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Violent Embrace

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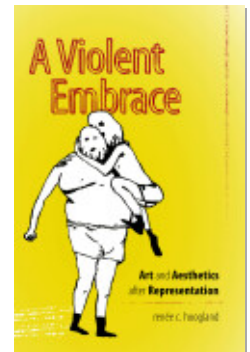
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Experience is that mass of affects,
projects and memories that must perish
and be born for a subject to arrive
at the expression of what it is.

Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*

CONCLUSION

lines of flight and the emergence of the new

I started this book by situating myself in a moment—a mood, a concatenation of events, with both theoretical and practical dimensions. The event, in a Deleuzian sense, is “unlimited becoming.” This idea is one of the principal targets of Alain Badiou’s (in)famous critique of Deleuze.¹ Rather than a philosopher of multiplicity, Badiou takes Deleuze’s distinctly vitalist perspective, the importance of the category of “univocity” in his thinking, to mean that he is a philosopher of the One.² Acknowledging that the idea of the event is as central in his own “enterprise” as it is in Deleuze, Badiou considers the contrast between their respective conceptualizations of the event to be the direct result of the “original ambiguity of the idea [of the event] itself.” He articulates this ambiguity and thus the contrast between his own and Deleuze’s positions as follows: “In the first case, the event is disjoined from the One, it is separation, assumption of the void, pure non-sense. In the second case, it is the play of the one, composition, intensity of the plenum, the crystal (or logic) of sense.”³

Badiou critiques Deleuze’s idea of the event as “unlimited becoming” on two general grounds. First, because “like all philosophers of vital continuity,” Deleuze does not allow for a division between “sense, the transcendental law of appearance, and truth, eternal exceptions.” This, Badiou submits, leads to a certain dogmatism in his thought. Second, and more seriously, Badiou perceives

a “latent religiosity” in Deleuze’s “vitalist logic” that stems from his identification of “sense” with “truth.” He writes, “If sense has in effect an eternal truth, then God exists, having never been anything other than the truth of sense.” His counterclaims against Deleuze’s empiricism and against his presumed dogmatism are that the event “must be thought as the advent of what is subtracted from all experience: the ontologically un-founded and the transcendently discontinuous” and, furthermore, that it must be “released from every tie to the one . . . subtracted from Life in order to be released to the stars.”⁴ On one hand, Badiou accuses Deleuze, in his insistence on the univocity of being, of reinstalling transcendence, and, on the other, of an “aestheticisation of everything” by forging a “chimera, an inconsistent neologism: the ‘sense-event.’” He thereby reverses, in the words of Mogens Laerke, the “practical dimension of Deleuze’s philosophy” from being an “aggressive struggle on behalf of the chance event of the future and a joyful practice of the multiple into being a mnemonic ascesis of the virtual One.”⁵ While Badiou’s critique is a serious one that should not be offhandedly dismissed, I would argue that it is precisely Deleuze’s vitalism and his notion of the “sense-event” that render his ontology of crucial importance for the project of a neo-aesthetics, for a theoretically informed approach of the arts of the present in the wake of the affective turn.

In these, my concluding reflections on art and aesthetics after representation, I therefore wish to take up Badiou’s dual challenge and use his “somewhat odd and . . . also rather severe”⁶ accusations against Deleuze as a starting point to explore what I have called, in the introductory chapter, the political potential of affect in its unpredictable and at best ambivalent operations, especially in its specific, even privileged interconnection with art, with aesthetic experience as dynamic process or force field, the consequences of which are both equally powerful and equally variable and unforeseeable. I will do so by first returning to Deleuze’s writings on the event, most prominent in his early work *The Logic of Sense* and in his later essay “What Is an Event?” in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988; hereafter *F*).⁷ Second, I will foreground the practical dimension of a Deleuzian-Whiteheadian ontology as an aesthetics of existence, by discussing, in tandem with these two affiliated thinkers, the central assumptions of Guattari’s model of an ethico-aesthetics as articulated in his essay “The Three Ecologies” (1989; hereafter “TE”) and in his earlier mentioned, posthumously published book *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (hereafter *C*).⁸ Guattari’s radical “remodelization” of subjectivity, in its conscious as well as its unconscious operations, will allow me to revisit several of Whitehead’s and Bakhtin’s ideas on aesthetic activity and its object and to attempt to make good on my overall claim that art is not a Sunday afternoon activity but a “project” with both subjective and collective, both individual and sociopolitical implications.⁹

In previous chapters, I have not made much of a difference between the notion of the event in its everyday, common sense and in the philosophical sense that Badiou suggests has become a “common term for the greater number of contemporary philosophers.”¹⁰ It is a common term, that is to say, in the aftermath of, in Deleuze’s words, Jean-Paul Sartre’s proposal of the idea of an “impersonal transcendental field, not having the form of a synthetic personal consciousness or a subjective identity—with the subject, on the contrary, always being constituted” (*LS*, 98–99).¹¹ While philosophically unaccountable, my inclination thus far to not clearly theoretically define the idea of the event springs from my desire to maintain the practical, if not empirical, dimension of Deleuze’s and Whitehead’s, as well as Bakhtin’s, respective uses of the term and to think with and through their various conceptualizations of it at different moments in my exploratory trajectory. Still, it is important to bear such distinctions in mind and to realize that, as Deleuze writes, the event is “not what occurs (an accident), it is rather inside what occurs, the purely expressed” (*LS*, 149).

For Deleuze, events are changes and transformations that are immanent to entities, forces that subsist over and beyond their actualization, virtualities. He defines events as by nature “ideal” and notes that this is what distinguishes them from their “realization in a state of affairs” (*LS*, 53), or, more simply, from accidents, in which they can nonetheless be expressed. He continues that the event “signals and awaits us . . . it is what must be understood, willed, and represented in that which occurs.” This renders the question of the event an ethical one: “Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us” (*LS*, 149). The notion of the event as the “underlying” confluence of forces of an actualized state of affairs challenges the Platonic metaphysics of substance to “remove essences and substitute events in their place, as jets of singularities.” The identity of a thing or the determination of a state of affairs cannot be ultimately distinguished from the forces and events that define it, even if the event can never be fully captured, remains unrelated to the material content of a thing, is “unlimited becoming” and hence without beginning or end. Deleuze’s event is thus a dynamic concept that serves a dual philosophical and ethical purpose: “A double battle has the objective to thwart all dogmatic confusion between event and essence, and also every empiricist confusion between event and accident” (*LS*, 149–50). The point is to preserve the productive potential in every kind of force, to see events as potentialities, as moments that may generate new forces, to consider things anew, in short, to rise to the occasion of the chaos of life and to embrace the possibilities given in each moment. The event, in other words, is what Bakhtin’s designates “unfinalizability,” the idea that life is not only a “messy place, but also an open space.”¹²

