FROM THE BODY TO LANGUAGE:
LIFE AND MIND IN LITERATURE AND FILM
FROM THE MODERNIST ERA
TO THE PRESENT

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

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Presented by Peter Michael Lang,

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Professor Sean Ireton

Dedicated to David, Helen, Dick, and Janet.

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Abstract

My dissertation focuses on the ways in which twentieth-century literature intersects with theories of living systems and biosemiotics, the biological capacity for meaning making. My critical readings highlight the process of subjective emergence in Beckett, the drawing out of a world in Woolf, a dynamic, embodied socio-political subjectivity and resistance in Wright and Ellison, and the parallel emergence of art and life in the films of David Lynch. These works present a step-by-step reading that grounds subjectivity in biological processes and demonstrate that an understanding of the co-emergence of subject and world, and by extension meaning-making, is a wholly embodied phenomenon. Reading with a focus on the biological foundations of meaning-making supplemented by the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze at once dissolves the partition between the individual and the objective world so often identified in the literature as well as mobilizes these texts in order to draw out a theory of biosemiotics that is as much aesthetic as it is scientific.

Introduction: Making the Case for a Biosemiotic Approach to Literature and Film from the Modernist Era to the Present

The truth is that acts are successive, even continuous; one causes or passes into another. And though we may string ever so many clauses into a single compound sentence, motion leaks everywhere, like electricity from an exposed wire. All processes in nature are interrelated; and thus there could be no complete sentence – Ernest Fenollosa

1.

In *What is Philosophy?* (1994), Deleuze and Guattari write: "it is literature that has constantly maintained an equivocal relationship with the lived" (170). The equivocation they are referring to is not an attempt to document perception or memory. Instead, the philosophers focus on the means by which authors compose elements of sensation in their works. In painting, line, color, and shading enter into a combination from which the image emerges. Literature likewise relies on such active relations. In their estimation, Mrs. Dalloway is imperceptible against the London she moves through, just as Ahab can be said to actually perceive the sea, not because the character is a living, breathing human, but because it is set in an active part of the Ahab/sea compound. To this I will add, literature is capable of doing much more than simply representing relations. It also has the capacity to narrativize the activity of its discrete elements in their emergent, lived becoming. And it is in this way that literature becomes equivocal to life.

In Virginia Woolf's 1919 short story "Kew Gardens," we can see precisely how literature narrativizes life as a collective, active, emergent phenomenon. The story opens with a flowerbed stirring in the breeze. The colors of the petals "[stain] an inch of the brown earth beneath" and "flash into the air above, into the eyes of the men and women

who walk in Kew Gardens" (188). Along with the verbs "to stain" and "to flash," the reflections are described as "expanding" drops of rainwater with their colors and "revealing" a leaf's "branching threads of fiber." Finally, the light "spread its illumination" and brings forth a collection of leaves. Throughout "Kew Gardens," the image is the movement. In the passages above, emphasis is consistently placed on the activity that pulls the various elements of the garden together; what emerges reads as a direct result of their interaction.

Woolf's emphasis on movement returns later in the piece as a snail drags itself along the floor of the garden. Following the snail, it is apparent that, for Woolf, emergence is also expression. The snail is described as "having a definite goal in front of it" (189). It "[considers] every possible method" to make its crossing and is "doubtful" that a vibrating and crackling leaf can support its weight (191). Beyond simply deliberating what obstacles lie in its path, the snail, it seems, pulls the narrative along with it, providing connection and coherence to the story's disparate parts. As with the active self-construction of the garden, the narrative is likewise predicated on movement. For example, as the snail is deliberating, a young couple crosses its path and the paragraph shifts to their conversation. In fact, it as if the snail's movement is the very thing which opens up the possibility of expression in the piece. Following this movement, the story's ambiguous narration, which emerges with and from the flowerbed, points to the expressive – in other words, intentional - capacities in and of nature.

Both living and non-living things seem to take an active role in the various interactions Woolf describes. In spite of this, expression emerges from a complex or system of relations that begins and ends with lived bodies, and it is from this perspective

that Woolf's story is distinctly biosemiotic. The key insight of a biosemiotic perspective lies in its central assumption that human beings share a basic mode of biological organization and interaction with other organisms. Specifically, it retains the contingent, active, emergent, material-affective engagements so readily accepted across posthumanist discourse yet, in recognizing a semiosis fundamental to biological processes, secures a notion of subjectivity at all registers of human and non-human life.[1] Leading biosemiotician Jesper Hoffmeyer (1993) writes: "Since nothing in the natural world can be isolated from the rest of nature, the boundaries of all natural systems are indeterminate" (87). A biosemiotic approach provides an awareness of life, cognition, subjectivity, and the world as co-emergent properties of a single system. Biosemiotics, as an evolutionary science, narrativizes the processes from which the body, the subject, and meaning emerge. Meaning emerges through the autopoietic activity of the living system as it strives to maintain itself and prolong its existence. Subject and world mutually inform each other by way of their structural coupling, or history of recurrent interactions. The maintenance of organic life, therefore, necessarily includes the production of meaning.[2]

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[1]There is significant overlap between biosemiotics and posthumanism, namely those theories which draw insight from second-order cybernetics and systems theory.

[2] My approach to biosemiotics is informed by the 4E approach to subjectivity first articulated by Richard Menary (2010), who defines 4E as embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended subjectivity. John Protevi (2013) later expands this notion to the 4EA approach, emphasizing affect and cognition as "aspects of single process." Subjectivity, as a result, is here understood to be "embodied, embedded, enactive, extended, [and] affective" (74, 99). The emphasis on affect is crucial because it "comprises the active capacities of the body to be affected or to be acted on…*Affectus*, or what we could call *experiential affect*, is not representational…[it] is 'purely transitive' (Deleuze 1988, 49)" (72). Cognition and affect are intertwined. Protevi is here following Deleuze who writes in his short book on Spinoza that the difference between the mode and the idea of affect/sensation involves both the body and mind alike. In fact, "it is experienced in a *lived duration* that involves the difference between two states" (emphasis added, Deleuze 1988, 49).

My dissertation focuses on the ways in which literature and film narrativize subjective emergence and as a result intersect with theories of living systems and biosemiotics, which is the biological capacity for meaning-making. My critical readings highlight the coemergence of embodiment and expression in the literary work of Samuel Beckett, Virginia Woolf, and Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, as well as in the films of David Lynch. With the exception of Lynch, these are all modernist texts, although Beckett arguably straddles the line between modernism and postmodernism. As I will argue, the difficulty of defining modernism chronologically, aesthetically, and philosophically as well as contemporary parallels that can be drawn directly back to the first half of the twentieth century leave open the possibility that the era has never properly come to a close. In this regard, a biosemiotic approach provides a new lens with which to examine the philosophical, scientific, and aesthetic concerns of modernism in a broadly historical way that runs up to and includes the present.

In the following chapters I will examine the process of subjective emergence in Beckett, the drawing out of a world in Woolf, the emergence of a dynamic, embodied socio-political subject and its potential for resistance in Wright (and to a lesser extent Ellison), and the emergent, expressive multiplicities in the films of Lynch. These works present a step-by-step reading that grounds subjectivity in biological processes. They demonstrates that these works share an understanding of the co-emergence of subject and world, and by extension meaning-making, as a wholly embodied phenomenon. My engagement with these works is informed by the biological foundation of meaning-making; it is supplemented by the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze as well as insights derived from biological systems theory, especially the theory of autopoiesis. As will

become clear, such an orientation serves a dual function. It dissolves the partition between the individual and the objective world so often identified as a symptom of modernist literature. As well, it mobilizes these texts in order to reintroduce back into posthumanist discourse notions of subjectivity and selfhood that posthumanism commonly (and at time patently) rejects.

2.

Dealing with modernist texts carries with it its own brand of trouble. There is no simple catch-all to define modernist literature. Despite the similar projects of *Mrs Dalloway* and *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf is a vastly different writer than James Joyce. The same could be said about William Carlos Williams and T.S. Eliot in discussing *Paterson* and *The Waste Land*, respectively. Even if we made the sweeping claim that a central concern of modernist authors and artists is the process of representing "reality," that reality is nevertheless decidedly contingent on individual experience and style. The difficulty of securing a definitive modernist "style" is compounded by the difficulty in placing the era into a neat historical context. Woolf famously announced in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs, Brown* that human nature changed "on or about December 1910" and that with this fundamental change, there follows "at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature" (320-21). Critics are much more hesitant to emphatically date the transition to the modernist era, but all agree that it is signaled by rupture. Depending on the criteria one chooses to define an era, Malcom Bradbury and James McFarlane (1976) trace modernism's roots alternately to Paris of the 1830s, the publication of Zola's *Le roman experimental* in 1880, or to the work of Pater in the 1870s, to name just a few examples

(30). This abbreviated survey illustrates that any definition of modernism depends on one's subjective appraisal of the era. Does one regard modernism as an *avant garde* movement? Is it anti-romantic? Experimental, decadent, symbolist?

Mia Carter and Alan Warren Friedman (2013) cite any number of decisive moments for the advent of modernism, from the Industrial Revolution, to Darwin's theory of evolution, to Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead" (1). Yet, they also make a crucial observation about the term "modern" itself. They write: "Even more than analogous labels, 'modernism' is especially problematic because the word is commonly used in at least three very different ways: to designate certain qualities in art and culture that resist or transcend temporal limits; in contradistinction to 'postmodernism'; and as a synonym for 'contemporary'" (1). The terminological ambiguity is only confounded by the international scope of the era. As Bradbury and McFarlane make clear, the movement was at once Anglo-American, French, German, African, and Asian. As a result, it was the culmination of "many varied forces which reached their peak in various countries at various times" (30). The oblique character of modernism is not just its terminological or temporal ambiguity, but also the highly personal, individualized, and searching styles of its artists.

If modernism is best defined as a search, there is reason to believe the search to be ongoing. One constant of the era is the approach to art as a means of cohering and asserting an individual subjectivity in the face of change. The first world war, rapid advances in communication technology, and marked paradigm shifts from Newtonian to quantum physics and the theory of relativity destabilized and fragmented not just one's individual worldview, but the individual itself. Critics attribute a certain apocalyptic or

millenarian sentiment coursing through much of the literature of the time, exemplified in Yeats's rough beast of "The Second Coming." Modernism is an era of rupture, of social, scientific, technological, and artistic breaks. Arguably, the subjective incoherence and social dislocation that mark much of modernist art has never been shrugged off. Postmodernism, if we follow Frederic Jameson's model, is foremost an aesthetic means of mitigating the radical dispersal of thought up and against increasingly rapid and global flows of capital. In this way, it is simply a continuation of the modernist project. Modernist concerns even track into the present. As I write this, the Russian invasion of the Ukraine continues to raise fears of a potential world conflict – if not at the very least the destabilization of Europe - and ultimately a devastating nuclear war. And this is just another chapter representing decades of global conflict in the Middle East, Israel, Africa, and elsewhere which continue to force questions of national and individual sovereignty. The global Covid-19 pandemic, potentially on the wane, nevertheless recalls the 1918 Flu pandemic. Technologically, attachments to devices and social media have quite literally fractured and objectified individual identities while advances in neurotechnology have allowed paralyzed folks to communicate via brain-computer interfaces, technology that Elon Musk and Neuralink envision as expanding well beyond the therapeutic.[3]

Mark S. Morrisson (2017) identifies flux as the definitive element of modernist art, science, and culture (2). This sense of flux, of rapidly changing identities against rapid paradigm shifts in science and technology accords with the tension that Bradbury and McFarlane identify as central to both defining modernism as an era and in its many iterations. They write: "It is the image of art holding transition and chaos, creation and

[3] According to a pew research study and reported by Gizmodo, only 13% of those polled believe human-computer interfaces to be a good idea.

de-creation, in suspension that gives the peculiar concentration and sensibility of Modernist art" (49). To this I would add modernism's stylistic promiscuity. The lack of a coherent style and the emphasis on individualized expression does more than allow us to interrogate the tensions of the first half of the twentieth century. It draws the critical heart of the modernist project into a present where identity, expression, and expansion (scientific, economic, colonial, etc.) are as proliferating and profligate as ever.

I do not envision this work to be a revision of modernist studies. Yet I believe that biosemiotics, supplemented by systems theory and Deleuzean philosophy, provides a viable means of cohering notions of subjectivity, self, and expression in the face of persistent change. A biosemiotic interpretation allows us to expand our reading of modernist texts into the present, and examine how questions fundamental to the era are still being addressed. Asserting that it is the lived activity of the organism that generates a world that is saturated with meaning, biosemiotics aestheticizes science. Life and art come together, not just in the way the individual imbues its world with significance. Because meaning is generated by all life, a biosemiotic orientation is also inherently empowering.

Perhaps most importantly, from a scientific standpoint, the readings that I present in this dissertation are not limited to the few texts that I have chosen. These readings can be repeated. Take two (somewhat) random examples. In a later Beckett short story, "The Lost Ones" (1966), individuals are relegated to a stark existence within a cylinder cyclically controlled for temperature, sound, and light. Everything within this space is done "for the sake of harmony." Beckett also refers to the total image he creates as a system. In fact, the movement of bodies within the cylinder is quite similar to cellular

activity. Two bands of moving bodies create a boundary that regulates the movement of the remaining bodies within and without the belts. If there is any meaning to be drawn from the text, it in the self-regulating, perpetual motion of the system of bodies as they interact. Alternatively, in William Carlos Williams' *Paterson* (1946), language emerges from the innate activity of the urban ecosystem which is likened to atomic activity. Pulled along by the current of the Passaic River, the city – along with its history, its mythology, and its future – emerges in a single movement:

> . . a mass of detail
> to interrelate on a new ground, difficultly;
> an assonance, a homologue
> triple piled
> pulling the disparate together to clarify
> and compress
>
> (19)

The movement of the river spurred by the momentum of the Paterson Falls pulls together and interrelates a mass of "disparate parts" into a single expression (subject) that is contingent upon and coemergent with the very activity of its becoming.

Both examples draw upon representations of molecular activity in order to derive an emergent, if not merely active, expression of meaning. Beckett's story centers on the aforementioned suspending of transition and chaos and the necessity of art to confront its situation despite the promise of inadequacy or failure. Williams' poem, to the contrary, takes transition and chaos as an invitation. Notions of ideology or artistic impotence are dissolved in favor of active participation in the very process of subjective becoming. In

both texts, expression and subjectivity co-emerge. The images in each are the representation of the activity of their constituent parts.

3.

Jesper Hoffmeyer (2008) defines biosemiotics as "an interdisciplinary scientific project that is based on the recognition that life is fundamentally grounded in semiotic processes" (3). In short, sign processes can be understood as an essential function of biological life. Hoffmeyer cites a more complete definition suggested by Claus Emmeche (1992):

> *Biosemiotics* proper deals with sign processes in nature in all dimensions, including (1) the emergence of semiosis in nature, which may coincide with or anticipate the emergence of living cells; (2) the natural history of signs; (3) the 'horizontal' aspect of semiosis in the ontogeny of organisms, in plant and animal communication, and in inner sign functions of the immune and nervous systems; and (4) the semiotics of cognition and language. (4)

Sign processes and relations are not cultural artifacts secondary and supplemental to nature. Rather, semiosis is an emergent property of living systems. As such, sign relations, and as a result, meaning, are established as deep as the cellular level. A bounded system, the living cell marks inside and outside, establishes a set of lived relations, enacts a repertoire of behaviors, and establishes the foundation for a self/other distinction.

