing relates to experimentation, for it is only through experimentation and exploration that the artist experiences what s/he is capable of in a world wherein that which s/he is capable of is determined by the materials and the capacities of the things at hand. We can be creative only with that which is available to us – whether those things are material or immaterial, etc. Free will, then, is not some *thing* that pre-exists its expression, but can be understood as following on from someone's successful attempt at pursuing what s/he is capable of pursuing, achieving that which is capable of being achieved (but which can not be known before hand). Furthermore, an individual's so-called freedom is always exerted relative to an other, a limit; freedom, then, always issues forth from an encounter with that which enables us to do, to create, to encounter what we are capable of.²¹⁷ In this way, freedom is necessarily condemned to its fate.

Nietzsche is no hard determinist, but a theorist of creativity who recognizes that each and every one of our creative acts emerges from complex relationships of

²¹⁷ "In Nietzsche's conception, free will is equal to self-determination, to the autonomous determination and creation of one's own values. It is not some kind of metaphysical faculty that humans are a priori endowed with; it is rather an opportunity that has to be shaped and elaborated in a process of determining oneself. We now have a first hint of Nietzsche's positive understanding of free will: freedom of will means to possess the power to determine oneself. This might seem paradoxical at face value, for does not the concept of determination, even when it is only applied to one self, exclude free will? In what way are both concepts compatible in Nietzsche's philosophy?" (Grillaert, 2006, p. 47).

affordances, dispositions, and capacities: “Because fate appears to man in the mirror of his own personality, individual freedom of will and individual fate are well-matched opponents” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 16). Self-fashioning or creativity can only occur when our “fate” throws up obstacles that force us to move beyond it by experimenting, by exploring alternatives, and by pursuing unforeseen pathways in our attempts to achieve that towards which we are disposed (however consciously) and our attempts to satisfy our *desires*. Creativity is impossible without this tension between desires and obstacles, willing and limitation, fatedness and its overcoming. Creativity cannot exist in a smooth space (to use a Deleuzian term) since within such a metaphorical space there is no resistance, nothing with which to be creative: no limits, challenges, or problems. Nietzsche’s demand that we love our fate seems reasonable, however, insofar as it is this very fate – that which befalls us, that which limits us – that creates the conditions that generate our ability to continue to be creative. In a short reflection on the fatedness of thought, Nietzsche writes:

Freedom of will, in itself nothing but freedom of thought [...] Thoughts cannot go beyond the boundary of the circle of ideas. But the circle of ideas is based upon mastered intuitions that can, with amplification, grow and become stronger without going beyond the limits determined by the brain. Likewise, freedom of will is capable of enhancement within the limits of the same farthest point. It is another matter to put the will to work. The capacity for this is dispensed to us in a fatalistic way” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 16)

As Grillaert explains, by “incorporating the impersonal fate in [...] life and conjoining it with [our] personal characteristics and actions”²¹⁸ we personalize and individualize “the remote concept of fate”; in other words the “persistent human will” – our dispositions and capacities – receive and convert “this impersonal fate to a personal individual fate” (Grillaert, 2006, p. 52).²¹⁹ Fate, then, only has meaning relative to that which resists it, to the inclinations and dispositions and creative acts that move beyond *this* fated situation to the *next*.

²¹⁸ “The conflict between fate and free will is inherent in the individual’s being. The human personality is shaped both by fate and free will: fate provides man with a multitude of external elements (education, environment, etc.) out of which man selects what fits him best by the inner faculty of free will and eventually molds all impressions together to his own personal destiny. Every individual determines for himself in what way he reconciles fate and free will in his life, how he conjoins them in his personal destiny” (Grillaert, 2006, p. 53).

²¹⁹ Grillaert continues: “Humans believing in and transforming fate into personal destiny distinguish themselves by strength of will, whereas people who submit their individual will to the will of God are too afraid and cowardly to face their destiny” (Grillaert, 2006, p. 52).