Deleuze’s essay “What Is an Event?” constitutes his only extended engagement

with Whitehead, whose concern with the question of the event is placed in the context of *The Fold's* wider argument on the German mathematician and philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (or von Leibniz; 1646–1716) and on Deleuze's attempt to develop a neo-Leibnizian analytical model in terms of contemporary arts and science. Further pursuing the distinction between events and accidents presented in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze here follows Whitehead in maintaining that the world as such is made up of events, of happenings and processes, rather than of substances and essences: "An event does not just mean that 'a man has been run over.' The Great Pyramid is an event, and its duration for a period of one hour, thirty minutes, five minutes . . . a passage of Nature, of God, or a view of God." Instead of positing life as a chaotic multiplicity that needs to be embraced, as he repeatedly suggests in *The Logic of Sense*, this intonation of the idea of the event raises the question of what the conditions are that make an event possible. The answer Deleuze provides is that chaos "does not exist," that chaos is an "abstraction" that comes into being only through the intervention of "some sort of screen" placed between the One and the Many, a screen "that makes something" from the "purely disjunctive diversity" of the Many, and from which it is "inseparable." This screen functions like a "formless elastic membrane" and "makes something issue from chaos" (F, 76).

For Leibniz, the idea of the screen allows for different approximations to chaos. In a "cosmological approximation," Deleuze writes, chaos appears as the "sum of all possibles," whereas the screen "only allows compossibles—and only the best combination of compossibles—to be sifted through." From a psychic point of view, he goes on, "chaos would be a universal giddiness, the sum of all possible perceptions being infinitesimal or infinitely minute; but the screen would extract differentials that could be integrated in ordered perceptions." If the world appears chaotic to us, it is merely because our screening abilities are limited. If we cannot adequately follow the "infinite series of wholes and parts . . . each of which is extended over the following ones," it is because of the "insufficiency of our own screens." Referring directly to Whitehead, Deleuze subsequently attempts to offer a more precise definition of the event by describing it in terms of its four "components" or conditions: extension, intrinsic properties, individuals or prehensions, and eternal objects or "ingressions" (F, 77).

Extension exists when "one element is stretched over the following ones, such that it is a whole and the following elements are its parts." Forming an infinite series without final term or limit, the "event is a vibration with an infinity of harmonics or submultiples, such as an audible wave" or a "luminous wave." Extensive series have intrinsic properties (such as height, intensity, timbre, tint, color), which "enter on their own account in new infinite series, now converging toward limits, with the relation among limits establishing a conjunction." Once

such conjunctions are formed, extensions no longer exist, but have become “intensities” or “degrees”: “It is something rather than nothing, but also this rather than that: no longer the indefinite article, but the demonstrative pronoun.” To move out of chaos from the mood of the indefinite and the demonstrative, the event requires the third component of the individual—that which Whitehead calls prehension—which is “creativity, the formation of a New” (*F*, 77). As we have seen, for Whitehead the subject emerges from the world in the prehension of its elements or data; prehension constitutes individual unity, which comes into being through the “how” of the prehension, the subjective form. In Deleuze’s words, this occurs through the “form in which the datum is folded in the subject,” so that the individual can be defined as a “conrescence of elements” that are given (*F*, 78).¹³ The fourth and final component of the event Deleuze derives from Whitehead, eternal objects or “ingressions,” requires a brief detour through the latter’s theory of objects, presented as a published lecture in his less well-known book, *The Concept of Nature* (1920; hereafter *CN*).

An object, Whitehead submits, is an “ingredient in the character of some event.”¹⁴ The awkward term “ingression” serves more precisely to define the general relation of objects to events: “The ingression of an object into an event is the way the character of the event shapes itself in virtue of the being of the object . . . the event is what it is, because the object is what it is.” The reverse holds equally true: “Objects are what they are because events are what they are” (*CN*, 145). Not all objects are the same, obviously, and even in the case of the same kind of objects, the ways they ingress into the event differ. Whitehead distinguishes three general kinds of object: sense-objects (colors, sounds, smells, feelings), perceptual objects (ordinary physical objects, such as garments, chairs, tables, trees), and scientific objects (electrons, etc.). The latter are primarily the result of the “endeavour to express in terms of physical objects the various roles of events as active ingredients in the ingression of sense-objects into nature” (*CN*, 158) and hence fall outside of his theory of objects.

In *Process and Reality*, significantly subtitled “An Essay in Cosmology,” Whitehead expands on the concept of the object as an “ingredient in the character of some event” within the context of what he considers to be the task of European philosophy (which he characterizes as a “series of footnotes to Plato”), the necessity of the “construction of a philosophy of the organism” (*PR*, 39).¹⁵ Sidestepping the idea that it is necessary to define reality, he proposes to conceive the “actualities constituting the process of the world” as “exemplifying the ingression (or ‘participation’) of other things which constitute the potentialities of definiteness for any actual existence” (*PR*, 39–40). Whatever is actualized is, in Deleuzian terms, arising from the realm of the virtual. Whitehead puts it thus: “The things which are temporal arise by their participation in the things which are eternal” (*PR*, 40).

The eternal (or the virtual) is timeless, but it is only in the actualization, in the “valuation of pure potentials,” in which each “eternal object has a definite, effective relevance to each concrescent process,” that novelty or creativity are possible. Actual entities allow us to generate ideas, to invent something new, to think and to create simultaneously, and without such actualizations there would be no life, no organism, no process, no novelty. In Whitehead’s terms, the “ideal realization of potentialities in a primordial actual entity constitutes the metaphysical stability whereby the actual process exemplifies general principles of metaphysics, and attains the ends proper to specific types of emergent order” (*PR*, 40). Eternal objects for Whitehead evoke the notion of “Platonic form.” In Deleuze they appear to transform into the notion of virtualities: “Any entity whose conceptual recognition does not involve a necessary reference to any definite actual entities of the temporal world is called an ‘eternal object’” (*PR*, 44).