Rather than (re)appropriating natural processes into the cultural, biosemiotics provides a link between nature and culture, one that moreover understands culture to be a direct manifestation of, rather than a supplement to, natural processes. As well, in

regarding semiosis as a natural function, we see that sign processes emerge across the entire spectrum of living beings. At a bare functional level, this is the emergence of what Francisco Varela (1997) terms a "surplus of meaning" that results from the fundamental operations of living systems. From the autopoietic perspective of Maturana and Varela (1987), cognition is simply lived activity (in other words, the autopoeisis of a living system). Semiosis is therefore fundamental to "the coordination of action [living systems] bring about" (208). For humans, this coordination of action is most profound in our use of language. Hoffmeyer writes: "the obvious uniqueness of humans is not as users of signs but as creatures who can readily teach themselves to master a special form of sign usage – symbolic reference – that is the basis of linguistic competence" (6). Biosemiotics presents meaning systems as actively embedded in nature. Meaning and signification are not abstractions, they are fundamentally determined by the basal activity of living systems.[4]

Biosemiotic theories often rely on Peirce's triadic structure of the sign, the interpretant, and the object to prove that sign processes are at work in the material processes in nature. Crucial to this position is the understanding that semiotic processes are causal, that the sign produces the interpretant. Biosemioticians apply this logic to inform their understanding of the genetic code and how it operates. As Marcello Barbieri states, "In RNA splicing…we find the three basic characteristics of all codes: (1) a correspondence between two independent worlds, (2) the presence of molecular adaptors,

[4] Terrence Deacon (1997) likens language learning and networks of distributed, recurrent interactions that apply to biological systems. He writes: "language is not just any system of association…its deep logic of associations, which derives from the indirect systems logic of symbolic reference, is highly distributed and nonlocal, and the syntactic implementation of these relationships tend to form complicated hierarchic patterns" (129).

and (3) a set of rules that guarantee biological specificity" (190). By this logic, he discerns signs and meaning as organic when the codemaker is itself composed of organic molecules, for example RNA as it functions to induce activity or behavior in differentiated cells (188). Marcello Barbieri recognizes the function of RNA as codemaker in the scanning and sequencing of amino-acids in protein formation. Marcella Faria investigates the evolutionary role of RNA in developing and sustaining new organic codes. Yet, it is not that the material parts, in this case RNA molecules, amino acids, and nucleotides, determine the expression of genes, but rather their interaction and correspondence that are determinate. It is in this way that content and expression are at once molecular and molar in the Deleuzoguattarian sense – the formal and substantial elements interact at the individual level and emerge (that is, are expressed) at the global level.[5]

The internal generation of meaning at the molecular level has a direct bearing on the constitution of an external domain of signification outside of the organism, the semiosphere. This is the molecular, processural foundation of cognition as sense making and ultimately "worlding." Following the work of Francisco Varela, Andreas Weber (2001) explains this reciprocal relation between interior molecular-biological processes of meaning-making, on the one hand, and exterior socio-cultural processes of meaning making, on the other:

> The organization of the living is characterized by the conjunction of two, seemingly different ontological realms. Unshaped matter and the process of regulation together make up the proper reality of the organism. This process-

[5] See also: *A Thousand Plateaus, 44-45.*

> related circularity is a fact that biology must take into account. The process of the living takes place in normal matter, only that the latter is organized in such a way that it shows autopoietic behavior…By cognition in an autopoietic sense, organisms create relevance by separating the outside from themselves, while at the same time being dependent on it (155).

The autopoiesis of a living system, its self-organization and self-maintenance, directly conditions the domain of possible interactions within an environment, an *Umwelt*, which is also its cognition. As Luhmann (1995) states, the environment is "an external extension of active sequences: [the] context of the conditions for and results of actions within the system" (181). In other words, the material/metabolic/cognitive activity of the living system is precisely that which expresses a world which is wholly system-relative. The recursive relation between materiality and cognition bridges the gap between the seemingly disparate ontological levels (biological and conscious) of living systems.

Hoffmeyer reconciles the difference between bodily and mental aboutness (expression) through the notion of code-duality. This premise regards DNA as the genetic, digital code and the organism as the emergent, contingent analog of that code. In short, the organism is the interpretive self-description of the genetic code. He writes that "life is dependent on [the] semiotic interplay between the analogic and digital versions of [the genetic] message" (44). Congruent with theories of biological systems, the interplay of the two codes marks the self-referential character of life. The emergent organism is, in Hoffmeyer's terms, a "creative interaction" between the discrete elements of its digital code – an "active" and "ecological" subject.

The active, ecological generation of both bodies and meaning is at once a biological and a philosophical position. Regarding the organism as a contingent, emergent occurrence of discrete material parts accords philosophically with Deleuze's notion of double causality developed in his 1969 book *The Logic of Sense* (1990). On the one hand, at the atomic level there is the mixture of bodies, or "intra-molecular modifications." At its most primary, this is the hard, physical causality in Nature based on the conjunction and disjunction of atoms (268). On the other hand, he gives the quasi-cause or "ideational cause" which corresponds to "varieties of a surface tension." Of the latter cause he explains, "this cause is nothing outside of its effect, and…maintains with the effect an immanent relation which turns the product, the moment that it is produced, into something productive" (95). At the outset, two important distinctions must be made. First, dual causality does not occur in succession but in tandem. Secondly, I believe that the designation "quasi" (Deleuze also uses the term "fictive") is misleading. The ideational cause is not a fiction or a phantom, but rather a direct and immediate expression. In other words, it is a coemergent cognitive activity that corresponds to a biophysical event. It is a reciprocal process wherein cognition inheres in being, and being inheres in cognition.

I would like to take this description one step further. Read as an analysis of organizational levels, Deleuze's system resonates with Franciso Varela et al.'s study of dynamic networks of cognitive systems in *The Embodied Mind* (2016):

> The strategy…is to build a cognitive system not by starting with symbols and rules but by starting with simple components that would dynamically connect with each other in dense ways. In this approach, each component operates only in

> its local environment, so that there is no external agent that…turns the system's axle. But because of the system's network constitution, there is a global cooperation that spontaneously emerges when the states of the participating 'neurons' reach a mutually satisfactory state. In such a system, there is no need for a central processing unit to guide the entire operation. (2016, 88)

Meaning is revealed in a sub-symbolic register as "it resides in complex patterns of activity that emerge from the interactions [of the network's] many such constituents" (100). Assuming a quantum approach wherein subatomic activity is reduced and studied not in terms of specific particles but of interrelations, what becomes meaningful in the network system is not objective, symbolic representation but rather the network activity itself.

4.

If meaning making, following Evan Thompson's (2007) definition of it as the context-dependent signification between system and environment, is intrinsic to the bare activity of living systems, this premise supports an understanding of cognition as embodied, and thus in the co-dependent emergence of mind and life. Cognition as defined by Maturana and Varela (1987) is "effective action" resulting from a history of structural coupling that brings forth a world (244; Varela, Thompson, Rosch 2016, 206). Varela and his coauthors' work on the subject, despite its eschewing of the term, is rooted in the former's work with Humberto Maturana on autopoiesis. Initially, the term autopoiesis was used to describe any self-producing, self-maintaining system, the most clear-cut example being a living cell. This definition evolved: "In later writings, Varela (2000a)

proposed the following simplified definition of autopoeisis. For a system to be autopoeitic, (i) the system must have a semipermeable boundary; (ii) the boundary must be produced by a network of reactions that take place within the boundary; and (iii) the network of reactions must include reactions that regenerate the components of the system" (Thompson 2007, 101). While the system is wholly self-organizing, there is no "self" (in the philosophical sense) controlling the process. Rather, self-organization and the resultant emergent processes "belong to a network of elements" and "arises spontaneously or self-organizes from locally defined and globally constrained interactions with those elements" (60).

Central to the autopoietic system is a metabolic network enclosed by a semi-permeable membrane. The system must "produce and regulate its own internal topology and functional boundary" (Thompson 2007, 107). The membrane does not merely serve as a boundary for the system, but actively participates in the network. The network produces the boundary that in turn maintains the functioning of the network (Maturana and Varela 1987, 46). Moreover, the boundary allows for the system to regulate its activity in response to perturbations from the environment (or the system's immediate lived-context or milieu). The system's behavior thus expands to include sensorimotor activity. Maturana and Varela (1987) explain:

> In this sense, the nervous system can be characterized as having *operational closure*. In other words, the nervous system's organization is a network of active components in which every change of relations of activity leads to further changes of relations of activity. Some of these relationships remain invariant through

> continuous perturbation both due to the nervous system's own dynamics and due to the interactions of the organism it integrates. (164)[6]

Operational closure, it follows, is sufficient for not simply differentiating an individual organism from its environment, but also for cognition. Defining the self as an operation, in other words, an activity, allows us to analyze the ways in which bodies persist, perceive, and interweave. Margulis and Sagan (1995) remind us that "life is a verb" (14). From a biosemiotic perspective rooted in systems theory, so is the subject.

The biophysical event is thus formed and reformed by the mutually constitutive, co-emergent activity of autopoiesis, philosophically understood by way of Deleuze's double-causality. The surface or membrane does not only regulate the system's operational closure. It also regulates the recurrent interactions of the organism in its environment. This reciprocal, recurrent engagement is known in biological systems theory as "structural coupling" and refers to "the history of recurrent interactions leading to the structural congruence between two or more systems" (Maturana and Varela 1987, 75; Thompson 2007, 45). For Deleuze, the membrane serves as "a receptive apparatus capable of bringing about a successive superimposition of surface planes in accordance with another dimension" (1990, 104). It is at this point that the biological becomes also philosophical. Structural coupling, as facilitated by the membrane, does not only mediate a consistent relation between organism and environment. In pure philosophical terms, it also overlays subjective and objective dimensions. In fact, the distinction between individual and Nature (qua thing-in-itself) is completely levelled. As such, the transcendental in this case is not the result of stretching abstract categories of

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[6] See also *The Tree of Knowledge,* 89: "identity is specified by network of dynamic processes whose effects do not leave that network."

consciousness - it is in the fundamental activity of cognition itself. Cognition "is not the representation of a pregiven world by a pregiven mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs" (Varela et al. 2016, 9). To enact a world is not to process a mental representation of it. On the contrary, self, world, and even representation, are dependent on life *as a process*.

5.

In his book *Signs of Meaning in the Universe* (1996), Jesper Hoffmeyer writes: "consciousness…must be narrative" (121). Biosemiotics recognizes consciousness as a distinctly human way of processing the swarming activity of the body as it is situated in and consistently processing its *Umwelt*. The body is an assemblage of systems and states, from the individual cells that compose it to the higher-order functioning of the central nervous system. Language begins with the sign processes that are present at the most basic levels of biochemical life. Interpretation, and by extension, intelligence, therefore begin with the body. Recognizing a fundamental semiosis at work in all registers of life de-centers the human, as cognition and sense-making are now understood to emerge and operate along a spectrum of living things. Moreover, the expression of a world and therefore the generation of meaning is a fundamental property of all biological life. Supplementing biosemiotics by means of a theory of autopoiesis, systems theory, and Deleuzean philosophy signals a merging of science, theory, and the arts. Cognition as the lived activity that enacts a world is an inherently aesthetic phenomenon. The question that remains is how can the arts best represent the subjective experience of a mind as it is

drawn out along lived, embodied experience. Biosemiotics accounts for the active process of individual, subjective emergence as that which gives coherence to a world. Moreover, it allows for a keeping pace with a world in constant transition. The static, visual arts force us to recognize our embodied encounter with the world, and the precise ways in which the body thinks. It is literature and film that best provide a means of narrativizing the event.

I follow a relatively chronological reading of literature and film. The bulk of the work covered in this dissertation are modernist texts. As I have argued, there is good reason to consider that we have never left the modernist era. My biosemiotic perspective has the additional benefit of allowing me to track modernist concerns into the present as well as look back on texts from the first half of the twentieth century from the perspective of contemporary theories of life and mind. I do this with the intention of letting the texts speak for themselves, my theoretical lens hopefully lending clarity and coherence along the way.

Chapter one challenges the popular reading of Samuel Beckett as a-theoretical in order to identify a consistent notion of embodied subjectivity in his work. Expression, for Beckett, is an embodied, emergent phenomenon predicated on failure. Reading his essays and letters on art, it is apparent that the notion of failure Beckett develops is resonant with later notions of structural coupling and constraint in biological systems theory. As we will see, the "failure" of artistic expression that Beckett identifies implies that any system of expression be organizationally closed but structurally open. The closed network of recursive operations that designate a system is precisely what opens up a world for that system. In other words, a system is open to a repertoire of meaningful

interactions precisely because it is closed off. This not only designates an inside and an outside, but allows the system to develop habits. Following this line of thought in Beckett's art criticism, it becomes clear he is not interested in developing a theory of aesthetics, but a theory of life as expression.

Once a reading of life in Beckett's art criticism has been secured, I turn to his novels *Molloy* and *Unnameable*, written around the same time as the art essays. The novels provide a means of analyzing Beckett's theory in practice, following the ways in which language "fails" by way of equivocation and negation. Nevertheless, language as expression of a "self" or subject persists despite continually negating itself. In this way, it parallels the metabolic movement of life. Tracking the movement of language in the novels with and despite the deteriorating physical states of their character-narrators reveals that subjectivity is an embodied phenomenon. It is not only congruent with movement (or lack thereof), it is entirely co-emergent with its world.

Chapter two builds upon the notion of subjectivity and sense-making developed in the previous chapter. It examines how a coherent, meaningful world is articulated along with the emergence of a "self" or subject. In order to do so, I undertake a reading of Virginia Woolf's novel, *The Waves*. I follow specifically Woolf's use of the image of the nerve fiber to coordinate the way in which the individual enacts a world. As a result, the narrative tracks along with the subject's sensorimotor engagement with the world. Composed as a "play-poem," the experimental prose of the novel interweaves not just the soliloquies of its six characters, but mind and world with embodied activity. In my reading of the story, I seek to unfold the narrated world as enacted by a complex repertoire of embodied actions. I supplement this biosemiotic reading of the novel with

the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and their understanding of affect and expression. Affect is quite simply the capacity for various bodies to interact and the degree to which they do so. Regarding affect as a capacity allows us to interrogate not what a body expresses, but how. Like Beckett, Woolf has a direct influence on Delezoguattarian thought. Her work allows us to apprehend not only a constitutive relation between life and world, one that informs and expands our understanding of expression in the philosophy of Deleuze (and Guattari), but also how meaning and therefore a world are likewise drawn out along the same process.