Free will and fate remain, of course, subjects of ongoing philosophical debate. At the same time, what we consider free will is most certainly conditioned by our expectations of what freedom might be like. Like the artist who feels less burdened when given strict parameters with which to work, the conception of creativity I am attempting to articulate is one that is *more* free than some of the alternatives, especially due to its emphasis on the role of relationships, non-human actors, and determinant factors in the generation of ongoing creative events. Indeed, causality itself – that force which is so connected to deterministic thought – is opened up when we begin to incorporate the full significance of a world that is intra-related and always changing. For instance, we tend to think of causal determinism as occurring in a relationship wherein A follows B when condition C is present. But in a rhizomatically connected world wherein difference is the only constant neither A nor B nor C ever remains what it just was; indeed, all three are themselves undergoing constant transformation – whether at macro or micro scales. Causality itself, in this case, is anything but consistent due to the fact that the conditions of the condition (i.e. the causes) were themselves never stable. Nevertheless, the shifts and transformations of A, B, and C *do* have determined *and novel* consequences that aren't able to be predicted. So while all events are caused this does not mean that they are caused in the same way as they might seem to be at a glance since that which is doing the so-called causing is always *itself* different than it was; indeed, how can we speak of causes at all when that which causes is never itself and is always becoming different?

Creative self-fashioning, then, is potentially as creative as anything else despite – or indeed, because of – its fatedness. The integral nature of fate and creativity, of determinism and becoming, of limits and an infinite number of potentialities lays out a scenario that cannot be resisted, or at least one that – if resisted – will happen anyways. Fate, dispositions, determinism, and creativity will unfold with or without our approval, let alone our “love.” And it is this very inevitability – the fatedness of fate – that Nietzsche requires us to love.²²⁰ This uniquely Nietzschean love is a love, an embrace, or at the very least an acceptance of complexity and precariousness, one that interprets conventions as shortsighted and inadequate responses to unceasing problems and questions. Solomon observes that Nietzsche's self-making is a type of

²²⁰ “Nietzsche suggests that our fate cannot be countermanded, and our only option is therefore to ‘love it’” (Solomon, 2002, p. 70).

self-cultivation dependent on one's "native talents" and "instincts,"²²¹ as well as on one's "environment" and "the influence of other people and one's culture"²²²; we don't, then, make ourselves "on, a basis of absolute ontological freedom (as Sartre famously insists)" (Solomon, 2002, p. 64), but instead *participate* in the creation of a sort of composition of which we are a part.²²³ When Nietzsche exhorts us to become who we are he recognizes that what we are is itself multiple, is itself not an it, but an interconnected and interdependent composition of forces.²²⁴

Much like Spinoza, Nietzsche urges us to re-orient our outlook on life. This re-orientation is based on the cultivation of new ways of understanding the world and our relationship to it. According to this understanding the world forces us (fates us) to be nothing *but* creative and to be nothing *but* artists. Additionally, much of this understanding is aimed at not resisting the inevitable limitations that we will confront as we live our lives. These limitations, however, when understood "correctly" as impersonal forces with a panoply of potential, provide us with quite a bit to work with in our efforts to be creative and productive in a way that allows us to become who we are and to do what we are capable of doing.

²²¹ "It is on the basis of one's nature that one has talents, virtues, abilities, and purpose in life. One might also argue that one's ability to cultivate his or her character or develop his or her talents is itself subject to abilities and talents with which one is either blessed or not. But what is not in question is the need to cultivate one's character and develop one's talents and take some responsibility in doing this" (Solomon, 2002, p. 78).

²²² "Nietzsche's fatalism is both a goad and a challenge to become who we are, to discover, explore, and develop our talents, to scrutinize ourselves and suffer through the agonies and humiliations of 'going under,' to realize our 'destinies' through courage, intelligence, hard work, and discipline. In short, Nietzsche tells us to 'create ourselves' and with that 'invent new values,' but always in accordance with our inborn abilities and limitations" (Solomon, 2002, p. 75).

²²³ "One is insofar as one has predetermined and limited possibilities—one's talents, abilities, capacities, disabilities, limitations. A child at an early age (perhaps almost from birth) displays a real talent for music, for language, for spatial relations, for gymnastics, for dancing, for leadership. But it is perfectly obvious that these promising possibilities are no more than that, that they require development, encouragement, training, practice, and dedication" (Solomon, 2002, p. 72).