For Whitehead, then, “eternal objects” are possible forms of experience which “ingress” into the actual occasions of the event. Here it is helpful to recall that he makes a firm distinction between occasions and events. In Shaviri’s gloss, an occasion, for Whitehead, is the “process by which anything becomes, and an ‘event’ . . . is an extensive set, or a temporal series of such occasions.” Shaviri goes on to point out that the distinction is crucial for an understanding of Whitehead’s metaphysics, in that an “actual occasion” never occurs “*ex nihilo*,” but rather “inherits its data from past occasions,” while at the same time introducing something different, something new into the world, because every actual occasion is “also self-creating, or *causa sui*, by virtue of the novel way in which it treats these preexisting data or prior occasions” (*WC*, 19). This formulation recalls Bakhtin’s assumption that creativity is immanent in ongoing processes that are not random interruptions, but the result of minute alterations that make up the continuous “event of being.”¹⁶ In Whitehead’s own straightforward terms, “No thinker thinks twice; and, to put the matter more generally, no subject experiences twice” (*PR*, 29). Eternal objects are thus not actual objects or concrete existences in the form of sense-, perceptual- or scientific objects, but abstract potentialities for actual occasions. In other words, they constitute occasions in which they become what Deleuze calls the “purely expressed.” As such, “eternal objects” are only available to us in their actualization, in the form of concrete events, but the way they become relevant to us, that is, the prehension of such data in their subjective form, is how they will generate or give birth to the new. Eternal objects are therefore not knowable in and of themselves, but they are nonetheless not ultimately different, though distinct in nature, from the actual occasions in which they are realized. While Deleuze does not discuss these aspects of the Whiteheadian idea of “eternal objects,” he infers from the idea itself that the possibility for novelty

and/or creation derives from the fact that the “best of all worlds is not the one that reproduces the eternal, but the one in which new creations are produced, the one endowed with a capacity for innovation or creativity” (*F*, 79).

As “pure Possibilities,” eternal objects participate, ingress into the event, in the form of qualities, figures, or even things. They are virtualities that are actualized in experience, in prehensions, in moments or occasions of becoming. Their permanence, Deleuze writes, is thus not given in advance: they “gain permanence only in the limits of the flux” (of extensions) that “create them, or of the prehensions that actualize them” (*F*, 79–80). Since they are inseparable from the process of actualization, from their realization in the event, their “eternity is not opposed to creativity” (*F*, 79), but rather finds its conditions in the new, in new things, new figures, new qualities. Creativity, or the formation of the new, is thus, ostensibly paradoxically, a question of screening, of imposing limits, of delimiting the total multiplicity of pure possibility. It is on account of the latter aspect of Deleuze’s conceptualization of the event as “unlimited becoming” that he can justifiably be “accused” of a certain vitalism. And so can Whitehead.

Vitalism, my online Merriam-Webster dictionary suggests, can designate two things: first, a doctrine that the functions of a living organism are due to a vital principle distinct from physicochemical forces; and second, a doctrine that the processes of life are not explicable by the laws of physics and chemistry alone and that life is in some part self-determining.¹⁷ Underlying Whitehead’s idea of the eternal object is his recognition that without the “actuality of [the] primordial valuation of pure potentials,” that is, the fact that each eternal object has a “definite, effective relevance to each concrescent process,” there would be a “complete disjunction of eternal objects unrealized in the temporal world” and hence no emergent order: “Novelty would be meaningless, and inconceivable” (*PR*, 40). Unlike rationalist models of thought, his “philosophy of organism” (now known as process philosophy) presupposes that not all elements in the universe are explicable by “theory,” since “‘theory’ itself requires that there be ‘given’ elements so as to form the material for theorizing.” There is no “givenness” that does not involve some screening, some kind of exclusion, for what is given is “separated off from what for that occasion is ‘not given’” (*PR*, 42). The element of “givenness” in a thing is the result of a “decision,” which can be but is usually not a question of conscious judgment and which is crucial for the actual occasion and the actual entity to emerge:

The ontological principle asserts the relativity of decision; whereby every decision expresses the relation of the actual thing *for which* a decision is made, to an actual thing *by which* that decision is made. But “decision” cannot be construed as

a casual adjunct of an actual entity. It constitutes the very meaning of actuality. An actual entity arises from decision *for* it, and by its very existence provides decisions for other actual entities which supersede it. (*PR*, 43)

On Whitehead's view, actual entities or occasions are produced and produce themselves in their actualization, as discrete finite units of becoming. Rather than substances or essences, actual entities are what is given in experience, processes in their actual givenness, that are issued by being delimited from the total multiplicity of the universe. Eternal objects are not given as such, but acquire a limited givenness in each actual entity; the "determinate definiteness of each actuality is an expression of a selection" from the multiplicity of these objects (or forms). But the critical point is the "insistent particularity of things experienced and of the act of experiencing," an act which has no sooner "happened" when it is gone, to be "superseded" by other actual occasions of experience (*PR*, 43).

The fact that the eternal object is always a "potentiality for actual entities" means that the eternal object is, in itself, neutral. Only on meeting the third condition of the event, prehension or the individual, does the actual entity become "given." The concrescent feelings arising from the prehension of the actual entity converge with the "primary data" not to form a "mere multiplicity," however, but rather a "synthesis" the final unity of which is the actual entity, "another fact of 'givenness.'" This moment marks the limit of the occasion as a process of becoming: "The actual entity terminates its becoming in one complex feeling involving a completely determinate bond with every item in the universe, the bond being either a positive or a negative prehension. This termination is the 'satisfaction' of the actual entity." Since no subject experiences twice, every new prehension will bring some additional element or component to the actual entity's "synthetic 'givenness'" (*PR*, 44), alter it, and thereby constitute the potential for the "formation of a New." This emphasis not only confirms what Shaviro describes as the "strictly limited scope" of occasions (*WC*, 19), it also explains why Deleuze defines the event, as an extensive set or series of occasions, in terms of "unlimited becoming," as a process of inevitable or necessary alteration—what Bakhtin designates the "unfinalizability" of the world as an ethical and phenomenal necessity. Finally, Whitehead's "doctrine of the emergent unity of the superject," that is, of the individual as both a subject "presiding over its own immediacy of becoming" and a "superject which is the atomic creature exercising its function of objective immortality," clarifies why his "philosophy of the organism" can be seen as a reversal of Kant's philosophy, in the sense that for the latter, the world emerges from the subject, while for the former, the subject emerges from the world.

It will be clear that in the orchestration of the subject-superject, eternal objects only appear as the "purely expressed" of actual occasions, as the forces immanent

to entities as we experience them in their actualized, externalized condition. Whatever we define as an object (whether physical or mental) derives its quality of “being-an-object,” its objectness, from its capacity to be prehended, to be experienced in perception. Moreover, since the final unity of subjective form, in Whitehead’s words, is the “individual immediacy of an occasion,” its “moment of sheer individuality,” the occasion must be seen as an “absolute reality,” which enjoys its decisive moment of “absolute self-attainment as emotional unity,” only to perish “into the status of an object for other occasions” (AI, 177). This means that every occasion is sensitive to the existence of others, that actual entities take account of or “perceive” one another, and therefore that the subject-superject emerges from the total multiplicity of forms (or chaos) as a multicomponential process within the “throbbing emotion of the past hurling itself into a new transcendental fact” (AI, 177).