Having secured a notion of subjectivity and its relation to a world, I move from the biological to the social and examine embodied socio-political subjectivity and resistance in Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison. Relying on the Deleuzoguattarian notions of assemblage and "becoming-animal," I undertake an evolutionary reading of Richard Wright's "The Man Who Lived Underground." I argue that creative subjectivity in the novella emerges from the dynamic relation between the body and environment of the main character, and that lived activity in turn grounds resistance to racist hegemony. The novella uses space and infrastructure, namely the streets and the sewer system, as visual metaphors to designate social strata as well as clearly mark the space against which the limits of sociopolitical subjectivity are tested. Chased by police into a sewer, not only does the protagonist's body change to compensate for the darkness of the underground, he reciprocally engineers the city from below, actively reconstructing the underground environment to suit his changing bodily state. Digging from basement to basement, he forges new physical and social connections that short-circuit dominant, racist and capitalist modes of social organization. Collapsing the distinction between mechanical

emergence and embodied expression pulls theoretical discussions of biosemiotics and living systems toward a practical application of developing a tactics of living in a world. The lived body becomes the statement of a radical, positive, embodied sociopolitical subjectivity. The chapter's final section turns to a reading of jazz aesthetics in order to ask the fundamental Deleuzean question: "What can a body do?" Jazz improvisation provides a concrete example of the material processes that condition a radical, creative, improvised sociopolitical subjectivity. The material dynamics of the jazz event facilitates a parallel reading of autopoiesis, openness from closure, structural coupling, and recursive self-reference as both organic/biophysical and social phenomena.

The final chapter will turn from literature to film in order to examine embodiment, emergence, and expression in the films of David Lynch. Lynch's filmmaking style is distinctly multidimensional and can be traced back to his beginnings as a painter. At the level of the story, alternate worlds or distant levels of reality seem to always be in contact. This multidimensionality is also at work in the way Lynch composes his films. Rather than stable shots, each scene is a densely layered milieu, an active zone of intensity and movement. From a Deleuzean standpoint, Lynch's is a cinema of the virtual. What overspills in his films is the image as it emerges from the contingent material interplay of the elements that make it up. In order to illustrate the ways in which Lynch's cinema has always centered on emergence and sense-making, I begin by examining the superimposition of space and reality in *Eraserhead* (1977). Lynch treats space like a circuit; the motif of the hole allows us to observe Lynch connecting various dimensions of space. It also reveals how Lynch guides the movement of his compositions. In *Fire Walk with Me* (1994), Lynch's use of superimposition is

brought to the level of a single image. Close reading a key scene of the film (and arguably his entire oeuvre), we can observe a co-emergence of image and idea that parallels the co-emergence of body and mind. Taking cinema to be a natural extension of the literary, narrative arts, Lynch's work, in my estimation, reveals the culmination of what I see to be a century (plus) long interdisciplinary project of making sense of the world that began in earnest with the modernist era and continues into the present.

Chapter 1: "On the one hand the mind, on the other the world": Expressions of Life in Samuel Beckett's (Non-) Theory of Art

A. van Velde. *Gouache,* Samuel Becket collection, Paris

1.

Reading Samuel Beckett's essays on art in conjunction with his first trilogy provides a unique opportunity to pursue the fertile encounter between theory and literature. Taken together, these works not only serve to map out an aesthetic theory that is reflected in his fiction. As well, artistic expression becomes for Beckett a means of working through the entanglement of subject and world in such a way that it foreshadows later notions of emergence, embodiment, and subjectivity in biological system's theory. Taken as a

whole, Beckett's essays on art betray a rather systematic appraisal of the art experience that only thinly veils a larger theory of life itself. These works open to an analysis of subjectivity as an entirely embodied, emergent phenomenon – one that is not simply embedded in a world, but in its very activity, enacts its world. If subjectivity is contingent on the interaction between the individual and its environment, neither the subject nor the world precedes the other. They are strictly co-emergent. Nevertheless, if we were to designate a (precise) place for the subject, it would be at the point of interaction, of the structural coupling that leads to structural congruence and recurrent interaction between the living system and its environment. As subjectivity proper cannot account for this mutual interaction but rather emerges or "erupts" from it—because this self-analysis would require the subject to be both subject and object at once—the subject can only be regarded as a surplus (what Deleuze would call "extra-being"). From the perspective of systems biology, this is the direct result of striving. Subjectivity is the expression of the "fully realized" activity of a living system.

As to what Beckett's "theory" is, it essentially amounts to a theory of structural constraint. Especially in "Peintures de l'Empechement," "Three Dialogues," and "La peinture des van Velde ou le Monde et le Pantalon," creativity emerges from constraint (for Beckett a term that is synonymous with failure). But this constraint also implies that expression emerges from a system that is organizationally closed but structurally open (ie. it is by virtue of being a closed network of recursive operations that a system opens a world of meaningful interactions). As Niklas Luhmann and Maturana and Varela have argued, it is precisely the closure of a system (of emergent relations) and the designation of an inside and an outside that enables the very openness of the system to any possible

future interactions.[1] Beckett's interlocutor Georges Duthuit admonishes Beckett in their dialogues for essentially not caring about art, reminding him that their subject should be this painting or painter, but not he, Beckett. This is the key. It is not about the art for Beckett, it's about existence. Artistic expression, for Beckett, is just a compulsion, often pathological and dictated entirely by the laws of habit. If we can gain any insight here, it will not be in the pursuit of an art theory, but of a theory of life.

Focusing on existence rather than aesthetics, Beckett emphasizes the emergence of form rather than relying on pre-established, historically influenced concepts (categories such as time, space, measurability, etc). This approach provides a prescient awareness of life, cognition, subjectivity, and the world as co-emergent properties of a single system. Meaning emerges through the activity (movement) of the living system as it strives to maintain itself and prolong its existence. Subject and world mutually inform each other by way of their recurrent interactions. The maintenance of organic life, in other words, necessarily includes the production of meaning.

In order to make my case, I will have to shift the emphasis away from the abstract level of aesthetic ideas in Beckett's essays and towards a more comprehensive analysis of the embodied level of aesthetic perception. This has been pursued in relation to Beckett's work for the theatre, yet I believe there is more work to be done in regard to his non dramatic works.[2] I believe that the essays on art reflect a lived and embodied process of

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[1] Cf. Luhmann (2000). Art as an autopoietic system "draws a boundary, which implies that only internal operations are henceforth possible – operations that are capable of observing this boundary, that can, in other words, distinguish system from environment and make indications that refer either to themselves or the outside world" (33).

[2] Laurens De Vos, "The Observer Observed. The Promise of the Posthuman: Homeostasis, *Autopoiesis*, and Virtuality in Samuel Beckett". *Journal of Beckett Studies* 27.2 (2018): 245-260.

perception, and by extension the expression of a "world."[3] In this light, Beckett's ideas on art and the act of looking align with later ideas and insights at the heart of biological systems theory. This approach requires a detour through some conceptual and philosophical particulars before exploring specific examples from the literature. Specifically, I begin with a reading of his essays on art with an eye toward identifying conceptual similarities between these works and later insights from Gilles Deleuze and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Identifying these connections will allow me to draw out Beckett's position on embodiment in the art essays in a way that resonates with biological systems theory (as well as follow the common direction recently taken by critics). Enlisting Merleau-Ponty along with Deleuze and philosopher of science, Hans Jonas, my aim in this section is to situate Beckett's work at the intersection of art, theory, and philosophy. The third section is dedicated to Beckett's fiction, namely *Molloy* and *Unnameable*. The connection to the autopoietic, systems reading of the previous section, I argue, is evident in both his critical work and his literature. This connection outlines a fundamental reading of subjectivity that, in its lived activity, is not merely embodied but mutually constitutive and co-dependent with its world. I will demonstrate how the movement of language in Beckett's prose parallels the movement of life (at the metabolic level).

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[3] The term "world," used throughout this chapter, is derived from Jakob von Uexküll's *Umwelt*, which refers to the subjectively enacted world of a specific organism. In *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, von Uexküll writes: "All animal subjects, from the simple to the most complex, are inserted into their environments to the same degree of perfection. The simple animal has a simple environment; the multiform animal has an environment just as richly articulated as it is" (50). Agamben later explains this as "the environment-world that is constituted by a more or less broad series of elements [called] 'carriers of significance'…which are the only things of interest to the animal" (40).

2.

The notions of failure and striving[4] have been well documented in Beckett's work. Notable instances of this are "fail better" in *Worstword Ho* and "I can't go on, I'll go on" in *The Unnameable*. In "Three Dialogues" this theme is introduced in the discussion of Tal Coat. Beckett writes here of an art that turns away from the "puny exploits" of an objective preoccupation, preferring "the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express" (139). Beckett asserts that for the artist "obsessed" with expression – he describes the expressive possibilities available to the artist as drawing out along a "plane of the feasible" – everything can become an object, including the pursuit of the object. In fact, both artist and object are "unstable terms." What matters is the tension and anxiety that arise from this precarious linkage or non-relation between the two. For Beckett, the artist has neither power nor desire to express anything, but must do so nonetheless. Expression is an "obligation." But this is a vague term. I believe that the emphasis on tension and anxiety, coupled with the fact that for Beckett art and life read as inseparable terms in this text, draws this obligation to express away from the aesthetic. In short, expression

[4] Spinoza asserts that each body strives to open up and prolong its existence. Cf. *Ethics* (II/222; II/224). We know that Beckett spent time in the 30's working through Spinoza's *Ethics* (Knowlson 206) and directly incorporated the philosopher into *Murphy*. For our purposes, the link here to Spinoza is more than simply terminological, yet, as Hans Jonas (1968) clarifies "Spinoza, with the knowledge of his time, did not realize that the *conatus* to persevere in being can only operate as a movement that goes constantly beyond the state of things." Thus, in a teleological sense, the "will to live" read in Spinoza is translated into the very process of existence of the organic individual. Deacon (2013) specifies this when he writes "Because [the self] is dynamical, it is dependent on extrinsic energy and material; because it is a form of reciprocal dependency, it is dependent upon being isolated from aspects of the non-self world that might disrupt this delicate reciprocity" (471).

becomes synonymous with living. Beckett writes that the painter van Velde "is the first to desist from this estheticized automatism, the first to admit that to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living" (1984, 145).

The essay "La peinture des van Veldes ou le Monde et le Pantalon" provides insight into the tenuous historical relation between artist and object. Beckett centers on the compression or knotting he identifies in the work of Bram van Velde to counter a traditional, representationalist approach to painting (and art in general). In situating the artist, he makes a critical distinction in the essay between consciousness or awareness [*prise de conscience*] and "taking vision" [*prise de vision*]. He writes:

> Because it [seeing] has nothing to do with taking consciousness, but with a taking vision, with simply taking view. Simply! And with a taking vision on the only field that from time to time allows itself to be simply seen, that does not insist on being poorly known, that at times grants its faithful ignorance of all that is not appearance: on the interior field. (my translation, 125)[5]

Beckett shuts out the perceiving subject completely in favor of raw sensory impression, cognizance here implying a history of subjective reflection up and against an objective world. Bracketing the interior field of subjective reflection does not so much serve to narrow the gap between subject and object, perceiver and perceived, as much as it seems (at face value) to nullify any subjective experience altogether. The immediate confinement reduces one's engagement with art from the subjective to a purely material

[5] "Car il ne s'agit ullement d'une prise de conscience, mais d'une prise de vision, d'une prise de vue tout court. Tout court! Et d'une prise de vision au seul champ qui se laisse parfois voir sans plus, qui n'insiste pas toujours pour être mal connu, qui accorde par moments à ses fidèles d'en ignorer tout ce qui n'est pas apparence: au champ intérieur."

or formal level. Hence Beckett's study of the van Veldes presents a certain immediacy, a formal suspension "of the thing sole, isolated by the need to see it, by the need to see" (my translation 1984, 126).[6] Any relation beyond a biological imperative –the exchange of raw sense data – is uncertain, quite literally in suspension [*en suspense*], because it emerges only in the embodied act of seeing. It is the act - the occasion or process of taking vision – that is solely generative. Abandoning the mental in favor of an embodied process, painting, for Beckett, is therefore an expression of the irrational - those atomic, preconscious processes that are obscured by any "realist" or representational arts.

At the outset, Beckett troubles any notion of apperception. This is apperception as distinct from Kant's definition from *The Critique of Pure Reason*. The Kantian[7] unity of apperception states that the "I think" must accompany all of one's representations in order for them to be anything at all for the subject (KRV B132). Beckett complicates things by stating it is simply nonsensical or impossible to write "purely visual apperception" [*"Écrire apperception purement visuelle, c'est écrire une phrase dénuée de sens* (1984, 125)]. Language – and we can include here any symbolic mode of communication that aims to render a representation of the "real" – annuls the immediate, physical act. Beckett further believes that in language we can only recount ourselves, first, because language is always already a recapitulation of an anterior event that it seeks to describe; second, because language inevitably drags along behind it the weight of its (intellectual) history; and finally, because language retroactively envelops the body,

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[6] "C'est la chose seule, isolée par le besoin de la voir, par le besoin de voir."

[7] Beckett spent considerable time working through Kant's philosophy. As P.J. Murphy observes, "Kant's failure to validate the powers of the imagination in ontological investigations is remarkably similar to Beckett's comments on the world-making 'pure force of the imagination'" (276).

supplementing and therefore stripping its movements and actions of their primary sensory qualities.

Rather than fall back on the generative capacity of the mind, or conversely, on the primacy of the object, Beckett recognizes the potency of "*la chose en suspens*" allegedly exemplified in the painting of Bram van Velde. Bram van Velde, Beckett claims, "idealises [extension], in an internal sense, in fact" (my translation 1984, 128)[8] suspending identifiable relations and forcing traditional notions of objectivity into retreat. Whereas for Kant, the "pure object" or "ding an sich" exists only outside our intuition (as opposed to the phenomenological object that is the result of our own mental activity), for Beckett, the "pure" object, the thing-in-itself, is the process of intuition itself. Specifically, it is the coupling of perceiver and perceived, the resultant expression being the articulation of an emergent process and not a "thing" or "object" as such. Beckett will later define art in "Peintres de l'Empechement" as an "adjustment." It is precisely the status of this process or adjustment *as object* that needs to be interrogated.

Formally, the focus on process draws the problem of relation between artist and object out of the mind and sets it squarely within an embodied situation.[9] In fact, Beckett's position highlights the temporalized, embodied process of subject formation operant in Kant.[10] A clue as to Beckett's thinking on the matter, as well as his approach

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[8] "Il l'idéalise, en fait un sens interne"

[9] Cf. Luhmann (2000): "the consciousness that accompanies and controls the operation always perceives…both sides simultaneously – that is, it perceives the form. The operational mode is always concerned with unfolding a temporal paradox: it must either realize simultaneity sequentially or control a sequence of operations through an observation that exists only as an operation…observation unfolds the temporal paradox that the simultaneity of the distinguished and the consecutive nature of the operation occur simultaneously" (73).