²²⁴ "One might even say, alluding to one of Nietzsche's better-known bits of euphoria, that we are more like the oarsmen of our fate, capable of heroic self-movement but also swept along in an often cruel but glorious sea" (Solomon, 2002, p. 69).

4.13 Conclusion: Modesty, Magnanimity, Generosity, and Counterintuitive Creativity

Becoming is stripped of its innocence once any state of affairs is traced back to a will, to intentions, to responsible acts. (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 472)

[T]o understand all is to forgive all. (French proverb)

Nietzsche's insistence that we love our fate – *amor fati* – is his way of encouraging us to become who we are in the face of what befalls us as we plunge into the future. The inevitability of the obstacles (and opportunities) that the future (in conjunction with the past) will produce must be embraced (rather than resisted) so that we can, using our dispositional capacities, navigate a path through the obstacles laid out before us without getting bogged down in unrealistic expectations, guilty regret, venomous resentment, or non-creative complacency.

Ideally, in Nietzsche's view, we would all *choose* to become artists and "free spirits," although he recognizes that this is not possible across the board. Instead, like Deleuze, Nietzsche speaks to a people yet to come, a posthuman people who have leapt over false hopefulness (i.e. delusions) in order to go about the pragmatic business of being (self-) creators without being weighed down by convention, opinion, or narrow teleological objectives. These creators and artists say "Yes!" to life, are open to the new, novel, and unexpected, and delve into the nooks and crannies of existence as a way of experimenting not with the limitations of things, but with things' potential to surprise, to create new "lines of flight," to enable the emergence of unforeseen capacities. It is thanks to these "free spirits" that, for Nietzsche, great works of art, literature, drama, architecture, and so on, emerge.

The attitude to life Nietzsche encourages us to cultivate derives, fundamentally, from his ontological commitments. These commitments – to a non-anthropocentric perspectivalism, a suspicion of "free will," and a commitment to overcoming resentment – leads to Nietzsche pontificating about the need to embrace life, to love its trials and tribulations, to transform life's struggles and limits into unique and astonishing artworks, thoughts, concepts, understandings, and so on. This loving of

our fate – of that which befalls us – is at once a modest recognition of certain inevitabilities *and* an expression of generosity towards that which threatens to undermine our inflated or ignorant desires. In other words, for Nietzsche's self-actualizing artist it is an act of generosity – love – free of resentment that is the most profound expression of life and of living creatively. The love of fate, issuing as it does from us in response to a particular ontological interpretation of existence as sets of impersonal forces in the process of becoming, can be the foundation for a Nietzschean ethics meant not to provide us with moral solutions to life's problems, but to encourage us to cultivate a sort of ontological or artistic preparedness for life's onslaught. What results is a feedback loop of generosity where the fate that we encounter – the limits we experience – is interpreted as offering us the *tools* with which to be creative; in other words, Nietzsche's ontologically-informed objective is to *generously interpret our fate as itself a form of impersonal, non-human generosity*. As Schoeman explains, the "virtue of generosity" plays a "central role in Nietzschean ethics" (Schoeman, 2007, p. 17). This generosity that issues forth from the person who is well-disposed to life and life's inevitabilities is regarded by Nietzsche, in Schoeman's view, as an expression of *magnanimity* – as an expression of strength in the face of unknowable forces. As Schoeman explains, for Nietzsche the truly noble or creative or virtuous person lives life "beyond resentment and feelings of remorse and guilt"; living instead "from the fullness and plenitude of his own being and what he is able to bestow on others" (Schoeman, 2007, p. 17).

In other words, freed from feelings of resentment and guilt – and enabled by a love of life that does not pick and choose but interprets the world in a way that takes nothing personally – this "overhuman"-to-come can't help but be generous with those people and situations that s/he encounters. This resentment-free expression of love is an expression, too, of control, of self-control that engenders, in turn, not only reverence for the earth, but a sort of co-reverence for oneself. That is, the Nietzschean artist, recognizing that s/he too is an expression of the impersonal creative forces of becoming, can't help but be impressed by his or her *own* capacities and their attendant unfolding. As Schoeman explains, this "control, this imposing a form on oneself without neglecting the multiplicity in oneself, is [itself] a creative, artistic activity" (Schoeman, 2007, p. 17).