In order to bring all this “throbbing emotion” of the universe more down to earth, and to show the ways Whitehead’s and Deleuze’s vitalism does not so much, pace Badiou, issue in what Laerke unsurpassably calls a “mnemonic ascesis of the virtual One,” but instead enables us to theorize the “sense-event” in its multiple, yet specific determinations on the level of the subject-superject, let me presently turn to Guattari’s elaboration of subjectivity as a heterogeneous production in which the operation of art takes up a distinct, if not privileged, position. This in turn will allow me to restate my earlier claims about the significance of art in the processes of unlimited becoming and its actualization in everyday life, to reformulate the terms of the Whiteheadian/Deleuzian aesthetics of existence that it has been my purpose to unfold and explore in the foregoing pages.

The problem of subjectivity, or, rather, the question of subjectification, was of central concern for Guattari throughout his career not only as a philosopher but also as a social and political activist, as well as a practicing psychoanalyst. It is hence not surprising to find him return to this problem in the last two works published before his death in 1992. In the first of these, the deceptively concise essay “The Three Ecologies,” Guattari assumes a generally ecological perspective in order to address the question of subjectivity beyond the terms of the traditional opposition between individual and society. The essay opens with a lengthy and incisive account of the ecological crises facing the contemporary world, culminating in the submission that traditional models of thought are inadequate to the task of generating effective responses to them. Guattari subsequently sets out to outline an experimental conceptual framework for which he adopts the neologist term “ecosophy” (a contraction of the phrase ecological philosophy) to rectify the shortcomings of traditional environmentalist perspectives, which obscure the complexity of the relationship between humans and their natural environment by maintaining a dualistic separation of human (cultural) and

nonhuman (natural) systems. Insisting on the necessity to broaden our views of ecology to include not only the natural environment, but also the social and subjective ecosystems within which human existence evolves, Guattari intends the term “ecosophy” to designate an ethico-political framework of articulation in which the three ecological registers of existence—the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity—are thoroughly integrated. But here, as in his earlier collaborative work with Deleuze, Guattari privileges difference and heterogeneity, assemblages and multiplicities, rather than embracing a “holistic” point of view on these interrelated systems. He introduces the mathematical term “transverse,” a line that intersects a system of other lines, to further qualify his paradigm and to foreground his concern with the variable intersections among these three complexly connected, parallel systems, or “ecologies.”

Guattari justifies the need for such a “transversal” perspective by pointing up the paradox of postmodernity, that a variety of new technoscientific developments have opened up an equally expanding range of possibilities for solving major ecological problems as well as for the reconstruction of sustainable social relations, while existing social and subjective formations as yet do not seem capable of productively using these resources. Our lifeworlds are in the process of being fundamentally reconfigured by revolutionary technoscientific developments. The various ecological, social, and cultural consequences of such transformations do not ask for purely technocratic responses, but rather for an “authentic political, social, and cultural revolution . . . on a global scale.” This revolution should, Guattari writes, not merely address “relations of force on a grand scale,” but also take into account “molecular domains of sensibility, intelligence and desire” (“TE,” 28).

By emphasizing the importance of the “molecular” level on which global changes critically take effect, Guattari seeks to underline that the increasing decentralization and fragmentation of a postindustrial world reigned by what he calls “Integrated World Capitalism” (“TE,” 47) definitively mark what Daniel Bell has termed “the end of ideology.”¹⁸ Since all the grand humanistic ideologies derived from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are exhausted, any attempt to create similarly normativizing, “unequivocal” worldviews/political models is not only unfeasible but also downright unhelpful. What is called for instead, Guattari suggests, is to use the “ecosophical example” to trace the lines along which a “reconstruction of human praxis in the most varied domains” can be effected (“TE,” 33), that is, to explore, on a multiplicity of levels at once, possibilities for new sociopolitical and cultural arrangements that will lead to new forms of individual and/or collective “resingularization”—as distinct from modes of being manufactured by the mass media or merely considered in terms of facts, statistics, and general predictions. Such resingularization would incor-

porate affective change, multiple modes of nondiscursive signification, and the proliferation of sense, as much as it would require the development of specific practices that would help us to reinvent the ways we live, on interpersonal and community levels, as well as on global levels.¹⁹

Boldly claiming that its overall problematic is the “production of human existence itself in new historical contexts” (“TE,” 34), Guattari projects the ecosophic project simultaneously to evolve on the three ecological planes (natural, social, subjective) it centrally involves. Taking the first, the environment, as self-evident, he continues by developing his ideas in relation to the two remaining ecologies, especially important in their interrelated operations. He foresees social ecosophy to involve experimentations with new modalities of “‘group-being’ [*l’être-en-group*],” both through institutional interventions and through “existential mutations driven by the motor of subjectivity” (“TE,” 34). These experimentations should help us to respond to such variegated problems as racism, phallocentrism, market-driven art practices, a technocratic and equally market-oriented educational system, as well as impoverished systems of town planning, commercialized recreational systems, and the power of military-industrial complexes. Alongside these practices of experimentation on a microsocial and institutional level, mental ecosophy should seek remedies against the standardization of human existence through the mass media, new information and communications technologies, and the fashion and advertising industries, as well as to the manipulation of opinion through media politics, social surveys, and “charismatic” public figures. New forms of being-with-others will serve to “reinvent the relation of the subject to the body, to phantasm, to the passage of time, to the ‘mysteries’ of life and death.” Rather than resembling the *modus operandi* of psychiatrists (“always haunted by an outmoded ideal of scientificity”), the ways of functioning of mental ecosophy will be more like the “operations of an artist” (“TE,” 35).

Guattari’s integrational or “transversalist” perspective on human existence evidently entails a highly different conception of subjectivity than either the traditional Cartesian subject as the center of rational consciousness, or the post-structuralist subject, fatally caught in the grips of the alienating systems—of discourse, of power—that already exist and predetermine its coming into being. Just as Whitehead contends that the subject as such does not exist, but is something that must be constantly renewed since it does not outlive the feelings that bring it to life at any given moment, Guattari urges us to abandon any idea of the “subject” and redirect our focus to the “*components of subjectification*,” to the various forces or “vectors” of its becoming, each of which can be seen to be “working more or less on its own” (“TE,” 36). Additionally, where Whitehead posits the subject as always a subject-superject whose individuality constitutes the moment of creativity, Guattari, though using a different terminology, similarly

argues that a transversalist perspective on human existence requires first of all a reconsideration of the relation between the concepts of the individual and subjectivity to the extent that the two should be clearly distinguished from each other.