[10] Cf. Andreas Gailus, *Forms of Life: Aesthetics and Biopolitics in German Culture* (Cornell UP, 2020). Gailus recognizes immediately in Kant's third Critique the importance of the term *Lebensgefühl*, or the feeling of life that "brings the subject into contact with her own existence" (82). Moreover, the failure of our cognitive faculties to generalize (subsume under a concept) the beautiful, "throws into relief the *activity*

to the work of A. van Velde, can be taken from his March 9, 1949 letter to Georges Duthuit. He begins by citing an accepted understanding of the term "relation" as "not only the primary form, that between the artist and the outside world, but above all those which, within him, ensure he has lines of flight and retreat, and changes of tension, and make available to him, among other benefits, that of feeling plural (to put it no higher), while remaining (of course) unique" (2020, 138). The sarcastic parentheticals aside, Beckett believes the trouble with any representative art begins with the insistence of a "primary form," that is, a pre-established, cognitive schema that remains within the individual (note that lines of flight and retreat are wholly interior movements) and ensures a guarantee of unique subjective individuality even in the face of other "forms" that constitute a more or less illusory plurality. Crucial to this line of inquiry is the linkage Beckett establishes later on in this letter between the seemingly disparate terms "life," "density," and "simplicity of being," our understanding of which, if we are to follow Beckett, pivots on an "eruption." Painting enacts the internal tensions otherwise inhibited by expression. It idealizes natural extension not by way of the intellect, but within a total field as it emerges through lived activity.[11] Nature, as defined by Beckett in *Three Dialogues*, is "a composite of perceiver and perceived, not a datum, an

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of cognizing, and in particular the imagination's creative work in extracting form from reality. It is precisely because beauty provides us with no determinable knowledge that it gives us access to the formative nature of thinking, this enabling us to recognize, *indeed feel and bodily experience*, a drive within us that we also recognize in external nature: the drive toward the realization of kinds and the articulation of form" (my emphasis, 93).

[11] Beckett's description of internal tension (or the "internal idealism") of A. van Velde's painting is similar to what Even Thompson reads as the immanent purposiveness of living systems. Following Jonas (discussed below), Thompson remarks: "Life…is a self-affirming process" (153). The organism at once strives to continue living (maintaining itself despite a continual threat of dissolution) as well as enacts a world of significance (*Umwelt*) from the physiochemical environment that surrounds it. This dual activity, what Thompson identifies as the organism's immanent purposiveness, reveals identity (as organization and sense-making) as based in autopoiesis. Moreover, identity becomes in itself transcendental.

experience," one that is revealed in a "vigilant coenaesthesia" (1984, 138). For Beckett, nature and its expression can therefore be realized only in a bodily state. The here and now glossed over in traditional, speculative modes of perception and expression – the eschewing of the whole in preference of the interior flights of the mind - is recaptured in the painter's thrust toward natural (i.e. more real) modes of experience.

Beckett expands upon the position of the object vis à vis lack in "Peintres de l'Empechement." Specifically, he states that the connection between the artist and their object is one of mutual privation. From a historical philosophical perspective, the object is conditioned on the fact that it is self-contained, it stands in itself opposed to a subject that is likewise closed off. Painting, thus, is the articulation of this limit. The resistance of the object to representation, the subject's inability to see it, marks the crisis of representation not as a matter of the "thing," but of the conditions of possibility of expression in the face of this impasse or mutual privation. As a result, art becomes not merely an adjustment, but a confinement (in the *Cahiers D'Art* essay this adjustment is alluded to in an interest in the human condition as a continual process of change). Moreover, it is "an art of acceptance, discerning in the absence of relation and the absence of object the new relation and the new object, a way that branches already in the painting of Bram and Geer van Velde" (2011, 880). The privation – on the side of the subject, an impotence – of the artist to secure anything resembling an "objective representation" in the face of a fundamental non-relation – an impossibility that is the very condition of objectivity – locks the subject into a new, immediate system of relations it has no choice but to accept, and for Beckett this act of acceptance is synonymous with life.

There is considerable overlap between Beckett's insights on artistic expression and Deleuze's theories of emergence and the event. This should come as no surprise as Beckett influenced and informed much of Deleuze's work. Deleuze (1990) writes that events are "never causes of one another, but rather enter relations of quasi-causality" (33). The "quasi" or ideational cause is the surface expression of the hard, physical causality at work in nature. Linguistically, the event operates at once at the material and the propositional level (one can consider here Terrence Deacon's reliance on the dual meaning of the term "matter").[12] What is more, the relation that Deleuze is affirming is structured upon a lack, a relation of non-relation between the event and its articulation (ie. of the combination of elements and the emergent form). The mixture of bodies, that is, the material cause that represents the organic, biological register of the event, is presented as demonstrating a certain ambivalence. It is important to recall here that for Deleuze "singularity is *neutral*" (52). This neutrality is simply the lack or absence of needs, wants, or goals inherent in bare material activity. There are no pre-conditioned relations, only emergent ones. Thus, to make a bold claim, the minimal organization of life is also the minimal organization of sense or signification. And for Beckett, both artistic and linguistic expression follow the bare, material act of living. Life and art emerge from the same process.

The Deleuzean notion of dual causality pushes toward what Beckett identifies in " La peinture" as the "internal idealism" allegedly realized in Van Veldes' work. Just as to speak of or write apperception – to give it a syntax (in time, language) - is to strip it of its

[12] Cf. Deacon (2013): "To 'matter' is to be substantial, to resist modification, to be beyond creation or destruction – and yet what matters about an idea or purpose is dependent on something that is not substantial in any obvious sense" (23).

sense, "taking vision" inverts this movement and leads away from "writing apperception." Taking vision alone in terms of the pure sensory impulse brackets the interior field of cognition. It enacts a silence, the object "retires" as something preconditioned, and with it the subject. Relation, or what is left of it, is reduced to the suspension of elements with a field of mutual interconnection.

Further securing a reading of active, embodied relations in the art essays, Beckett's insistence on failure bears a similarity to Merleau-Ponty's belief that meaning does not "exist" anywhere and the object (of painting) is not something to be rediscovered or constructed. Rather, both emerge by way of embodied experience. In his essay, "Cezanne's Doubt," Merleau-Ponty writes: "if the painter is to express the world, the arrangement of his colors must bear within this indivisible whole, or else his painting will only hint at things and will not give them in the imperious unity, the presence, the insurpassable plentitude which is for us the definition of the real" (65). Like Beckett, Merleau-Ponty believed that the history of scientific thought renders primordial, sensory experience artificial.[13] Art, therefore, should not be taken as an imitation but a process of expression. Yet, this process is a contingent one. The real is inexhaustible. It is in the embodied situation of the artist and the spectator that reality takes on significance as world. Merleau-Ponty writes in *Phenomenology of Perception*: "The body is our general medium for having a world. Sometimes it is restricted to the actions necessary for the conservation of life, and accordingly it posits around us a biological world; at other times, elaborating upon these primary actions and moving from their literal and figurative

[13] In "Eye and Mind" Merleau-Ponty reverses Kant's dictum to raise metaphysics to the status of a science, stating that "[science]…will learn to ground itself upon things themselves and upon itself [by way of primordial experience], and will once more become philosophy" (161).

meaning, it manifests through them a core of new significances" (169). The body, as site of the intertwining of vision and movement, makes a difference in the visible world only through its being a part of it. The self (the result of our embodied situation in an environment) is "caught up in [the very] things" of our world.

Lois Oppenheim reads Beckett and Merleau-Ponty as forwarding similar notions of "incarnated perceptivity." Rather than securing a speculative or transcendental position, "this perceptivity incarnate is neither objectified nor subjectified by Beckett; the work of art…is thing-less and the perceiving consciousness as pure mentality is everywhere proven false…before a bodily possession of the world in which perception is above all visual and the artist that carnal instrument by which the world, in all its visibility, is rendered" (101). From a phenomenological perspective, there is little to contend with Oppenheim's position. The body as a carnal instrument echoes here Merleau-Ponty's notion of motor intentionality, that the "objective" world is immanent to and opened up by one's bodily movement through the world. What is more, Oppenheim quotes a passage from "La Peinture…" in which Beckett refers to the activity of the painter as disclosing "the fundamental invisibility of things till the very invisibility itself becomes a thing" (105). Merleau-Ponty makes a nearly identical claim in "Eye and Mind," writing: "(Painting) gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible…this voracious vision, reaching beyond the 'visual givens' opens upon a texture of being which the discrete sensorial messages are only punctuations or caesurae" (166). Painting is a (literal) movement toward a "figured philosophy." What both Beckett and Merleau-Ponty are after is the articulation of a pre-conscious mode of perception that reveals the circuit linking body and world. The body is that link. Painting (and all

perception) is an embodied technique. Perception is therefore not so much a construction (from the standpoint of a subject) but an adhering, an expression of the "inarticulate cry" of pure, emergent equivalences. Perception is what Merleau-Ponty recognizes as a mixing-up of pre-established categorical distinctions to reveal a fundamental likeness of "mute meanings."

The locking-in of the individual to a binding relation has connections to biological theory. Hans Jonas identifies the paradox of an individuality that, although composed of matter, is in no way identical to or bound by the matter which makes it up. In his 1968 essay "The Biological Foundations of Individuality," he stipulates "an identity totally different from physical identity, yet grounded in transactions among substrates of physical identity" (237). This is the result of the continual flow or exchange of matter through the network of substrates – in other words, the system's metabolic activity. He explains: "We have thus the case of a substantial entity enjoying a sort of freedom with respect to its own substance, an independence from that same matter of which it nonetheless wholly consists…Though independent of the sameness of the matter, it is dependent on the change of it, on its progressing permanently and sufficiently, and there is no freedom in this" (237). This entity is marked by a continuity of materialization, which Jonas does not hesitate to call a "self."[14] Identity, as a composite of matter and form, is always a moving beyond itself, its composition always a "passing beyond" of the very material that composes it. Thus, "being" is ontologically grounded in an activity –

[14] Deacon (2013) reiterates this crucial point: "this self-reconstitution capacity does maintain a persistent and distinctive locus of dynamical organization that maintains self-similarity across time and changing conditions. And yet there is no material continuity…Only the continuity of the constraints that determine the autogenic causal architecture is maintained across repeated iterations of dissolution and reconstitution" (309). Despite the lack of maintaining a consistent material identity over time as a result of molecular replacement, the "self" persist as a function or process rather than an inert material entity.

i.e. the structural coupling of individual and environment. Identity is likewise a process and not identical to the particular, transient elements that compose a consistent material assemblage.

Recalling Beckett's letter to Duthuit, his language of a break or rupture that opens onto a totality, rooted in the movement of life (it "goes on"), and furthermore a life that is both dense and simple, is quite prescient. And while it is certain Beckett was not thinking in distinctly biological terms, the dynamic relation between the individual and the world, highlighted in the moment of "taking vision," does not arise independently of life, but emerges with it. This returns us to the notion of the "idealized," internal extension – "reality" (qua world) emerges from the bare activity of perception - Beckett identifies in the painting of Bram van Velde, and the question of the possibility of any expression whatsoever.

3.

In Beckett's critical works, subjectivity is not merely embodied in the art event, it is constitutive of and co-dependent with its world. This systems theoretical perspective carries over into his fiction, notably in his first trilogy of novels: *Molloy, Malone Dies* and *The Unnameable*. Eschewing style, especially in these novels, allowed Beckett to concentrate on the movement of language, following its rhythm and musicality rather than saturating it in meaning and references, an inevitable symptom of using one's mother tongue. Beckett began writing in French in order to simplify his writing as much as possible. James Knowlson (1996) writes that "it was easier…to write in French 'without style'" and that "by adopting another language, he gained a greater simplicity

and objectivity. French offered him the freedom to concentrate on a more direct expression of the search for 'being'" (324). I contend that this stripping down of language, that is, using language "without style," can be read as bending signification towards "sense" qua movement of the body. Beckett brings writing as close as possible to the embodied act. On the one hand, this robs language of its cognitive presuppositions. On the other, remaining as close as possible to an embodied situation, we can see the very activity of cognition at work in the movement of Beckett's language. In following this very movement, Beckett's proves to be quite ahead of his time as his writing avoids any strict division between cognition and affect, the latter generally centered in the body, the former relegated to the mind. Affect (sensation), rather, is linked to the very movement or activity of the cognitive system.

The principle of openness from closure provides a novel means of approaching *Molloy*. Closure is most evident in the formal structure of the text. A careful reading of movement in *Molloy* on the plot level reveals a concomitant resistance to movement within the formal structure of the text itself. Immediately after Molloy's meditation about his bicycle, he thinks: "This should all be written in the pluperfect" (16). The pluperfect is the grammatical construction formed by the use of the auxiliary verb "had" + the past participle. It represents the past of the past. Thus, the narrative seeks to subvert its own temporality, because the appearance of progress in the narrative is in fact located two steps behind itself. The reference to the pluperfect occurs relatively early on in the monolithic 82-page second paragraph that comprises the bulk of the first section of the novel (minus one page). In wanting to pull back time by way of a confounding

grammatical aside, Molloy succeeds in functionally pulling the narrative further back into itself.

The functional impasse created by a narrative that impedes its own progress (by way of shifting tenses and monolithic blocks of text) mirrors Molloy's lack of mobility on his bicycle: "So I shall only add that every hundred yards or so I stopped to rest my legs, not only my legs. I didn't properly speaking get down off the machine, I remained astride it, my feet on the ground, my arms on the handlebars, my head on my arms, and I waited until I felt better" (Beckett 16). Molloy can only move so far without stopping. The theme of movement, mobility, arrest, and stasis in this novel not only defines Molloy's position in space. It also figures life and reading (a reading of life?) as "writhing": "My life, my life, now I speak of it as something over, now as of a joke which still goes on, and it is neither, for at the same time it is over and it goes on, and is there any tense for that" (27, 36). This struggling expression – as that which goes on despite being over - is further emphasized in the text as the narrative ends with Molloy physically dragging himself along the ground. Moreover, it becomes something of an ironic, teleological endpoint (a theme that is exemplified in *Endgame* in its examination of individuals persisting - "going on" - despite stultifying external as well as internal pressures).

Both openness and closure operate in the tender images of nature found in the novel, images often predicated on exchange. Of the few times nature is explicitly mentioned in *The Unnameable*, it has been seemingly negated by the voices that run through the speaker. This is not so in *Molloy*. At one point, in Lousse's yard, Molloy speaks of a "night of listening" where:

> there is less constraint…and then something else that is not clear, being neither air nor what it moves, perhaps the far unchanging noise the earth makes and which other noises cover, but not for long. For they do not account for that noise you hear when you really listen, when all seems hushed. And there was another noise, that of my life become the life of this garden as it rode the earth of deeps and wildernesses. Yes, there were times when I forgot not only who I was, but that I was, forgot to be. Then I was no longer that sealed jar to which I owed my being so well preserved, but a wall that gave way and I filled with roots and tame stems…(48-9)

The image of the body as "sealed jar" returns in *The Unnameable*, which describes the speaker (simply a head, torso, and genitals) stuffed into an urn near a restaurant at the edge of the shambles. Molloy's situation is not so hermetic. The disabled or deteriorating body – the fading form of a perpetually fading narrative – should not be read as shut off or fading from a "perfection" or wholeness (self-sustaining subjectivity). Rather, the body is a part of nature.[15] The noise heard "when all seems hushed" and "when you really listen" indicates an attunement to the movement (dynamic forces and flows) of nature, an attunement that is rooted in the realization of life as something shared. Subjectivity is thus revealed as an event rooted in the coupling of body and environment, a connection here predicated on exchange and intimately lived through. Here Beckett's fiction draws

[15] For a discussion of the "uncertain relation" between the human and matter, as well as an ethical reading of the material (in)determinacy of the human condition in *Murphy* that relates as well to Beckett's later work, see Jeff Wallace, "Murphy and Peace" *Twentieth Century Literature* 61.3 (2015): 352-372.

out the very carnal or "mute" meanings[16] Merleau-Ponty sees in the body and world as equal and co-emergent.