The transformation of oneself into a work of art, by embracing the transformative creative powers of becoming, gives style to existence and frees us from guilt,

resentment, and what Schoeman describes as “the rage against contingency” (Schoeman, 2007, p. 17). The creative person Nietzsche describes is someone who carries very little “baggage,” or who is able to be unrelentingly creative in light of having nothing keeping him/her in the past, in a box, in a particular paradigm (cultivating a creative relationship to forgetting is also crucial for the resentment-free disposition to life Nietzsche encourages). This person lives a life free of regrets and free from self-conscious anxieties about not being fully human (since that is not a concern anyway). Indeed, attaining self-satisfaction with oneself – in Nietzsche’s estimation – is, as Schoeman explains, to affirm life “in its totality,” a life “beyond resentment”; in other words, a life that is characterized by “generosity or magnanimity (megalopsychia, magnanimitas), which is for Nietzsche the ‘crown’ of all the virtues” (Schoeman, 2007, p. 17).

Again, I am describing here a counterintuitive version of creativity, one where to become creative oneself one must be open to others (and otherness), and where one’s creative capacities issue forth not from oneself but from the extended, agential environment that grants one one’s capacities. This is a creativity that is a product of what we’d conventionally describe as *selflessness*, but in this case is a selflessness or extreme form of modesty arrived at through reflection, ontological thought and that, in fact, becomes – for Nietzsche and, in this case, me – an expression of power from a position of strength. In short, one has to set aside a self-absorbed, anthropocentric understanding of value in order to pursue a life lived creatively and, as Nietzsche reminds us, a life lived dangerously:

For believe me: the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is – to live dangerously! Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at war with your peers and yourselves! (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 229)

Living at war with yourself – what could be more dangerous than that? What could be more dangerous than attempting, as an artist, to be perpetually creative? To be perpetually tearing down one’s habits? Clichés? Ways of thinking? Ways of being? And how can one be creative – how can one live like an artist – without as a first step annihilating oneself by understanding that one’s capacity to be creative are not your own, issuing forth, as they do, from others? And does not this realization make one, if living creatively is any sort of goal (or living resentment-free, etc.), ultimately – in a

counterintuitive sense – *stronger*? More *powerful*? More of a “*free spirit*”? In other words, in order to become *more* creative we must let others (whether human or non-human) *create through us* – the more we give the more creative we become. Indeed, to give generously of oneself – excessively! – is to become magnanimous, and to become magnanimous requires strength (being free from resentment, guilt, jealousy, self-loathing, etc.). According to such a logic by relinquishing more of ourselves we contribute to greater overall creativity.

This counterintuitive creativity is, as Spinoza reminds us, in our own self-interest. Being generous, being open to others makes us more powerful – more able to do what we are capable of doing – by extending and complexifying the networks in which we operate. By incorporating external forces and dispositions into ourselves – by being open – we in fact become larger, we become and contain, as Whitman once wrote, “multitudes” (Whitman, 2006, p. 75). In fact, what is being cultivated here is a sort of reverse-egoism, a sort of decentered self-centredness (driven, as Nietzsche posits, even by an “extreme thirst for vengeance”) meant to align ourselves – for our own benefit – with the emergent, creative, agential forces at work all around us (and through us). As Nietzsche explains: “Magnanimity has the same degree of egoism as revenge, only egoism of a different quality” (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 62).²²⁵ This, then, is a selflessly self-interested version of magnanimity that provides us with pleasure through a strange sort of discomfort or pain – the pain of the struggling artist, the pain that accompanies fleeing convention, the pain of constant experimentation.²²⁶