The individual, Guattari submits, should not be regarded as a site through which all vectors of subjectification necessarily pass; instead, he posits the individual as “something like a ‘terminal’ for processes that involve human groups, socio-economic ensembles, data-processing machines, etc.” (“TE,” 36). This means that it makes little sense to assume individual interiority in opposition to and split off from different layers or modalities of exteriority. Rather, we should conceive of interiority as something that is constituted “at the crossroads of multiple components, each relatively autonomous in relation to the other, and, if need be, in open conflict” (“TE,” 36). Countering poststructuralist notions of the subject as the mere product of, or as that which is spoken by, larger structures of discourse and power, he nonetheless follows Whitehead (to be sure, without mentioning him) in stipulating the creative potential of the self as it comes into being in the moment of its singularity, the actual occasion of its discontinuous transformation, in its encounter with that which is given. In other words, like Whitehead’s subject-superject, Guattari’s individual subject is in a process of “unlimited” becoming, not *ex nihilo*, but in its active interrelations with the multiple “components” that make up its equally heterogeneous ecosphere. Any concept of subjectivity that rests on the exclusive operations of exterior systems or structures in producing subjective interiority hence misses precisely what is crucial to the process of subjectification as such, which is its “intrinsically progressive, creative and auto-positioning dimensions” (“TE,” 36).

Although he does not articulate his transversalist model in terms of an “aesthetics of existence” (Whitehead), Guattari implicitly indicates, by describing the operations of mental ecosophy with reference to artistic practices and by foregrounding the creative aspects of subjectivation, that the projected ecosophic paradigm is not merely ethicopolitical, but also profoundly aesthetic in inspiration. What he will later come to define as “chaosmosis,” a contraction of “chaos” (not in the general sense of formless matter, but with reference to dynamic systems whose extreme sensitivity to small changes makes their behavior, although determined by initial conditions, so unpredictable as to appear random) and “osmosis” (the process whereby molecules pass through a semipermeable membrane from a less concentrated solution in a more concentrated one in order to equalize the solute concentration of the two sides), is as much an ethical as it is an aesthetic paradigm. His joint concern in “The Three Ecologies” with “aesthetic creation and with ethical implications” hence leads him to a reassessment of the psyche and of psychoanalytic thought beyond its pseudo-scientific aspirations overall, in order to highlight instead this reconfigured psyche’s aesthetic components (“TE,” 37).

Rejecting phenomenological analysis (“handicapped by a systematic ‘reductionism’ that leads it to reduce the objects under consideration to a pure intentional transparency”) as a viable alternative to classic psychoanalysis, Guattari starts from the assumption that a “psychical fact” is “inseparable from the assemblage of enunciation that engenders it.” He additionally refuses to make a clear distinction between, on one hand, cognitive or conceptual understanding and, on the other, affective or perceptive comprehension, regarding the two as “entirely complementary.” He nonetheless maintains that there is a “kind of relationship of uncertainty between the apprehension [*la saisie*] of the object and the apprehension of the subject.” To account for this differential, i.e., for the spatiotemporal gap between object and subject without returning to the traditional opposition between rational and intuitive modes of understanding, Guattari gestures toward what will become a central aspect of the more fully elaborated concept of subjectification delineated in *Chaosmosis*—to which I will turn shortly—which is its self-creative or *autopoietic* dimensions. In “The Three Ecologies,” he restricts himself to the view that the articulation of both the apprehension of the subject and that of the object requires a “*pseudo-narrative* detour” through the stories, myths, and “supposedly scientific accounts” that make up a culture and that have as their aim to produce jointly a “discursive intelligibility” (“TE,” 37). He additionally suggests that the repetitions deployed by this pseudo-narrative detour, in their infinite permutations, form the “very supports of existence,” in that discourse becomes the “bearer of a non-discursivity” that cancels out the “play of distinctive oppositions” at both the formal and content levels of expression. Such repetitions, functioning through an endless range of “rhythms and refrains,” enable the regeneration of “incorporeal Universes of reference, whose singular events punctuate the process of individual and collective historicity” (“TE,” 38).

In *Chaosmosis*, Guattari will increasingly connect such punctuating events to the incorporeal frames of reference as those relative to music and art. Within the ecosophical paradigm, they primarily function to counter visions of the world—associated with structuralism and postmodernism—in which micropolitical forms of human intervention are no longer granted any significance. In trying to safeguard, or to rediscover and rekindle, the creative and constructive dimensions of subjective processes, it is necessary, Guattari writes, to acknowledge that the three ecologies are not so much governed by the logic of ordinary communication and discursive intelligibility as they are by a different logic—or “eco-logic”—that consists in “intensities” and “auto-referential existential assemblages engaging in irreversible durations” (“TE,” 44). Being only concerned with the “movement and intensity of evolutive processes,” ecological praxes, what Whitehead and Deleuze refer to as actual occasions and events, involve that which runs counter to the normal order of things, that invoke alternative

intensities to those of established discursive sets, in order to forge “new existential configurations” (“TE,” 45).

Guattari frankly acknowledges the risks involved in the “deterritorializations” effected by such “dissident” vectors of subjectification, which in their most violent manifestations might bring about the destruction of the assemblage of subjectivity per se. He nonetheless insists that more gentle forms of deterritorialization, “processual lines of flight” breaking through referential frames of expression and enunciation to operate as “decorporealized existential materials” (“TE,” 45), are necessary to escape from the huge subjective void produced by “Integrated World Capitalism” so as to forge new productive subjective assemblages, as well as to gear emancipatory struggles toward such micropolitical and microsocial interventions as might lead to a “rebuilding of human relations at every level of the socius” (“TE,” 49).