Molloy's writhing failure, the inability to speak of "life" coupled with a body more and more incapable of movement, is drawn almost entirely into the linguistic realm in *The Unnameable*. Yet the body is not wholly absent. Early in the novel, the speaker remarks: "It is well to establish the position of my body at the outset," (304). The body is seated, still, with hands on knees. Despite the speaker's desire to think himself a featureless sphere or egg, the indication of a generic, bodily shape is given by way of pressure to the feet, rump, and palms. The reduction of the body is not necessarily an admission of the primacy of language. Rather, the breaking down of the body – the loss of limbs, the failure of the senses, the pained locomotion – and the breaking down of language – writing "without style" – are indicative of a single impulse, drawing us closer to a more preconscious, habitual mode of subjectivity.

At the outset, language is understood as a compulsion for the speaker of *The Unnameable.* As the novel progresses, the initial imperative or compulsion to speak of an "I" and "it" (i.e., subject and object) take the form of a circuit, originating with the bodily act of speaking and listening – passively received as aural stimulation: "I launch the voice, I hear a voice, there is nowhere but here, there are not two places, there are not two prisons…outside, inside, there is nothing but here" (410). At once, the projection of the voice signifies a return to the same body. The body itself is a relay, "a transformer in

[16] In "The Intertwining-The Chiasm," Merleau-Ponty writes of the human body: "we would see that the structure of its mute world is such that all the possibilities of language are already given in it" (1968, 155). Meaning, thus, does not precede our embodied encounter with the (external) world, but as our embodied experience is interwoven with the things of the world, meaning emerges as a result of our embodied engagement.

which sound is turned, without the help of reason" (356). The speaker excludes consciousness/reason in favor of bare activity – "This obligation…engrossed me in a purely mechanical way, excluding notably the free play of the intelligence and sensibility" (320). Yet he admits – despite his discounting of the higher faculties – that all is being done with "a minimum of mind" (311). In the absolute reduction of the body and language to a concomitant movement, that is, to a single activity which, as we will see, is consistent with both biological and philosophical notions of habit, Beckett's speaker may "simply utter…utter me" (299, 300).

The Unnameable begins with the imperative to speak – "I, say I" and "It, say it" - against the very breakdown of speech (291). Quite simply, the uncertainty of knowledge and belief is immediately set against the compulsion of speech/language to continue forward. The early sections of the novel highlight the split that language effects between the subject and the world. Even visual perception is described as fitful. The unreliability of both the senses and the intellect grounds the speaker's existence on a "principle of disorder" (294). Limited vision ("what I best see I see ill") recalls the tension between vision and cognizance in "La peinture." If there is to be any mediation – in the sense of that which might bring order from chaos – it is in relation to the eye. Yet between the remarks on vision, there is a break in which the speaker reflects on his origin:

> It would help me, since to me I must attribute a beginning, if I could relate it to that of my abode. Did I wait somewhere for this place to be ready to receive me? Or did it wait for me to come and people it? By far the better of these hypotheses, from the point of view of usefulness, is the former, and I shall often have occasion

> to fall back on it. But both are distasteful. I shall say therefore that our beginnings coincide, that this place was made for me and I for it, at the same instant. (296)

The temporal coincidence of subject and world does more than simply assume the simultaneity or co-emergence of the two in this passage. The aporia that arises (as the only way the speaker knows how to proceed) is not simply the failure to express this simultaneity, since language always comes too late. Rather, it is also the "internal tension" inherent in Beckett's use of language. That tension is at once an affirmation and a negation, a closure and an opening up that, in its very materiality, parallels the thrust of autopoietic life.

Taking the body as the site of emergence of both mind and world allows us to identify the subject as located between the mind and the world:

> Perhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either. (383)

The division between inside and outside, this middle space the speaker occupies, gradually blurs as the passage progresses. The subject as partition becomes a "tympanum" or membrane. The subject is reduced to a sound-producing organ that acts as a resonator, receiving and emitting auditory stimuli. The body becomes a site of reciprocal exchange, a resonant barrier between inside and outside, mind and world. Subjectivity is expressed by way of a language that follows the movement of life.

Life, as articulated through language, is centered on need. The speaker of *The Unnameable*, upon announcing that "we'll always be short of me," confuses affirmation and negation. Regarding one of his interlocutors' (Worm's) inability to "note" the extent of the speaker's effort, he states: "There at least is one affirmation, I mean negation, on which to build" (339). Taking negation and affirmation as isometric terms, the exhaustive run of language that pushes forward, equivocates, fails, and begins again, is congruent to the material conditions of existence. If, at the bare minimum, cognition is simply an effective action that compensates for something that is missing, then language, reduced to the mere expression of an embodied phenomenon, follows that very movement. Likewise, this (expressed) activity reflects a more primary need. Beckett's speaker admits: "I like to think I occupy the center, but nothing is less certain," and later in the same paragraph, describing the apparent movement from (presumed) center to periphery: "It is equally possible, I do not deny it, that I too am in perpetual motion…But the best is to think of myself as fixed and at the center" (295). Speech, the speaker confirms, "can only be of me here." Moreover, subject (qua speaker) and place are drawn out at once by a language in the process of continual redefinition: "For to go on [i.e. continue speaking] means going from here, means finding me, losing me, vanishing and beginning again, a stranger first, then little by little the same as always, in another place, where I shall say I have always been" (302). This material movement of both life and language (of life articulated through language), marks the coincidence of individual and world. This coincidence is reiterated toward the end of the work: "there was never anyone, anyone but me, anything but me, talking to me of me, impossible to stop, impossible to go on" (395).

This returns us to the notion of habit briefly mentioned above. Much of the behavior of Beckett's characters is figured on repetition. Toward the end of his narrative, Molloy is crawling on his belly, "always present to [his] mind, which was still working, if laboriously, the need to turn, to keep on turning…which permitted [him] to describe, if not a circle, a great polygon" (90). The notion of circular movement returns in *The Unnameable*, distinctly echoing Molloy, the speaker "hobbling through a [barren, deserted] nature":

> I had already advanced a good ten paces, if one may call them paces, not in a straight line I need hardly say, but in a sharp curve which, if I continued to follow it, seemed likely to restore me to my point of departure, or to one adjacent. I must have got embroiled in some inverted spiral, I mean one of the coils of which, instead of widening more and more, grew narrower and finally, given the kind of space in which I was supposed to evolve, would come to an end for lack of room. Faced then with the material impossibility of going any further I should no doubt have had to stop, unless of course I elected to set off again at once in the opposite direction. (316)

The speaker's spiraling movement, a series of "sharp" curves not unlike Molloy's polygon, is at once a return to his "point of departure" - much like Molloy's oblique path is inevitably a return to his mother, his own point of departure, so to speak. Moreover, as the narrative progresses, the coil narrows, compressing space, and thus limiting movement, which ultimately stunts any organic progression.

The spiral provides a compact illustration of the dual movement of habit in relation to the body.[17] Beckett understands the body to be consistently overworked (it adjusts and readjusts) in its translation (both physiologically and linguistically) of sensation. This is as exhaustive a task for Beckett's characters as is the bare act of living. The speaker of *The Unnameable* observes:

> the words are everywhere, inside me, outside me, well well, a minute ago I had no thickness, I hear them, no need to hear them, no need of a head, impossible to stop them, impossible to stop, I'm in words, made of words, others' words, what others, the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, all worlds, the whole world is here with me, I'm the air, the walls, the walled-in one, everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows, like flakes, I'm all these flakes, meeting, mingling, falling asunder, wherever I go I find me, leave me, go towards me, come from me, nothing ever but me, a particle of me, lost, gone astray, I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing, coming together to say, fleeing one another to say, that I am they, all of them, those that merge, those that part, those that never meet, and nothing else, yes, something else. (386)

Words immediately close off a body. Hence the speaker goes on to compare himself to a "caged beast" born only into the certainty of death. Despite this closure, the space of being is either an "old void" or a "plenum,"[18] which is a place every part of which is

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[17] Quoting Beckett's early monograph on *Proust*, Maude emphasizes his recognition of habit and its necessity: "The fundamental duty of Habit, about which it describes the futile and stupefying arabesques of its supererogations, consists in a perpetual adjustment and readjustment of our organic sensibility to the conditions of its worlds" (816).

[18] Deleuze (1990) connects the (superficially) contradictory notions of void and plenum: "The void and plenum are interlaced and distributed in such a manner that the sum of the void and the atoms is itself

filled with matter (300). The stifling materiality implied in the plenum is here transposed onto the movement of language in the text – words are free floating dust. The movement of language, reflecting matter at a molecular level, positions the speaker simultaneously within being and non-being, as both "nothing" and "something." The coincidence of being and nothingness returns to the notion of the void that Beckett invokes earlier in the novel. In brief, the assertion that objective material reality (totality) exists implies at the same time a fundamental nothingness or incompleteness (non-being) that preconditions subjective Being.

The tension between being and non-being (nothingness), plenum and void pulses through all of Beckett's prose, especially the trilogy *Molloy, Malone Dies,* and *The Unnameable*. It can be likened to the challenge habit poses to any assertion of traditional subjectivity. Habit at this level is nothing more than the non-conscious, recursive activity of the lived body. As such, it is the foundation of the subject. For Deleuze, habit is the contraction of a repertoire of biophysical processes that condition the emergence of a subject. The body is thus enveloped by sense or meaning – its world - as a result of its own activity. As Deleuze (1990) writes: "sense is always an *effect*…It is a product which spreads out over, or extends itself the length of, the surface; it is strictly co-present to, and coextensive with, its own cause, and determines this cause as an imminent cause, inseparable from its effects" (70). In short, the body thinks. Recast in biological terms, repeated habitual activity displays a minimum of cognitive behavior at work prior to the

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infinite." Deleuze goes on to write: "In the void, the velocity of an atom is equal to its movement *in a unique direction in a minimum of continuous time*. This minimum expresses the smallest possible term during which an atom moves in a given direction" (269). If we consider the void an infinite topological space rather than a vacuum in which all matter is absent, then the void becomes a phase space described in dynamic systems theory. Fritjof Capra (1996) defines a phase space as "an abstract space, in which a single point describes the entire system" (130-31).

emergence of consciousness. Beckett likewise recognizes an ontological primacy in the habitual activity of the body. Following the distinction made in his critical writings on art between "cognizance" and "taking vision" (i.e. subjective consciousness and cognition vs. a habitual repertoire of embodied actions), the movement of language in Beckett's prose (especially that written post WW2) tracks along with the habitual movement of life. Taking the perspective of systems theory allows us to disambiguate Beckett's philosophical ambiguity – for instance the notions of failure, relation, and internal idealism – without falling victim to traditional formulations or assumptions of transcendentalism, notions Beckett would surely reject. Moreover, it enables us to trace a system of art that is at once a system of life without demanding that Beckett assume a particular theoretical or philosophical position (a move he would surely appreciate). Perhaps most importantly, it allows us to identify at a fundamental level how literature treats embodied subjectivity as embedded in a specific milieu that is also, at the same time, expressed in the emergent processes of life

Chapter 2: "To be witness to my complete integration": A Biosemiotic Reading of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*

1.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write that in *The Waves* "Virginia Woolf – who made all her life and work a passage, a becoming, all kinds of becoming between ages, sexes, elements, and kingdoms – intermingles seven characters…but each of these characters, with his or her name, its individuality, designates a multiplicity…Each is simultaneously in this multiplicity and at its edge, and crosses over into the others" (252). Formally, Woolf's novel *The Waves* is an assemblage, what the philosophers define as a constellation of heterogeneous elements, a "matter flow" displaying emergent qualities (407). The narrative in *The Waves* is developed by interweaving the lifelong interior monologues of six speakers. Together, the characters "make an unsubstantial territory" (W 16). As the voices coalesce, each individual flows into the others. The seeming lack of partition between identities betrays individuals (bodies) that are, as the character Bernard muses, "edged with mist," and "territories" for interactive engagements, an idea that Woolf maintains in her work from "Kew Gardens," through *Mrs. Dalloway* and into *Between the Acts*.

Woolf's novel provides a literary description of Delezue and Guattari's concept of the rhizome or assemblage. It is "a circulation of states…composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overspills" (TP 21). The term "middle" is crucial here as in the French, *milieu* designates "middle" as both a space between and a background. In the novel, Louis provides evidence for the former: "I am rooted to the

middle of the earth" (W 12). Neville approaches an awareness of the latter, remarking, "Each sight is an arabesque scrawled suddenly to illustrate some hazard and marvel of intimacy" (W 213). In *The Waves*, the flow of being follows the rhythm of the sea. Identities are regarded as "oleaginous spots" (W 25), "undifferentiated blobs" (W 246), and ultimately the "nebulosity of my own life" (W 276). These examples speak to the arrangement and patterning of "life" as embedded within an environment. Formally, *The Waves* circulates through a series of linked soliloquies, each section separated by a series of nine interludes. As a result, the entire lives of the six (speaking) characters are drawn out, as it were, over the course of a single day. Simply put, the unity of the novel is grounded in movement. The characters are not making sense of a world that exists in spite of them, but one that emerges with them. In this way, "making sense" is synonymous with life and "world" and is inseparable from the signification the very act of living bestows upon an individual's surroundings (milieu).

What matters for Woolf as well as Deleuze and Guattari is not just what emerges; what matters are the novel interactions that compose life and the activity this implies. To read *The Waves* is to be caught up in a progressive, active, ever forming world wherein body and mind, self and world co-emerge and co-sustain each other through autopoietic processes. From this wholly incorporating activity, a sense of meaning emerges that is synonymous with what the novel articulates as life. Moreover, Woolf examines the material and perceptual forces at work in nature. In so doing, she works toward an understanding of how mind and world emerge from the activity of the lived body. Weaving together the soliloquies of its six speakers, *The Waves* opens upon a world that, drawn out to the rhythm of life, is saturated with meaning.