²²⁵ The complete quote reads as follows: “*Magnanimity and related things.* – Those paradoxical phenomena, like the sudden coldness in the behaviour of the emotional person, or the humour of the melancholy person, or above all the magnanimity as a sudden renunciation of revenge or a satisfaction of envy, appear in people who have a powerful inner centrifugal force, in people of sudden satiety and sudden nausea. Their satisfactions are so quick and strong that they are immediately followed by weariness and aversion and a flight into the opposite taste: in this opposite, the cramp of feeling is resolved – in one person by sudden cold, in another by laughter, in a third by tears and self-sacrifice. The magnanimous person – at least the type of magnanimous person who has always made the strongest impression – strikes me as a person with a most extreme thirst for vengeance, who sees satisfaction nearby and drinks it down *already in imagination* so fully, thoroughly and to the last drop that a tremendous, quick nausea follows this quick excess and he now rises ‘above himself,’ as they say, and forgives his enemy, indeed blesses and honours him. Which this rape of himself, with this mockery of his drive for revenge he only gives in to the new drive which just now has become powerful in him (disgust), and he does so just as impatiently and excessively as just a moment ago he imaginatively *anticipated* and, as it were, exhausted his delight in revenge. Magnanimity has the same degree of egoism as revenge, only egoism of a different quality” (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 62).

²²⁶ Schoeman observes that the “truly generous and noble person” described by Nietzsche “lives in terms of a radically ‘other’ conscience and sense of justice compared to its moralistic version, which is basically driven by ressentiment. Such a person lives not only beyond revenge and retaliation, but even beyond acts of forgiveness or confession. Such a person is simply inclined to forget about the

Nietzsche again: “To divest oneself. – to let some of one’s property go, to relinquish one’s rights – gives pleasure when it indicates great wealth. Magnanimity belongs here” (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 158).

In Nietzsche’s view the thinker – the person who understands how the world’s impersonal forces generate existence – will take more pleasure in being right (ontologically speaking) and living according to these “truths” than in temporary creature comforts. With Spinoza, Nietzsche’s selflessly creative overhuman does not judge the world but helps *create* the world by, essentially, sacrificing him/herself:

The magnanimity of the thinker. – [...] The fairest virtue of the great thinker is the magnanimity with which, as a man of knowledge, he intrepidly, often with embarrassment, often with sublime mockery and smiling – offers himself and his life as a sacrifice. (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 192)

To be mocked, misunderstood, martyred – these are all *desirable* consequences insofar as they reveal one’s right-headedness in an all too often wrong-headed world. Moreover, these consequences also reveal one’s commitment to and love of the world (and its hardships) in the face of transcendence-seeking individuals persistently trying – through their false idols – to flee it. Again, committing oneself to Nietzsche’s ontological point of view (and its attendant hardships) must be understood as a sort of commitment to self-effacing cruelty in pursuit of larger truths, a commitment to the shattering of idols in pursuit of a truce with the world’s impersonal but creative forces of becoming.

However, Nietzsche’s selflessness – what I’m suggesting is the selflessness required of the artist – is a strange sort of performance since it can begin, very quickly, to spiral out of control. Nietzsche’s target, after all, are the illusions and false metaphors that give rise to moralizing, judgment, resentment, guilt, and so on. He suggests we cast off such falsities by recalling that the world is merely an impersonal field of emergent forces in which we (humans) have no special significance. But by embracing – loving – the flux, and by being open to becoming by resisting our inclination to cling to all-too-human illusions, we find ourselves committing to a reality that does *not* disappoint due to its continuously slipping through our fingers,

wrongs that have been done to him or that he may have done to others. At the very least, he does not take those wrongs seriously for too long” (Schoeman, 2007, p. 27).

but a reality that is illusory from the get go, that is nothing but an unceasing procession of shadows and fleeting moments – themselves illusions. That is, Nietzsche seems to be urging us to trade one set of (false) illusions for another. We must creatively reject false hopes for stable truths in order to embrace the delightful truth of false hopes. And, curiously, insofar as he urges us to make our lives into works of art we must ask why creating transcendental illusions that have little relationship to reality is a more “creative” feat than attuning oneself to the banal permutations of everyday life? That is, is it more (unwittingly) creative to go on living our (conventional) illusions, or to turn our back on these human conventions for the “conventions” of the non-human world? Strange questions these. Why is it more “creative” or “artistic” or “noble” to overcome the human than to overcome the non-human? How can one expression of illusion be superior – or more artistic? – than the other if, as Nietzsche so often seems to suggest, pursuing artistic effect is the only worthwhile pursuit:

Is it not magnanimity when, by worshipping in every force the force itself, one renounces all force of one's own in Heaven and upon earth? Is it not justice always to hold the scales of the powers in one's hands and to watch carefully to see which tends to be the stronger and heavier? And what a school of decorum is such a way of contemplating history! To take everything objectively, to grow angry at nothing, to love nothing, to understand everything, how soft and pliable that makes one; and even if someone raised in this school should for once get publicly angry, that is still cause for rejoicing, for one realizes it is intended only for artistic effect. (Nietzsche, 1991, p. 105)

Regardless of the illusion and artistry problem just described, the significant effect of Nietzsche's demand that we love our fate (etc.) and become magnanimous (and counterintuitively self-interested via selflessness) is that this way of being human requires that one be more open to giving of oneself than receiving (i.e. taking from others). Schoeman suggests that what Nietzsche is cultivating here – in a swirl of creativity, impersonal forces, and fate-loving – is a sort of virtue ethics based around generosity.

Becoming-generous, then, is the objective of the overhuman and, as a consequence, of Nietzsche's artist. Cultivating the virtue of generosity²²⁷ is, as Schoeman argues, an expression of *virtù*, of a sort of "virtuosity" and "vitality" (Schoeman, 2007, p. 18).²²⁸ And since this virtuous generosity necessitates a selfless openness to the outside the truly creative individual finds him/herself negotiating a complex tension between order and chaos, subjectivity and otherness, control and unpredictability: "I tell you: one must have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 259); that is, to become truly creative in the Nietzschean mode means focusing on specific tasks and cultivating particular habits while, at the same time, being open to otherness and to the unexpected in order to incorporate the unknowable potential of randomness into an extended, creative, multiplicitous form of "subjectivity." This negotiation itself is an artistic enterprise. As Schoeman explains:

Exercising control in such a way that it does not negate multiplicity is a great art. It requires a tremendous amount of ingenuity, creative imagination, subtlety – in short, all those qualities that we normally associate with the world of art and artistry. Indeed, Nietzsche refers to this as a process of transforming the self into a work of art, of giving style to one's own existence. (Schoeman, 2007, p. 20)²²⁹

Of course, as we know this transformation requires experimentation and experimentation necessitates mistakes. Since, mercifully, Nietzsche's artist has taken a position that defies conventional expectations s/he is able to pursue these

²²⁷ Schoeman suggest that for Nietzsche generosity is the "crowning virtue." He continues: "To me this seems quite obvious, as generosity is clearly the exact opposite of resentment, which according to Nietzsche, lies at the root of slave morality and the decay and perversion of what is best in human nature. Hence one may safely assume that generosity and all those qualities normally associated with it would play a central role in the extra-moral ethics that Nietzsche develops as an antidote to slave morality in all its manifestations. So what does Nietzsche say about generosity?" (Schoeman, 2007, p. 24-5).

²²⁸ "Nietzsche wants to animate and cultivate resistance against the established order and its systems of operation by inventing alternative constructions of the self, which attest to personal creativity, ingenuity and artistic sensibility" (Schoeman, 2007, p. 18-9).

²²⁹ "One thing is needful. – To 'give style' to one's character – a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as an art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed – both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it has been reinterpreted and made sublime ... In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste!" (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 232).

experiments unfettered by regret and remorse; indeed, perhaps by making *more* mistakes even *more* experiments can get done, more creative “lines of flight” can be explored and yet more conventions can be overruled. With his/her focus on immanent forms of creative expression mistakes yield nothing more than a good laugh and more work.²³⁰ Errors, then, become anything but, signaling that s/he who created the error has done so in pursuit of what s/he is capable of doing. As Nietzsche enthusiastically explains: “The higher its kind, the more rarely a thing succeeds. You superior humans here, have you not all – failed? Be of good courage: what does it matter! How much is yet possible! Learn to laugh at yourselves, as one has to laugh!” (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 256).

Nietzsche’s superior humans – artists of all kinds – having attuned themselves to the impersonal forces at work in the world (determined by and expressive of dispositions, affordances, capacities, propensities) are urged to become, themselves, impersonal forces – beyond regret, good and evil, and resentment. Having themselves become effectively non-human forces, these unrepentant, fate-loving artists – open as they are to the outside, to “being-with” as Nancy would say – absurdly create in the face of absurdity, laughing all the way. Again, however, this “absurdity” is not what it seems since the absurdity of the open-to-anything-artist’s absurdity is only ridiculous *relative* to the conventions of the human. Indeed, the artist derives his/her very creativity *from* these conventions, these limits.