Whereas the overall net of Guattari’s ecosophical logic is cast across the three existential territories of the environment, social relations, and subjectivity, its implications for these three ecological registers are, as already indicated, consistently inferred from the disruptive, deterritorializing potential of modes of creative expression most commonly associated with art. Indeed, by locating an expressive “a-signifying rupture” at the heart of all forms of ecological praxis, Guattari appears to suggest that it is in the first place certain forms of aesthetic practice (if not quite in the Whiteheadian, overarching sense, then definitely in the slightly more narrow sense suggested by Bakhtin) that may be capable of bringing about scenarios of processual assemblage that break with the dead-end logic of contemporary power formations and postindustrial consumerism. In experimenting with suspending referential meaning and disrupting established chains of signification, artistic creation would thus seem most closely to resemble the operations of the new ecosophical logic by opening up the fields of virtuality that will allow for a more constructive and sustainable individual and collective future. For even if, Guattari explains, “ethical paradigms” must be invoked in order to “underline the responsibility and necessary ‘engagement’ required not only of psychiatrists but also of all those in the fields of education, health, culture, sport, the arts, the media, fashion, who are in a position to intervene in individual and collective psychical proceedings,” aesthetic paradigms must be foregrounded in order to “emphasize that everything . . . has to be continually reinvented, started again from scratch, otherwise processes become trapped in a cycle of deathly repetition [*répétition mortifère*]” (“TE,” 39). Existing models of subjectivity fail precisely on this count; they remain “closed to the possibility of creative proliferation” (“TE,” 55).

To assess the relevance of certain “theoretical bodies” to mental ecology, Guattari writes, two criteria are of critical importance: first, that they have the “capac-

ity to recognize discursive chains at the point when they break with meaning,” and second, that they utilize “concepts that allow for a theoretical and practical auto-constructability” (“TE,” 55). As we have seen, Whitehead disputes the subject’s self-perpetuating capacity, in the sense that it needs to be continually re-constituted, to be animated by ever more actual occasions, ever more new feelings. It is Guattari’s major concern, however, to illuminate the *poietic* power of the subject in the face of the larger structures of sociodiscursive power. What the two philosophers hence (or nonetheless) share is their emphasis on the importance of aesthetic activity in the production of a self as creativity, of a subjectivity not “trapped in a cycle of deathly repetition.” Although he concedes that the “assemblage of enunciation” from which the subject emerges is “composed of heterogeneous elements that take on a mutual consistency and persistence as they cross the thresholds that constitute one world at the expense of the other,” Guattari insists that the “operators of this crystallization are fragments of a-signifying chains of the type that Schlegel likens to works of art” (“TE,” 54–55).²⁰

The suggestion that aesthetic practice assumes a special role in the ecosophic paradigm is furthermore corroborated by the fact that in trying to grasp these “a-signifying points of rupture,” Guattari takes recourse to the psychoanalytic notion of partial objects, or what Winnicott calls “transitional” objects.²¹ Freud recognized the existence of vectors of subjectification that elude the “mastery of the Self; partial subjectivity, complexual, taking shape around objects in the rupture of meaning,” but restricted their reality and operation to instinctual and corporeal levels. Guattari, in contrast, claims that “other institutional objects, be they architectural, economic, or Cosmic, have an equal right to the functioning of existential production” (“TE,” 56). Composing themselves around objects in the disruption of meaning, such “generators of a breakaway or ‘dissident’ subjectivity,” he argues, “constitute vectors of subjectification that hence escape not only the mastery of the ego, but also the logic of discursive sets, as well as that of ordinary existence,” and are, as such, unrepresentable. By expanding the range of such components beyond the inaccessibility of the Freudian unconscious, Guattari posits these proto-subjective elements as the focal points of creative subjectification, which may be impossible to represent but which, in their transversal connections with other objects contributing to the subjective production, are accessible nonetheless, if only by the “detour of a phantasmatic economy” (“TE,” 56). That is to say, just as for Whitehead as for Deleuze, “eternal objects” are accessible only in the actual occasion by which they are “screened” off and emerge from chaos in the expressive event.

When he returns to the question of subjectivity in the first chapter of *Chaosmosis*, it is this rereading of the notion of the “transitional” partial object, or indeed the (Lacanian) *objet petit a*, via Bakhtin’s concept of the aesthetic object,

that enables Guattari to further elaborate and clarify the function of *aesthesis*, affect, and fantasy in processes of “dissident” modes of becoming. At the same time, the call for an “ecology of the imaginary” with which he concludes “The Three Ecologies,” in the later book becomes the starting point for a remodelization of the unconscious itself.

Anticipating the “hyperindividualization” and “hyperconsumption” characteristic of our own “hypermodern times” (Lipovetsky), in *Chaosmosis*, Guattari situates his continued reflections on subjectivity in the context of the historical transformations of late twentieth-century postmodernity, marked by the disintegration of larger sociopolitical and institutional structures and the increasing prominence of subjective factors in current events. He numbers, among other things, the “global diffusion of the mass media” as well as rising demands for conservative modes of “subjective singularity” in the form of neonationalism, religious fundamentalism, and technoscientific determinism among the major causes for this shift (c, 2, 5). As before, Guattari does not see technological innovation as good or bad in and of itself. What he is primarily worried about are the uses to which such new, sophisticated technological resources are put and about their potentially impoverishing effects on human existence if they are not deployed to create new “Universes of reference” (c, 5) and used to counter the stultifying effects of, among other things, the mass media and commercial communication technologies in their current, pervasive operations.

Rather than addressing these issues in the more general, institutional terms in which Lipovetsky casts his analysis,²² Guattari insists, from his perspective as a practicing psychoanalyst, on the necessity of acknowledging that the “semiotic productions of the mass media, informatics, telematics and robotics” cannot be separated from psychological subjectivity, but that they form constitutive components within the subject’s variegated production. Borrowing an expression from Bakhtin, he defines the plural and heterogeneous nature of subjectivity in postindustrial societies as “polyphonic,” so as to underline that there are “a-signifying semiological dimensions” to the subject’s production that run alongside (and often independently from) the signifiatory effects of linguistic semiotics (c, 4). Affective, sense-perceptual, and corporeal in nature, this “a-signifying regime,” he argues, find its origins in the “pre-verbal subjective formations of the infant,” which, contrary to what Freud believed, do not constitute determinate stages in psychic development, but rather make up levels of subjectivation that “maintain themselves in parallel throughout life” (c, 6). This explains why both social “machines,” as well as new information and communication technologies, not only operate at the levels of memory and intelligence, but also at those of sensibility, affect, and phantasy.

Drawing on contemporary ethological research, Guattari further suggests that

even the earliest experiences of the infant are not so much purely individual, but instead are of a thoroughly interpersonal or “trans-subjective” nature. The feeling of self cannot be separated from the feeling of the other: a “dialectic between ‘sharable affects’ and ‘non-sharable affects’” runs through and structures the “emergent phases of subjectivity,” even in its most “nascent” stages (C, 6). As a relatively open, discontinuous process of constitutive encounters—“occasions,” in Whitehead’s terms, or “singularities,” in Deleuze’s terms—subjectivation is thus a multicomponential production in which “multiple exchanges between individual-group-machine” offer possibilities for the recomposition of both corporeal and incorporeal realities. Within the inevitably shifting and changing complexes of subjectivation, the individual is capable of realizing a certain autonomy or *autopoiesis*, similar to what Whitehead calls the “subjective form” of prehensions, by forging ever more new relations with others, objects both mental and physical, animate and non-animate. Rather than issuing from “ready-made dimensions,” processes of subjectivation can thus be seen to involve a “creation which in itself indicates a kind of aesthetic paradigm” (C, 7), just as Deleuze’s individual is the moment of “creativity, the formation of a New” (F, 77).