Woolf uses the image of the nerve fiber to articulate how a coherent, meaningful world is opened up as a result of our embodied, sensorimotor engagement with it. In the novel, it is the character Jinny who most illustrates an interactive, expressive corporeality. Unlike her counterparts, she is always dancing, always active, embracing the world rather than isolating entirely in the mind (Bernard, Rhoda) or in the world (Susan). Moreover, for Jinny, life is an affirmation: "Yes…our senses have widened. Membranes, webs of nerve that lay white and limp, have filled and spread themselves and float round us like filaments, making the air tangible and catching in them far-away sounds unheard before" (135). The pairing of the filament to "webs of nerve" centers the relation between the individual and the world in the activity of the nervous system. Woolf was not a neuroscientist, but taking into account her scientific background, her intuition should come as no surprise. From a neuroscientific perspective, the operational closure of the nervous system in its global function is precisely what opens up one's experience of a world.[1] Woolf attunement to neuroscientific discourse is further evidenced in *The Waves* as Neville intuits "to myself I am immeasurable; a net whose fibres pass imperceptibly beneath the world. My net is almost indistinguishable from that which it surrounds" (214), echoing Jinny's "webs of nerve" that effect a sensory engagement with the world. In short, the metaphor of the nerve fiber grounds an examination of the perceptual and conscious engagement with the rest of the world that is attuned to both aesthetic and biological emergence.

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[1] Cf. Luhmann (1995): "[Systems] constitute and maintain themselves by creating and maintaining a difference from their environment, and they use their boundaries to regulate this difference…Thus the complexity of the world…emerges through the reduction of complexity and through the selective conditioning of this reduction" (17, 25). The reduction of complexity further serves to ensure the system maintains itself "against the overwhelming complexity of its environment" (182).

Following the work started by Deleuze and Guattari, a study of affect in Woolf's writing, here most simply understood as the variation arising between interacting bodies, opens to a reading of life as a complex system of interactions. At stake here is not simply that the body experiences, but rather *how* it experiences. It is through an examination of subjectivity in the literature as not solely embodied, but also and at once embedded, enacted, extended, and affective[2] that life and world can be read as coemergent expressions of a system of (recursive) interactions. A biosemiotic approach bridges the human and nature, understanding language as the extension of a repertoire of behaviors already present in nature. Creativity is inherent to the activity of a living system as it interacts with an environment and opens upon a world. Woolf, I contend, anticipates in her writing this fundamental relation between life and meaning, and it is through her work that we can observe a literary examination of life as an inherently semiotic, meaning-full process.

2.

Critics have certainly not shied away from theoretical discussions of embodiment in Woolf's fiction. Louise Westling (1999) takes a decisively ecocritical stance, stating that ecocriticism is the "only perspective" from which we can apprehend Woolf's vision of life as a "self-organizing web" of the human and nonhuman (856). She reads in Woolf a proximity to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, as the two present similar accounts of embodied, embedded, emergent subjectivity. For Westling, an ecocritical perspective is crucial to the end that it draws our thinking toward a "new humanism" emphasizing the

[2] As described in chapter one, these are the fundamental categories of the 4EA approach, understanding affect and cognition to be "aspects of a single process."

lived engagement of the human within the nonhuman world. I am sympathetic to Westling's reading, especially in its incorporation of Woolf's scientific interests, namely physics, into her larger, eco-aesthetic vision, yet hesitate to declare an ecocritical position the sole means of grasping Woolf's project. As I will demonstrate, a biosemiotic perspective, especially in its relation to system's theory, incorporates the major concerns, both phenomenologically and ethically, of any ecocritical reading.

Similarly, Derek Ryan (2013, 2015) is interested in revealing in Woolf a posthumanist orientation that decenters the human subject and sees it as something contingent, a relational being rooted in a complex, material entanglement. In his book *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory* he reads in *The Waves* the principle in quantum physics of "intra-action," or the entanglement of agency. A biosemiotic perspective based in systems theory lends insight to such a position and furthermore reconciles the aesthetic, philosophical, and scientific concerns that overlap within it. A focus on the corporeal foundation of both mind and world assumes complex relation to an environment. Woolf, in bridging the internal operations of the embodied mind and the external environmental situation in which it is embedded, is directly interrogating this system of relations. The reconciliation provided by a biosemiotic approach evades the asubjective/antihuman tendencies of posthumanist critique because biosemiotics retains subject and human without excluding the inorganic or non-human.

In fact, Ryan (2015) notes that there is a likelihood Woolf could have encountered the writings of Jakob von Uexküll as they were being published and cited in England. Whether or not she was familiar with the work, Ryan nevertheless focuses on Woolf's concern with "the materially embedded, affective territories" shared by living organisms

(161). In his reading of Uexküll's *Umwelt* theory, Ryan is most interested in analyzing Woolf's treatment of animal life in *The Waves*. He writes: "both the material-semiotic Umwelten of animals and Woolf's literary animal environments prompt us to confront the notion of non-anthropocentric worldviews" (161). That is certainly true, and I agree with Ryan on that point. Yet the affective materiality at work in Woolf's fiction operates just as much, and if not more profoundly, at the human register. If one shifts focus from the biosphere to a notion of the semiosphere, defined by biochemist Jesper Hoffmeyer (2008) as "the reality of a causally efficacious matrix of biological interaction, the utterly natural product of organisms' interaction" (5), *Umwelt* theory and a subsequent biosemiotics does not co-opt or supersede an ecological, ecocritical, or materialist approach. Biosemiotics and biological systems theory integrate such perspectives into the fundamental processes from which life and meaning simultaneously coemerge.[3]

Craig Gordon's "Breaking Habits, Building Communities: Virginia Woolf and the Neuroscientific Body" comes closest to my reading in its examination of the fundamental connection of the body to the world in *The Waves*, although his analysis is aimed specifically at the way the novel informs the incorporation of communitarian projects. Focusing on subjective emergence as at once individual and social, he writes, "by the conceiving of community through the bodily categories of neuroscience, Woolf theorizes not only possible forms of collectivity but also the mechanisms through which communitarian projects of the early twentieth century literally incorporate themselves" (27). I agree in spirit with Gordon's reading, and believe that the novel does in fact secure

[3] Hoffmeyer writes: "biosemiotics considers human mental processes not as unique phenomena in the ontological sense, but rather as extremely interesting extensions of a much more general mode of biological organization and interaction that human beings share with all other living creatures" (24).

a notion of embodied, individual subjectivity that is always already collective. Yet, in his treatment of neuroscience, Gordon limits his reading to the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. As a result, the "neuroscientific body" he contends Woolf is working against is static, overly determined, and positivistic one, specifically, the habit-conditioned body of William James. Woolf's vitalism, exemplified in Jinny's lively engagement with the world, is a response to a body over-determined by habit. Gordon draws on Woolf's vitalism to secure a reading that affirms the communitarian project of the novel, the language of the affective body a metaphor for the means of production of the creation of communal space.

Neuroscientific approaches to literature have been gaining traction in recent years, and I believe a biosemiotic perspective can contribute much to the conversation. Sara Birge (2012) writes, "literary accounts…can demonstrate the interactions between an individual and multiple environmental and social factors that affect the ways in which that person experiences the world" (96). Central to my biosemiotic reading is the idea of living "in relation to" a background, moreover, one that not only takes up and includes the body, but pushes it toward a realm of signification – its world. In fact, this very engagement with a background (i.e. milieu or environment) should be regarded as anterior to identity. Woolf, I believe, was sensitive to this fundamental capacity for meaning making in all registers of life that results from the mutual interaction between the individual and the environment. The physical body gives the illusion of containment or separation from the world, but, as Woolf observes, we are not only connected to our world, we are dependent on this connection through the elements we share. In fact, she takes this a step further, emphasizing a semiosis inherent to living systems – a

biosemiotics – in her literature. This insight overcomes the conceptual limitations of exclusive historical or theoretical perspectives. Emergent life, resulting from the network activity of recursive material interactions, is fundamentally communal, from both an environmental and a social perspective. Moreover, rather than taking an aestheticized approach to theorizing life – a shortcoming of many posthumanist orientations in which art and aesthetics serve as a technique or strategy for a radical critique of human subjectivity - life and art are here taken as equivalent. In this way, an aesthetic theory is not applied to life. Rather, life as expression is inherently aesthetic. My position follows Andreas Weber's (2013) definition of aesthetics as a theory of sensory perception and therefore of the subjective presence of things, a position I believe Woolf would be sympathetic to. Derived from an autopoietic theory of living systems and organic cognition, cognition is regarded as always already aesthetic, following a systems's perspective wherein it is regarded as "an expressive phenomenon of the first order" (160).

Biosemiotics empirically grounds a phenomenology of the lived body. In fact, along with proponents of the enactive approach and 4EA cognition[4], theorists have derived considerable insight from the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty focuses on the body and behavior as operating reciprocally. In his lectures on Nature, he states: "On the one hand, the body is like the envelope, the sketch of behavior, on the other, behavior is literally a second body which is added to the natural body…the body is a sketch of behavior; embryonic development anticipates future behavior, the organs or outlines of organs of the embryo have no meaning if we consider them independently of all logic of behavior" (147). This dynamic, recursive rendering of behavior allows him to

[4] Following Menary (2010) and Protevi, the 4EA position understands cognition to be at once embedded, embodied, enactive, extended, and affective.

take off on a detailed analysis of the theories of Jakob von Uexküll whose theory of animal worlds or *Umwelten* asserts that the individual worlds of living beings are enacted by the very activity of the organism within its environment. In *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, Von Uexküll (1934) writes: "Every subject spins out, like the spider's threads, its relations to certain qualities of things and weaves them into a solid web, which carries its existence" (53). The *Umwelt* is the world as given. Von Uexküll's theory extends to various registers of development that include both plant and animal life. Crucial to Merleau-Ponty's reading of this theory is that the subject's "plunge into action" is a "relation of meaning" (175). In fact, he anticipates a biosemiotic approach when he declares: "In order to grasp the world of the animal, we must not only make perception intervene, but also behaviors, because these deposit a surplus of signification on the surface of objects" (172-3)[5]. The surplus of signification is the world as opened by way of lived activity, what Merleau-Ponty moreover recognizes as defining a "preculture" as the body synthesizes the mute meanings present in nature (176).

Recall that a key factor in the self-organization and maintenance (autopoiesis) of a living system is the conservation of a boundary or membrane. The closure of a system from its environment opens it up to a domain of interaction, interactions which are tailored or "selected" by the activity of that system.[6] Francisco Varela (1997) makes the distinction between living system and inanimate matter quite clearly:

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[5] In the essay "Patterns of Life: Intertwining Identity and Cognition" (1997), Francisco Varela explains from an emergent, autopoietic perspective that the "surplus of meaning and intention" is carried by the organism's situated behavior in a physical environment (14).

[6] Niklas Luhmann (1995) describes the operational closure of the autopoietic system in terms of self-referentiality. He writes: "The concept of a self-referentially closed system does not contradict the system's *openness to the environment*. Instead, in the self-referential mode of operation, closure is a form of broadening possible environmental contacts; closure increases, by constituting elements more capable of being determined, the complexity of the environment that is possible for the system" (37).

> What the autopoietic system does – due to its very mode of identity – is to constantly confront the encounters (perturbations, shocks, coupling) with its environment and treat them with a perspective which is not intrinsic to the encounters themselves. Surely rocks or crystal beads do not beckon sugars gradients [sic.] out of all the infinite possibilities of physiochemical interactions as particularly meaningful – for this to happen a perspective from an actively constituted identity is essential. (79)

Applying Varela's philosophy of embodiment to a semiotic perspective, Andreas Weber expands on the aforementioned perspective that emerges with the living system. He writes: "Varela's description of the 'patterns of life' is in fact the reconstruction of a semiotic nucleus. In such a view semiotics is coexistent with life, because life always is embodied cognition, giving rise to a world of relevance" (2). The differentiation of the individual (organism) from a material background (milieu) in turn opens up a domain of interaction (a world) that is intrinsically meaningful in relation to the very activity of the organism in maintaining itself. The network of interactions that designates the operational closure of the system is also the process that imbues an environment with signification. In other words, the operation of the living system marks within the environment those elements/interactions which are relevant or meaningful for the operation of the system. As Varela and others have argued, this relational structure can be coded to the basal functioning of the organism and reveals a semiotics inherent to biological processes. Contrary to a new materialist position which aims beyond a self/subject towards the non-organic, meaning is intrinsic to the operation of a living system. Subjectivity, the "actively constituted identity," is nothing more than a living system differentiated from

an environment. This formal definition of the individual "self" necessarily implies the designation of an other as well as a relation (domain of interaction) between the two. From this it is possible to draw on the notion of a "perspective." The emergent relational system can and should be recognized as the basis for a rudimentary semiosis observed in all living systems.

3.

Woolf's fiction engages both scientific and theoretical discourses of the time as well as prefigures a number of now current posthumanist theoretical approaches. It has been well documented that Woolf was exposed to philosophy from an early age. Her father, Leslie Stephen, a model for the philosopher Mr. Ramsey in *To the Lighthouse*, took up key epistemological questions in his own work through the proverbial philosopher's table that Mr. Ramsey also employs (Mackin 2010, 113). This influence worked its way into Woolf's fiction, as did her associations with Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore and the works of Henri Bergson and Ludwig Wittgenstein (who was a student of Russell's and whose lectures Woolf attended). What links Woolf to this speculative/philosophical lineage beyond mere social proximity is her shared interest in what Bergson describes in *Creative Evolution* as the "internal and profound" perceptions that constitute one's experience of the world (1) and an interest that attracted her to science and philosophy.[7]

Woolf's perceptual sensitivity stands in marked contrast to the cold, intellectual reaction to the world displayed by her father, whose attitude Woolf goes as far as to

[7] Much work has been done studying Woolf's scientific and philosophical engagements: Christina Alt, *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature,* Cambridge UP, 2010; Gillian Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, University of Michigan Press, 1996; Holly Henry, *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science*, Cambridge UP, 2003.

classify in "A Sketch of the Past" as "brutal" (125). She blames this on the "crippling effect of Cambridge" under which her father's "sensibility had atrophied" (126). The language of the (disabled) body in this section is paired with terms like "isolation," "imprisonment," and above all, "suffering." The implication here is that a life dictated solely by the mind divorces the individual not only from others ("he had no idea what other people felt") but from the activity of one's own body ("he had no conception of what he himself did or said"). This disconnect of mind and body further separates him from an engaged, aestheticized life and stands in stark contrast to Woolf's ideal.

Woolf's exploration of affective perception—the kind she felt her father was lacking—is described/evident in the opening paragraphs of "A Sketch of the Past":

> If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills – then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive. (64-65)

Coupling the perception of hearing the waves and seeing the effects of light through the blind with the "feeling of purest ecstasy," passive perception is intimately linked to sensation. In other words, experience for Woolf is at all points lived, passionate rather than passive. This is what grounds life. Woolf's impressionism, opposed to Roger Fry's detached aesthetics which views art as providing an "equivalent for life" and reality

based on the structure of the mind, links sense impression to the reality of bodily sensation, enveloping both in a single image. Art is not a logical equivalent to life, but the direct expression of it. Here a link to Bergson emerges that opens her writing to phenomenological analysis. Past images are guided by and cohered in embodied, sensorimotor activity. Both Woolf and Bergson refer to memory as a "base" for life, the latter writing in *Matter and Memory*: "The bodily memory, made up of the sum of sensori-motor systems organized by habit, is then a quasi-instantaneous memory to which the true memory of the past serves as its base" (152). Each understands memory to be intertwined with embodied activity. In describing just how she would paint her earliest impressions - these fragmented sights, sounds, color, and objects – Woolf's emphasis is not on representation, but affect.