Famously, Nietzsche encourages us to be serious about not taking the world too seriously. Laughter and lightness is the name of the creative game; so too is forgetting because it is only by willfully not recalling one’s habits and conventions that one can innocently embrace what befalls one at each moment. Further, forgetting – suggests Nietzsche – can lead one to enact forgiveness and even love – not that the overhuman is overly concerned with such things. At length Nietzsche explains:

²³⁰ As Schoeman explains: “For Nietzsche the truly virtuous, noble human beings are those solitary individuals who have attained a state of self-satisfaction or contentedness. This does not mean, however, that one becomes uncritical towards oneself, nor does it imply an attitude of passivity and indifference¹⁰ (this would simply be symptomatic of nihilism). Rather, it means that one no longer plays the morality game, i.e. one is no longer driven by feelings of resentment and self-loathing. Hence, one no longer hankers after some transcendent power that can somehow give meaning to one’s supposedly ‘corrupt’ and miserable existence. To be virtuous, in the Nietzschean sense, does not allow any feelings of aversion to life and its vicissitudes. On the contrary, it means a total affirmation of life. It points to a kind of existence beyond resentment, i.e. an existence characterised by generosity and magnanimity” (Schoeman, 2007, p. 22).

To be incapable of taking one's enemies, accidents, even one's *misdeeds* seriously for long – that is the sign of strong full natures, natures in possession of a surplus of the power to shape, form, and heal, of the power which also enables one to forget [...]. Such a man with a *single* shrug shakes off much of that which worms and digs its way into others. Here alone is actual 'love of one's enemy' possible, assuming that such a thing is at all possible on earth. How much respect a noble man has already for his enemy! – and such respect is already a bridge to love... The noble man claims his enemy for himself, as a mark of distinction. He tolerates no other enemy than one in whom nothing is to be despised and a *great deal* is worthy of respect! In contrast, imagine the 'enemy' as conceived by the man of *ressentiment*. This is the very place where his deed, his creation is to be found – he has conceived the 'evil enemy,' the '*evil man*.' Moreover, he has conceived him as a fundamental concept, from which he now derives another as an after-image and counterpart, the 'good man' – himself!" (Nietzsche, 1999a, 24-25)

Without wanting to spiral into an endless feedback of absurdity and relativity we can pull ourselves back by observing that Nietzsche's artist can perhaps best be understood as exhibiting *sprezzatura* – an attitude of nonchalance²³¹ in the face of struggle. *Sprezzatura*, as used by Castiglione (2002), describes a seemingly effortless virtuosity requiring little thought or effort. An even more appropriate description comes from Berger who suggests that *sprezzatura* is "a form of defensive irony" that has the ability "to disguise what one really desires, feels, thinks, and means or intends behind a mask of apparent reticence and nonchalance" (Berger, 2002, p. 297). With this definition in mind we might say that the Nietzschean artist is forever unimpressed in the face of the world's illusions, choosing instead to create greater, more unbelievable illusions. S/he laughs in the face of mistakes not because there are "correct" answers, but *because s/he recognizes there are no answers to be had*. The world is an expression of forces, a delimited and open field of relations that produce inclinations, affects, and non-human and human desires. These forces do what they can do (since they can do no more). Their actions *need not be judged because they could not have done otherwise*.

²³¹ "a certain nonchalance, so as to conceal all art and make whatever one does or says appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it" (Castiglione, 2002, p. 32).