In line with his argument in “The Three Ecologies,” Guattari privileges, throughout *Chaosmosis*, the “incorporeal frames of reference as those relative to music and the plastic arts” when it comes to the most creative and heterogeneous components of subjectivity, that is to say, aesthetic activity as critical counterforce to the conservative and controlling or reterritorializing effects of nationalistic, phallogocratic, ethnic, religious, political, economic, technological, and other systems of resingularization. The fact that he compares the creation of new modalities of subjectivity to the creation of new forms by “an artist . . . from the palette” (C, 7) partly derives from his need to stipulate the intrinsically transversal relations among the various machines that form the conditions of the subject’s emergence. The comparison furthermore allows him to incorporate the preverbal levels of “nascent” subjectivity into the complex assemblages of enunciation that produce adult subjectivity in individualized as well as collective forms, rather than restricting their operations to the primordial realm of early infancy. The term “collective” in this context therefore does not mean “exclusively social,” but should rather be understood as a “multiplicity that deploys itself as much beyond the individual, on the side of the socius, as before the person, on the side of preverbal intensities, indicating a logic of affect rather than a logic of delimited sets” (C, 9). The latter emphasis on the logic of affect as “man’s nonhuman becoming” (WP, 173), in tandem with his persistent foregrounding of the *autopoietic* potential of aesthetic practices, at once aligns Guattari’s ethico-aesthetic paradigm with Whitehead’s critique of pure feeling as not merely an aesthetics, but also an ethics of existence, and hence it underscores the critical

function of art in the process of “sensory becoming,” as the “action by which something or someone is ceaselessly becoming-other (while continuing to be what they are)” (*WP*, 177).

To substantiate his claim that it is from artistic frames of reference that the most heterogeneous aspects of subjectivity can develop and yet maintain his psychoanalytical perspective, Guattari must establish the place of the Freudian unconscious within the larger frame of the proposed ethico-aesthetic paradigm. Since the unconscious has since its invention come to function as an “institution, ‘Collective Equipment’ in the broadest sense,” there is no escaping being “rigged out” with one, even in our post-Freudian, post-Lacanian times, a fact we become aware of as soon as we make a slip of the tongue, dream, or forget (c, 10). Stripping this most elusive and initially decidedly radical concept of Freudian psychoanalysis of all of its pseudo-scientific trappings, Guattari resituates the unconscious within the “multiplicity of cartographies” in relation to which every individual and social group positions itself, alongside all other technical, institutional, social, and familial apparatuses that go into their making. Within his “multicomponential cartographic” model, the unconscious thus assumes its place as one among many aspects of subjectivation, “superposing . . . heterogeneous strata of variable extension and consistency.” This “schizo Unconscious” has lost its inextricable ties to familial and childhood trauma, being geared more toward actual praxis and future becomings than toward “fixations on, and regressions to, the past.” As an “Unconscious of Flux and of abstract machines” (c, 12), rather than of structure and language, the concept of the unconscious can thus be reappropriated as a “partial instrument” for understanding the operations of subjectivity in its heterogeneity and complexity, especially the existential registers that “involve a dimension of an aesthetic order” as a dimension of “processual creativity” (c, 13), which is indispensable for the regeneration of new existential territories, of progressive forms of subjective resingularization.

As a practice of everyday life, Guattari’s linking of the aesthetic event with the operations of the unconscious—albeit a “schizo” unconscious—indicates that aesthetic activity involves a manner of engaging reality that is distinct from modes of perception and understanding informed by cognition or rational thought. This is borne out by his subsequent attempt to clarify what he has earlier described as the “a-signifying rupture” brought about by certain forms of artistic creation. Within the ecosophical paradigm, aesthetic experiments with the suspension of referential meaning and the disruption of significatory chains lead, we have seen, to the construction of partial objects, which, remaining unrepresentable and inaccessible to rational thought, may yet be approached through the detour of a phantasmatic economy. The question Guattari now finds himself confronted with is how to explain the deterritorializing and disruptive effects ascribed to these par-

tial objects; how do proto-subjective elements “insert” themselves into the psyche and “start to work for themselves . . . to secrete new fields of reference?” (c, 13).

As mentioned above, it is Bakhtin’s notion of the aesthetic object that helps Guattari to elucidate the function and effects of the partial object, of what he himself will call a “partial enunciator.” His primary purpose is to build a bridge between the concept of the partial object that marks on one hand the “autonomisation” of unconscious components, and on the other the “subjective autonomisation relative to the aesthetic object” (c, 13). Guattari therefore seeks to draw the partial object of psychoanalysis toward a “partial enunciation” by expanding the notion of the *objet petit a* beyond the voice and the gaze, which Lacan had already included in it, so as to cover the “full range of-nuclei [*sic*] of subjective autonomisation” (c, 14), including those produced within group and machinic complexes of enunciation. Bakhtin’s assumption of aesthetic activity as an act of “co-creation” that escapes both a work of art’s material and its signifiatory determination becomes, in Guattari’s psychoanalytical terms, a certain transference of subjectivation between the author and the reader/spectator of a work of art.

Guattari links Bakhtin’s “aesthetic object” to the psychoanalytic partial object by defining the content of the former as something that “detaches itself from its connotations that are as much cognitive as aesthetic.” There is, he argues, a “certain type of fragment of content that ‘takes possession of the author’ to engender a certain mode of aesthetic enunciation” (c, 14). In detaching itself from the artistic material, this type of fragment is the event of striving, in Bakhtin’s words the “axiological tension,” which is both “fictively irreversible” and “in its essence, ethical” (“CMF,” 267). The irreversibility of the aesthetic object, and “implicitly the idea of autopoiesis,” lead Guattari to the proposition that it is such partial enunciators, fragments detached from form, material, and ordinary signification, that form “existential ‘motif[s],’” which in turn arrange themselves into “existential refrains” that couple “them to the existential Territory of my self” (c, 15, 17). Emerging from within the larger constellation of complexes of subjectivation, these incorporeal domains are given only in the creative moment, so that we can only “detect [them] at the same time that we produce them.” As “nuclei of eternity lodged between instants,” they elude situational elements and discursive time, opening up “lines of virtuality” that only emerge in the event of their appearance (c, 17). In Whitehead’s/Deleuze’s terms, they are eternal objects that only appear as the “purely expressed” of actual occasions.