Habit, the sensorimotor activity that slips beneath yet supports our conscious lived activity, is central for understanding the notions of "being" and "non-being" that Woolf recognizes as contributing to the way in which our perception of the world emerges. These notions are traced through "A Sketch" not simply in terms of the veracity of Woolf's recollections, or in the affective thrust of her writing. Rather, Woolf meditates on the non-being, the underlying, unperceived rhythm of everyday experience. She explains: "Often, when I have been writing one of my so-called novels I have been baffled by this same problem; that is, how to describe what I call in my private shorthand – 'non-being'. Every day includes much more non-being than being…Separate moments of being [are] however embedded in many more moments of non-being" (70). She goes on to describe non-being as a sort of "cotton wool" that obscures recollection. Non-being is here, by all accounts, synonymous with non-conscious habitual activity: "One walks,

eats, sees things, deals with what has to be done" (70). Each day contains its proportion of conscious and nonconscious activity, being and non-being. Yet being is embedded in non-being – the activity of life is supported as much by the non-conscious repetition of habits as it is by an active engagement in life.[8]

Woolf distinguishes the habit and consciousness of lived experience. This is similar to the Deleuzian distinction between *a* life and *the* life.[9] "The" life is the singular, differentiated identity. The notion of life connected to the indefinite article is, on the contrary, undifferentiated and a-subjective. A key question in *The Waves* is how identity emerges from a virtual background. Life must be understood as operating along multiple registers. Woolf touches on this notion in "A Sketch," writing: "one's life is not confined to one's body and what one says and does; one is living all the time in relation to certain background rods or conceptions" (73). Thus, notions of the being and non-being in Woolf are categorized by what one does and does not consciously experience, yet ideational experience (Woolf's "rods and conceptions") nevertheless envelops and participates in said experience. For Deleuze what matters is the process of actualization, the "movement and rest" at work between discrete elements that brings about a synthesis from a virtual field. The subject is the very activity within this virtual milieu. The particular "life" or "subject" is coexistent with the background or field from which it emerges and which at

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[8] N. Katherine Hayles (2017) distinguishes consciousness, the subjective narrative that details one's life, from cognition, "a much broader capacity that extends far beyond consciousness into other neurological brain processes; it is also pervasive in other life forms and complex technical systems…I call it nonconscious cognition" (9). While the present reading refrains from discussing the cognitive capacities of nonliving systems, Hayle's assertion that nonconscious cognitive activity is "pervasive" among nonhuman life is very much in line with the overall claims of biosemiotics.

[9] Derek Ryan (2013) and Beatrice Monaco (2008) provide detailed Deleuzoguattarian readings of Woolf. Ryan relies on assemblage theory to support a new materialist reading of *The Waves*. Monaco is interested in deriving a metaphysics of modernism through the work of Joyce, Lawrence, and Woolf following the pragmatic rather than transcendental impulse of Deleuze's concepts. While both Ryan and Monaco approach a reading of life and art as emergent, their work remains much more theoretical than scientific.

the same time it marks off. Recall Hans Jonas's paradox of individuality which observes that an individual is neither bound nor identical to the particular matter that makes it up. Moreover, it is the activity of the system that differentiates it.[10] Our bodies continuously regenerate themselves throughout our lives on the cellular level. The individual, it stands, is a formal rather than substantial entity, as the literal substance that composes it is consistently recycled. Focusing on the notion of composition over organization, John Protevi (2013) writes from a Deleuzian/scientific standpoint that "individuals are singular events before they are members of species or genera" (244). In *The Waves*, Bernard asks "What am I?" as he considers himself "mixed" with a waiter. The question has its echo a few lines later in "What is to come?" (118). Identity is reiterated as something combinatory, linked to a perpetual mixing of "unknown quantities." Identifying the self with the process of becoming allows us to shift the focus from pre-established organizational categories to a network of dynamic interactions, organically as well as socially.[11]

In *The Waves,* Rhoda observes this (in quite Bergsonian terms) as a life "embedded in a substance made of repeated moments run together" (222). The connection effected between the individual and the environment as embedded situation is evident even moreso in Woolf's memoirs as she recalls a striking moment in a garden at

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[10] John Protevi (2013) reminds of the distinction between "differentiation" as the "individuated end product" or result of the proess of becoming, and differenciation" which is the pre-individual, virtual field (background) from which the individual emerges, "becomes" (243).

[11] Von Uexküll makes a similar claim in *A Theory of Meaning*: "In our human environment, there is no mammal-in-itself as intuitable object, only as a notional abstraction, as a concept which we use as a means of analysis but never encounter in life" (179). In discussing the life-world of the tick, Uexküll points to those common mammalian traits that serve as carriers of meaning for the tick (hair, warm skin, butyric acid in the perspiration) that have a direct bearing on its Umwelt (life-world). For the human, these traits carry no weight beyond a categorizing function. Species, genera, etc. are nothing more than a series of agreed upon traits and do not exist "in themselves."

St Ives: “I was looking at the flower bed by the front door; ‘That is the whole,’ I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower” (71). She goes on to explain how this informs what she could “call a philosophy”:

> at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock. (72)

Non-being (non-conscious habit) is the underlying pattern that scaffolds one’s conscious engagement with the world. Therefore, life and one’s experience of a world are enacted just as much on “the invisible and silent” or background register of matter (73). Awareness of a pattern underlying perception accounts for the oneiric connection with nature that flows through *The Waves*, for instance when Jinny imagines herself a plant in stream, or Louis touches a flower only to become subsumed by nature.

In the novel, it is Neville who perhaps best articulates the delicate balance between being and non-being and the emergence of life from an “unreal” background: “Each sight is an arabesque scrawled suddenly to illustrate some hazard and marvel of intimacy” (213). In its opacity, Neville’s arabesque is analogous to the cotton wool of non-being/habit that all human beings – and all living things – are connected to. The

entanglement of the individual within overlapping registers of being and non-being or conscious and non-conscious engagement with a world as articulated in the descriptions of nature in the novel allows us to derive a notion of an embodied aesthetics that tracks throughout Woolf's writing. Woolf directly experienced such moments of realized being, which she describes as "shocks." I believe this sense of shock is twofold. First, there is the realization that "we are parts of the work of art," that humans are neither physically nor experientially isolated from nature but situated within an environment. What Woolf identifies as the pattern "behind the cotton wool" is the mutual engagement between individual and environment. As well, within this larger frame, the creative processes at work in nature can be observed at the individual level. The individual's lived engagement with its environment is precisely what opens up a world, and by extension gives it meaning. Life as expressive phenomenon at both the individual and collective levels reveals life to be an aesthetic phenomenon at all registers. Life itself, as novel emergence, is at once expression and creation. The human condition, for Woolf, is predicated on expressive, aesthetic empowerment (hence the negation of both Shakespeare and God).

4.

At multiple points in *The Waves*, characters refer to the fibers and filaments that connect them to the world. These images open the text to a neuroscientific appraisal. Human subjectivity is distributed along a complex web of forces and flows that connect and communicate between the inside and outside, individual and environment, emphasizing the active, codependent interplay of subject and world. Bernard remarks, "How strange to feel the line that is spun from us lengthening its fine filament across the misty spaces of

the intervening world" (89).[12] Misty spaces, like those also read in *Mrs Dalloway*, blur the distinction between the individual and the environment. As well, Louis uses similar language in an early section of the novel: "My roots go down to the depths of the world…I am all fibre…and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs" (12). Bernard is reacting to a humbling encounter after which he feels himself dissolved, scattered like small stones. Louis, by contrast, feels himself connected to nature: "I hold the stalk in my hand. I am the stalk" (11). In both cases identity is subsumed, taken up by either an image of nature (the insignificance of the individual against the sea) or by nature itself ("I am the stalk").

The image of the filament/fiber occurs as well in the early pages of *Mrs Dalloway* during Septimus Warren Smith's seemingly hallucinatory vision of the park. He considers, in rather biosemiotic terms: "A marvelous discovery indeed – that the human voice in certain atmospheric conditions…can quicken trees into life!...leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement" (22). Reading this passage point by point, the effect of the voice on the growth cycle of trees - the invisible, fibrous, and seemingly innate connection between outwardly disparate organic bodies (by extension the body within its immediate environment), and the concomitant movement between the arm and a branch - inscribes a subjectivity that is codependent and coemergent with its environment. Key here is turn in the passage from the voice "in certain conditions" giving life to one's surroundings to the effect of the tree

[12] The image of the web of relations, especially profound in Uexküll's illustration of the spider (as its "world" is a literal product of its body), should be familiar to Woolf's readers. As early as her 1919 short story "Kew Gardens," Woolf is examining emergent life, or what Jesper Hoffmeyer terms the "general mode of biological organization and interaction that human beings share with all other living creatures."

as it stretches the body. From a Deleuzean standpoint, the statement is not the particular act that appears at the surface. It is the equivalence between the affective interplay of discrete material parts (here between Septimus and the tree) and the emergent expression.

Thus, surface always implies an active depth and every individual is in fact the expression of a multitude (the dynamic material interplay of elements in their relation). A neuroscientific perspective lends insight to the philosophy at work here in the ways the individual is understood in terms of the consistent integration of active, dynamic processes. From this standpoint, Bernard's dispersal into stones, as well as Louis's aforementioned meditation on the depths of his being, present examples of the ways in which literary accounts serve to disambiguate this experience. Bernard states, "Like a long wave, like a roll of heavy waters, he went over me, his devastating presence – dragging me open, laying bare the pebbles on the shore of my soul. It was humiliating; I was turned to small stones. All semblances were rolled up…To be contracted by another person into a single being – how strange" (W 89). At the surface, Bernard's response is one of humiliation. Yet, in light of the treatment of distributed subjectivity in the novel, there is another, deeper reading available. Recalling Woolf's shock realizing she is part of a greater whole, in this moment Bernard's shock at the loss of the isolated "self" reveals in turn the individual's connection with their immediate environment, a notion that can here be expanded to include social/intersubjective space. Neville, for his part, experiences this as being "drawn in, tossed down, thrown" (W 72). Exemplified in Bernard's diminution to stones on a beach, the characters in *The Waves* are wholly dispersed. The neural metaphor guides us toward understanding subjectivity as an assemblage, the "self" is in fact a series of linked elements or states - a material (atomic)

engagement grounded upon the contingent interaction of the individual and its environment. This does not negate the subject. Nor does it, for Woolf, relegate subjectivity to a secondary force subordinate to its environment or milieu. Rather, subject and world are equally contingent, the emergence of one co-dependent on the activity of the other.

The neural metaphor[13] is extended in *The Waves* in the ways Woolf maintains a proximal, active relation between the individual and the world through the incorporation of emergent technology as it functions to mediate experience. As the six characters of *The Waves* separate for the first time, each parting from station to station, Susan observes streets that are "laced together with telegraph wires," and on the very next paragraph, Jinny sees: "The distance closes forever in a point; and we for ever open the distance wide again. The telegraph poles bob up incessantly; one is felled, another rises" (W 62-3). The characters, moving toward distant points, are nonetheless "laced together," converging at a single, communicative point. Moreover, the lacing of the telegraph wires is the realization and extension of the "millions of fibres" that articulate Septimus' discursive relation to the world in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and answers, as it were, Bernard's question: "if I shall never see you again and fix my eyes on that solidity, what form will our communication take?" (W 155). The telegraph wires lead to the advancement of the telephone, which offers Bernard a second opportunity to address communication:

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[13] The neural metaphor allows us to address and analyze similarities in function between social and biological systems without falling into the trap of the "organismic metaphor". As DaLanda (2005) states, "in its least sophisticated form, this stumbling-block involves making a superficial analogy between society and the human body" (8). Instead, tempered by the insights of Deleuzoguattarian assemblage theory, the key here is the identification of discrete elements in their particular, relational interactions and the ways in which constraints generated as a result of these interactions participate in the emergence, operation, and evolution of both living and nonliving systems.

> I marked the ease with which my mind adjusted itself to assimilate the message…I remarked with what magnificent vitality the atoms of my attention dispersed, swarmed round the interruption, assimilated the message, adapted themselves to a new state of affairs and had created, by the time I put back the receiver, a richer, a stronger, a more complicated world in which I was called upon to act my part and had no doubt whatever that I could do it. (W 261)

Envisioning communication as a vital, material process, the dispersal of atoms swarming and centering around a point, in this case a spoken message, is not merely a receiving, but an adapting of the mind to a new stimulus and therefore emerging and reengaging with a new world. Rather than stones, Bernard here dissolves into atoms. Moreover, despite this encounter having less of an impact than his earlier exchange with Neville, it penetrates significantly deeper. Shock (by way of humiliation) and dissolution give way to interruption and assimilation. Each moment presents a profound loss of self, the existential threat of the initial encounter culminating in the integration and participation in the fundamentally linked and shared activity of drawing forth a world.

Grounding the individual's capacity for meaning-making on a biophysical process embeds expression in life. More fundamentally, life itself is at once an event and an expression. Bernard, walking in Rome, makes sense of his surroundings:

> Here I am marching up and down this terrace alone, unoriented. But observe how dots and dashes are beginning, as I walk, to run themselves into continuous lines, how things are losing the bald, the separate identity that they had as I walked up those steps…I am moving too, am becoming involved in the general sequence when one thing follows another and it seems inevitable that the tree should come,

> then the telegraph-pole, then the break in the hedge. And as I move, surrounded, included and taking part, the usual phrases begin to bubble up. (188)

Bernard's walk is not simply an act of cognitive mapping. Sensorimotor activity, comprising what Varela et al. (2016) define as embodied action, is embedded in a "biological, physical, and cultural context" which grounds the enactive approach from which "cognitive structures emerge from the recurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided" (173). Varela and his co-authors write:

> the point of departure for the enactive approach is the study of how the perceiver can guide his actions in his local situation. Since these local situations constantly change as a result of the perceiver's activity, the reference point for understanding perception is no longer a pregiven, perceiver-independent world but rather the sensorimotor structure of the perceiver…This structure – the manner in which the perceiver is embodied – rather than some pregiven world determines how the perceiver can act and be modulated by environmental events. (173)

As Bernard moves through his environment, he is literally decoding his surroundings – the dots and dashes of morse code doubling for disparate sense data. Sensory information is structured into lines, "a general sequence" of objects. Words – increasingly specific and descriptive – emerge as Bernard continues, the cipher of the landscape forming phrases which "bubble up" into consciousness. Crucially, the use of language does not distance Bernard from what he perceives. This is not a matter of language supplementing nature. Rather, he is "included and taking part" as if each element is a necessary part of an emergent whole. Description and enaction are here shown to be two sides of a single, spontaneous process. This is the truly creative nature of embodied subjectivity.