Using such counterintuitive logic, the Nietzschean artist inhabits a world of perpetually-produced novelty that is beyond judgment and unresponsive to our efforts to create value since it is value itself. This artist also is faced with a world wherein causality and creativity are never singular, but always mixed, intra-relational, creating-with. Not only that, but this emergent world is profoundly unknowable and unpredictable – despite our best efforts to pin it down. These, and other, conclusions lead me to my support of modest ontological positions,²³² to an understanding of the world's processes as preceding and predicating our own potential. Modest ontologies emerge from an understanding of the world as something that issues forth as a plurality, as an interconnected network of *stuff*; further, the modesty of modest ontologies emerges as a response to reasoned modes of understanding that derive from the incessant observation and experimentation that reveals that we need the world *far more* than the world needs us. As Nancy insists, in order to relate the world – “everything” – adequately to oneself, “one must first of all be this Self to whom everything is related [...]. I am indeed myself, but I am not brought to myself in this me that I am. I am given to myself, but it is not me myself who gives me to me” (Henry 2003, 104). Or, for an even more modesty-inducing quotation we can turn to Serres who surmises:

If winds, currents, glaciers, volcanoes, etc., carry subtle messages that are so difficult to read that it takes us absolutely ages trying to decipher them, wouldn't it be appropriate to call them intelligent? How would it be if it turned out that we were only the slowest and least intelligent beings in the world? (Serres 1995, 30)

So by fully recognizing and acknowledging – assuming someone could adequately do such a thing, a task for a person-to-come, perhaps – the world's complexity, agency, and determining role in our lives we become generous²³³ – and indeed *forgiving* –

²³² I use the plural here to emphasize that modesty is a mode of understanding – a sort of attitude – that precedes any particular conclusion or action and is thereby capable of producing innumerable ontological solutions to the unfolding “problems” presented by existence.

²³³ The following passage by Mullarkey, quoted earlier, is worth referring to again: “When philosophers are ‘generous’ enough to say of literature, painting, film, architecture, science, or the Internet, that they too think, what is mostly meant is that they are capable of illustrating philosophical concepts. It is the conceptual artist's or the scientist's kinship to something called ‘philosophy’ that elevates his or her subject-matter to the conceptual level. What we are saying – and what a Post-Continental thought indicates – is that philosophy must take up the challenge of renewal and acknowledge the possibility that art, technology and even matter itself, at the level of its own subject-matter, in its own actuality, might be capable of forcing new philosophical thoughts onto us. With that, however, there might also come a transformation of what we mean by

towards the world that creates us and the world that destroys us. And by becoming generous – magnanimous – towards ourselves, others, and the world we are made modest. To create, then, is to open oneself up modestly to the unexpected, to affordances, and to propensities. In so doing we discover what our relations dictate we are capable of becoming and creating. This becoming is accomplished with the help of others and – most significantly – for the benefit of ourselves. We could say, even, that by maximizing what we can do, what we are capable of, we exact a sort of vengeance upon life (and death) itself, not to mention the all-too-human inclination to interpret existence as personal, and as something to escape and something to avoid. As Nietzsche observes, “true modesty” emerges out of the “recognition that we are not the work of ourselves” (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 189).²³⁴

By losing ourselves we gain the world, so to speak. We do not become artists (whether painters, writers, sculptors, musicians, and more) based on what we create, but on *how we live* – based on our *attitude to life*. It is from this attitude, as Nietzsche has shown, that more-than-human “creativity” will percolate and erupt. Creativity, then, is a rare thing as far as human beings are concerned, but an all-too-common characteristic of our world and of life itself. It is by selflessly searching amongst such ideas and attitudes that artists – that is, potentially all of us – discover what we, and the worlds of which we are a part, are capable of.

philosophy and even thought itself. The non-philosophical condition of thought, so-called, is not a discrete state or privileged domain, but a contingent and indefinite process. It is the process whereby *any* subject-matter can facilitate philosophical reflection, be it through folding back on itself, belonging to itself, or affecting itself. The medium or language of the process keeps changing; only the flexuous shape of the process remains constant. If we have discovered anything, it is that transcendence, that which is the outside both literally and figuratively, is multiple and relative, and comes in types that depend on one’s frame of immanence. And that frame, the place where one takes a stand, is never permanent” (Mullarkey, 2007, p. 193).

²³⁴ Nietzsche continues by deriding the false confidence of the immodest man: “One hates the immodesty of the great man, not to the extent that it comes from a sensation of his own strength, but through it he evidences a desire to experience this strength by wounding others, treating them in a domineering way and seeing how they will put up with it. As a rule this behaviour is even a sign that he lacks a calm certainty of his strength and thus leads men to doubt his greatness. To this extent immodesty is from a prudential point of view very inadvisable” (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 189).

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