His detour through psychoanalysis and Bakhtinian aesthetics allows Guattari to define the “poetic function”—what I have been referring to as aesthetic activity or artistic creation—as that which breaks through established territorializing systems so as to “recompose artificially rarefied, resingularised Universes of subjectivation.” In describing its task in such terms, Guattari not only points up the

function of artworks (“blocs of sensation”) as “catalysing existential operators,” but also underlines the distinction between the operation of “ordinary,” utilitarian objects and whatever counts as art in a given society at a given moment in history. Although the “poetic function” is thus to rupture, to break through, and to destratify controlling/conservative subjective singularities, its productive force lies in its potential to enable new “armatures of existence” within the context of alternative, affirmative assemblages of enunciation. The “efficiency” of the poetic function, Guattari hence maintains, lies in its capacity to “promote active, processual ruptures within semiotically structured, signification and denotative networks” and to “put emergent subjectivity to work” (c, 19).

The crux of Guattari’s ethico-aesthetic paradigm is, on one hand, that it helps us to think the function of affect in both its prepersonal and presubjective operations and to reflect critically upon its effects—which, again, are neither pre-given nor unambivalent—on the transversally interconnected levels of subjective and collective modes of un/becoming. Furthermore, in unfolding his notion of the “poetic function” on the side of both *socius* and *psyche*, and by enlarging its operations to include the multiple and heterogeneous existential registers with which the incorporeal domains as those relative to literature and art are transversally interconnected, he allows us to posit, in line with both Bakhtin and Whitehead, aesthetic practice as a practice of everyday life, instead of confining it to a domain separated from the more ordinary realms of meaning and being. Instead of resigning ourselves to the controlling operations or merely rejecting the “delimited sets” of prevailing power formations and symbolic structures, we may thus learn actively to use the asignifying, transformational potential of art for the actualization of new modalities of being—more precisely, of becoming—in the world. Rather than a “privileged ‘way out’ of the perceived impasse in cultural studies,” to evoke Hemmings’ earlier cited phrase, Guattari’s ethico-aesthetic paradigm, as a critical part of what Massumi calls an “asignifying philosophy of affect,” provides a theoretical grounding to what so-called minority studies have been acutely aware of since their inception—the inextricable links between the subjective and the social, of the transversal interrelations between the personal and the political—and thus offers possibilities for concrete micro-social, “ecosophical” practices.

On the other hand, however, Guattari’s multicomponential model of subjectification indicates that in order for such practices not merely to bring about change, but to bring about change for the better, that is, to generate new existential configurations that effectively enrich our relations with the world and with one another, some form of ethical reflection, or even active intervention in the process of creative desingularization, is nonetheless required. In “The Three Ecologies,” Guattari warns against the most violent manifestations of deterrito-

rialization effected by “dissident” vectors of subjectification, which might lead to the destruction of the subjective assemblage as such. In *Chaosmosis*, too, he cautions against the more neurotic or obsessive forms of deterritorialization that may cause the whole personality or a whole society to implode. In other words, the escape from the subjective void produced by postindustrial capitalism and consumerism cannot be dislodged from its immediate and ultimate aim: to generate new planes of consistency—sustainable lifeworlds—that allow for more meaningful, valuable, and enriching modes of being, on the social, interpersonal, and individual levels.

As an embodied/embedded practice, projecting worlds and selves that are yet to come, art, in its *differentia specifica*, constitutes one of the assemblages of enunciation defined by Guattari as “living auto-poietic machines’ *par excellence*” (c, 61). At the same time, in its irreversible connections with the objective world, and precisely because of its ability to “‘imagarinize’ the various manifestations of violence” (c, 58), aesthetic activity cannot merely be or remain a question of random deterritorialization. Fueled by the need to recompose oppressive sociopolitical formations and to reconfigure the positions of collective as well as individual subjectivities within them, an affirmative approach to art and aesthetics, that is, a neo-aesthetics that I have described as a critical and theoretical project in the wake of the affective turn, must find its destination in actively and effectively exploiting its possibilities for ethico-aesthetic intervention in the enlarged sense outlined above. Visual culture, or aesthetic practice more generally, will continue to function as one of the most powerful resources for generating both potentially violent and more gentle forms of deterritorialization, for such “processual lines of flight” as open up onto imaginary worlds, onto future virtualities. Art, as a “sense-event” *par excellence*, is not, pace Badiou, the “advent of what is subtracted from all experience.” On the contrary, in its actualization (of the virtual as the condition of real experience), the event of art is a happening within the ongoing yet discontinuous process that forms the occasion for deterritorialization as much as it is for what Deleuze calls the “formation of a New” and for what Bakhtin describes as a “completely new ontic formation.” Provided that we develop sufficient “screens” that make something issue from its “disjunctive diversity,” any attempt at avoiding art’s violent embrace is simply not an option—neither phenomenally, nor ontologically or ethically.

In the sense that we must always and inevitably respond to the world, interact with our environment in a continuous yet variegated series of encounters, the possibility for novelty, for a New, for fresh selves to emerge, is simply given. The fact that the world is, to recall Bakhtin, not only a messy place but also an open space leaves us no option but to allow ourselves to be taken up in its embrace: the “unfinalizability” of both the world and our selves guarantees the possibility

of innovation, for the genuinely new, for potentiality and creativity. But Bakhtin importantly adds to this that the openness and messiness of the world provides “no alibi for being.” We are also always answerable, accountable for our responses to the environment in their distinctiveness and particularity. Such accountability, I have suggested, includes our ethical obligation to seek encounters that allow for the creation or generation of something new that will enrich, rather than diminish, our relation to the world and to one another. The point is to preserve the productive potential in every kind of force, to see events as potentialities, as moments that may generate new forces, to consider things anew, in short, to rise to the occasion of the chaos of life and to embrace the possibilities given in each moment. Such possibilities, I believe with Whitehead, have less to do with understanding, cognition, or with language and representation, but are primarily, and prior to any stabilization in systems or categories, a question of feeling, their actualization a direct result of our ability to affect and being affected. Artistic experience, aesthetic events we seek out—whether reluctantly, unwittingly, passionately or eagerly—offer us occasions for new forms of feeling. It is art, in its essential artificiality, its simultaneous adventurousness and finiteness that, par excellence, may offer us such “screens” as enable the freedom to feel differently, to experience anew. Therein lie both its truth and its uncontrollable beauty.