Caught up in the rhythm of the waves, the insecurity of the self, the anxiety over one's insignificance in and against the world, and the subsequent pressure of grounding an existence in the cacophony of material interaction, it becomes clear that "identity" is something secondary. In fact, for all intents and purposes, consciousness takes a backseat to one's immediate sensorimotor relation to the world in *The Waves* as "we who live in the body see with the body's imagination" (176). Woolf writes: "My imagination is the bodies. I can imagine nothing beyond the circle cast by my body. My body goes before me…bringing one thing after another out of darkness into a ring of light" (128-9). In its capacity to illuminate or open up onto a world, the body functions in the same capacity as the rising sun at the beginning of the novel, drawing distinctions out of a space of total homogeneity. The mind, therefore, follows the body as it is taken up and acted upon by other bodies - both human and non-human. Jinny, observing a man on a train, remarks: "My body instantly of its own accord puts forth a frill under his gaze. My body lives a life of its own…He reads his paper. But we have exchanged the approval of our bodies. There is then a great society of bodies, and mine is introduced" (63). The trajectory of the characters in *The Waves* is not toward a singular identity, but toward a singular understanding of mind as the result of this mutual interaction (structural coupling) between body and environment. Mind emerges from perception *and* sensation, in other words, affect. Woolf is here forwarding a notion that it is not the identity of individual that is primary in shaping a world, but the movement of the body.

5.

The crucial insight of a biosemiotic approach is the understanding that a dynamic relation between the individual and the world emerges with the activity of living systems. This position not only encompasses Woolf's philosophical and scientific inquiries, but more importantly reveals her intuitive understanding that the rhythm of life – the individual's physical and subsequent cognitive engagement in an environment – is in itself the very activity that opens up a world. A notion of life as creative activity (art) embeds the human subject within nature. As a result, art and literature become not simply theory in practice, but illustrate theory at work in life.

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari announce that "composition is the sole definition of art" (191). They are not referring to a particular technique or set of materials. Rather, as a compound of percept and affect, aesthetic composition as embodied act extracts sensation. In literature, sensation is developed through the creation of a syntax, in other words a style or a tone. This syntax, the force of the combination of words, is doubled in the interplay of a novel's characters. They write: "what matters…is the revelation of counterpoint into which [characters] enter and the compounds of sensations that these characters either themselves experience or make felt in their becomings and their visions" (188). Following a principle of counterpoint, syntax (the interplay of words) and discourse (emergent relations) extract sensation. The affective thrust of language as becoming does not simply serve to narrativize "life" but indeed emerges with it.

For Woolf, life is intensive rather than extensive. Affect, as the activity of disparate bodies that act and combine, is synonymous with becoming. For Deleuze and

Guattari, affect operates as much on a social register as it does at the atomic level: "Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes" (272). Philosophically, the focus is on life as a creative, self-organizing process. The guiding principle is that of immanence rather than transcendence. The activity of being/becoming is the process of connecting or "closing off" of multiple elements into a system of productive relations (Deleuze 1995, 146).[14]

Art, for Woolf, bridges (if not wholly balances) internalized, subjective experience with the habitual experience of the external world. Moreover, a subjective, aesthestic experience is simply an extension of the fundamental sense-making capacities of all living organisms (not just humans). It is in no way exterior to the body or a biological concept of life. Woolf explains in "Modern Fiction," that the task of the writer is to convey life as an activity in all of its complexity and not simply record a conventional, linear account of one's experience. In Woolf's estimation, convention historically bars the novelist from writing what she refers to as the "that" of life, which lies in the "very dark places of psychology" (108). In contrast to what she categorizes as the materialism of authors like Welles or Sterne, fiction must draw upon "every quality of brain and spirit" (110). This includes the embodied immediacy of both the mind and the body. Unsurprisingly, her descriptions of Joyce's *Ulysses* (then in early serialization) have a neurophysiological undertone, writing that his works "reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain" (107). This follows

[14] "Closing off" of a set of related elements is comparable to the operational closure observed in autopoietic systems.

Woolf's characterization of the workings of the mind. Sense data come as "an incessant shower of innumerable atoms" and life, by extension, is "a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (106). In order to capture life in the singular dyamic between body and mind, Woolf composed *The Waves* as a "playpoem" (D III, 203) fusing elements of prose, poetry, and theatre in an attempt to make art come alive, unfolding a horizon of habit and instinct, in other words, the quantum-level, "atomic" experience that undergirds life.

Uexküll remarks that despite the bridges humanity has built between itself and nature, "we have detached ourselves from it" (192). If the transformation or supplementation of nature has caused a loss of a sense of nature, it is through a rendering of life *as art* that we can regain the very sense we have lost, namely that of movement, rhythm, polyphony. This is a life that is dynamic and active rather than static and teleological. Capturing life as it surges, "breaks," *The Waves* is not simply an experiment with stream of consciousness – it approaches life as art, as creative activity, and as such approaches a biosemiotics. In both form and content, the novel flows with physical as well as cognitive and conscious life, drawing out a world that, in form and meaning, is coemergent with the living body.

Chapter 3: "Man outside the scheme": Embodiment, Expression, and Resistance in Richard Wright (with a postlude on Ralph Ellision)

1.

The story driving "The Man Who Lived Underground" is relatively simple. Coerced by police into confessing a murder he did not commit, Fred Daniels escapes custody and retreats into the underground sewer system where he hides out, digging through walls into the basements of nearby businesses. Thrust outside of the law, along the way he steals food, tools, money, a radio and a typewriter. After three days, he returns aboveground to reveal his hideout to the police. As it turns out, the police have since arrested the true culprit and fearing Daniels to be mad and liable to expose their corruption, they shoot him. The simplicity of the plot serves the narrative's deeper resonance. Wright was inspired by an account he read in *True Detective* magazine of a burglar who tunneled into local businesses for years until he was spotted reaching toward a lock from a freshly dug hole by a lucky beat cop.[39] On the one hand, Daniels' execution emphasizes the history of police and extrajudicial violence toward people of color, calling to mind George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Michael Brown, among too many others in recent years. On the other, "The Man Who Lived Underground" draws out the creative potential of Daniels's social and spatial liminality, highlighting an emergent subjectivity that develops as the result of the relational interaction (structural coupling) between individual and environment. Body, world, and subject are all in transition and none determines or takes priority over the others. Between the above and below-ground,[40]

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[39] Cf. Faber (1985) for an overview of Wright's pulp influences for "The Man Who Lived Underground."

[40] Daniels' physical position as not simply marginalized, but outside of the law in the novella emphasizes the historical state of exception occupied by people of color, especially black bodies, and

body and world are reciprocally-engineered, the change in one directly guiding changes in the other. From this unique embodied position, Daniels is able to actively expose the ideological absurdities of the aboveground while asserting a creative, improvisational subjectivity from which he would otherwise be foreclosed. No longer coded (to death, submission, etc.), the body instead becomes the site of resistance to racist hegemony.

As Daniels lowers himself into the sewer, for a brief, yet "eternal," moment, he is hanging there, "[swaying] in dank space" (20), suspended between the two worlds of the street and the sewer, which in turn represent spaces of law and its absence. More than a mere boundary, the "dank space" between the above and belowground worlds is at once a literal and a figurative threshold. The two levels of infrastructure, the street and the sewer, neatly correspond to one's position in relation to the law. At a more abstract level, it illustrates a passing through of bodily thresholds from higher-order conscious activity to an embodied, non-conscious register, the movement from above to below signaling the changes within the body that will be detailed throughout the novella.

Changes in the constitutive rhythm of the sensorimotor engagement of the individual in relation to the environment in which it is embedded correspond to the overall renegotiation of the protagonist's embodied state. After passing belowground, Daniels cannot accurately place the sounds of police sirens overhead. Snapping in and out of attention, "he had the idea he had been dreaming." In fact, as consciousness wanes, perceptual descriptions give way to a focus on embodied action. Shifting from the mind to the body, "frenzied fingers clawed and sank into a crevice." Once in the sewer, the transition is just about complete: "He steadied himself and measured the strength of the

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is a particularly strong, visual example of the objectifying of certain classes/individuals as "bare life" articulated by Giorgio Agamben.

current with his own muscular tension." Loss of vision and spatial orientation is here commensurate with a renegotiation of the body's sensorimotor capacities. On the street and reliant on sight, the early paragraphs of the novella emphasize conscious decision making and planning. Descending into the sewer is therefore analogous to the passing through of a bodily threshold, drawing the mind into the body. Once Daniels is belowground, the novella pivots to an almost exclusive emphasis on the body, highlighted by tight phrases like "Muscles flexed" and "pupils narrowed" (21). A scaling back of intensities in one direction (in this case, the light receptive capacity of the eye) implies the amplification of another (sensitivity and cognitive amplification of skin and muscle). As this passage illustrates, a fundamental concern of the novella is the situation of the body in liminal space – the indeterminate milieu of the sewer - and the ways in which bodies are deterritorialized as they connect with and engage other assemblages.

A contingent, embodied subjectivity also presents a challenge to extant social and ideological constructs. Arguably, the most important sentence in the novella is: "He was the statement" (69). This brief affirmation comes as the protagonist, Fred Daniels, decides to reemerge from the sewer in which he had been hiding in order to stand before the detectives who wrongfully accused him of murder. The passage in full reads: "He would go there and clear up everything, make a statement. What statement? He did not know. He was the statement, and since it was all so clear to him, surely he would be able to make it clear to others." The subtle distinction between a formal, legal statement and embodied expression takes on its full weight a few pages later when, facing the police, "the distance between what he felt and what these men meant was vast" (72). Central to this episode is not Daniels' failure to speak, but the "distance" between embodied

expression and the language of the police station. This distance highlights the split between the above and below-ground worlds of the novella and recognizes the impossibility of substantially accounting for a "self" within an ideological situation. When Daniels finally confronts the police, he has nothing to say, he even forgets his own name: "He could no longer think with his mind; he thought with his feelings and no words came" (71). Rather than reading the loss of speech as a regression, this notion of thinking with one's feelings recognizes the primacy of the body in any notion of subject or self. This is precisely what Antonio Damasio (1999) defines as the "proto-self," the embodied repertoire of devices that "continually represent, *nonconsciously*, the state of the living body" (22). These are non- and pre-conscious states that evolutionarily support and maintain the self that emerges in the conscious register.

The reversion to a pre-conscious, proto-(embodied) self reveals a situational subjectivity that is not only contingent and but, as we will see, improvisational. It is not so much that Daniels cannot speak, he simply doesn't have to. Subjectivity is no longer imposed upon him from without. Expression, and by extension subjectivity, rather emerge as the result of a dynamic embedded-embodied process of renegotiating his lived engagement with the underground world. The body is the locus of a process that is at once a concentration inward and an engagement (dissipation) outward. As Deleuze (2002) states in his work on Francis Bacon, "the body has a necessary relationship with the material structure: not only does the material structure curl around it, but the body must return to the material structure and dissipate into it" (18). Deleuze is working thought the codependent relation of individual and environment. "Dissipation" is simply another way of conceptualizing the mutual interplay of organism and environment that

grounds a contingent, emergent subjectivity, the development of ecological and semiotic niches, both of which in turn serve to reflexively inform the individual. The base reality of the embodied-embedded subject is therefore the passing through of states – "being" in this sense is at once a process that affects and calls forth a subject and the expression of that very subject.

Between the upper world of the law and the lower world outside of it, the spatial metaphor corresponds as much to ideological subjectivity as it does to scientific notions of embodiment. Throughout the novella, Daniels operates wholly outside of social/legal space. His initial marginalization as a black man gives way to total exclusion. However, this "outlaw" status provides a unique opportunity to affirm a subjectivity outside of the margins. The spatial metaphor therefore has a double function. It facilitates a treatment of the fundamental liminality or plasticity of the body from an evolutionary perspective as well as exposes the reality of social space as contingent on one's embodied state, a reality that is obscured by ideological structures. In working through Wright's treatment of embodiment in the novella, this chapter will take up an analysis of the assemblage through the idea of "becoming-animal" in the work of Deleuze and Guattari and the ways it relates to the body as well as to literature. From there, a discussion of ideology and embodiment will engage the social and political implications of a biosemiotic approach as it pertains to notions of contingency, expression, and ultimately resistance. Finally, the chapter will pivot to a discussion on jazz improvisation in order to provide a concrete example that links material and conceptual emergence to a singular process.

2.

At the expense of fully engaging an embedded-embodied reading, one which in turn endorses naturalist, philosophical, and political appraisals of Wright's novella, theoretical and phenomenological analyses of the text tend either toward the transcendental or the existential, the latter contributing to the bulk of the studies due to Wright's intellectual association with Jean Paul Sartre and Simone De Beauvior. Kathrine T. Gines (2011) writes that the novella, published five years before his expatriation to France, shows Wright in fact to be a "proto-existentialist." According to Gines' traditional existential reading, "The Man Who Lived Underground" shows Wright "bearing witness to the absurdity of the world aboveground" in its treatment of themes of "flight, guilt…death, dread, and freedom" (50). Gines' work is important in historicizing Wright's work and thought, namely in that it reveals his philosophical intuition. However, constrained by a singular philosophical idea, this reading reduces the novella to an inverted allegory of the cave which, as we will see, only scratches the surface of the text.

Commenting on the critical impulse to highlight the novella's existential themes, Patricia D. Watkins (1989) emphasizes the "paradoxical structure of the story" as both a naturalistic and an existential fable (768). As a result, Watkins over-emphasizes the role of environment in any reading of embodiment. The protagonist is exposed to internal and external forces which result in his "living and dying like an animal" (769). Both naturalism and existentialism focus on questions of essence. On the one hand, man is essentially an animal. On the other, existentialism asserts it is the finitude of the individual which gives one freedom to enact a world. A biosemiotic reading in line with theories of living systems accepts the finitude of the individual (maintenance of

autopoiesis depends on the limiting of perturbations coming to the system) as the very basis for enacting a world. Watkins's reading, I believe, is moving in the right direction, yet I find a biological reading to be much more empowering rather than reflective of a specific lack in the face of external/environmental factors.

Joseph A. Young (2001) undertakes an expressly philosophical reading of the text, citing parallels between Daniels's exploration of the underground and the stages of the Husserlian phenomenological reduction. Despite the trajectory of his analysis toward empowering the individual to reconstruct a world on one's own terms (70), any theory that relegates a pre-objective world to an activity of consciousness (the mind) falls drastically short. As a biosemiotic reading rooted in dynamic (systems) theory reveals, any consideration of what Young recognizes as "purified intentionality" or "pre-predicative" mindfulness is established in the reciprocal engagement of system and environment, well before a mind, much less consciousness, appears on the scene.

Tracking subjectivity by way of a dynamics of biophysical emergence accounts for the biological, philosophical, and the ideological concerns of the novella. As an alternative to traditional naturalistic and philosophical readings, the Deleuzoguattarian notion of "becoming-animal" shifts our thinking from a static, naturalistic and/or ideological position to thinking in terms of the assemblage. This leads us to investigate not only the forces acting on the body from the outside, and the ways in which the body reacts to said forces. Thinking in terms of the assemblage allows us to interrogate the generative nature of the interaction between internal and external forces. The resulting co-emergence of subject and world opens to an analysis of subjection, the ways in which

dynamic notions of embodiment challenge ideological structures and lead to a truly discursive notion of subjectivity that resists subjection.

Becoming-animal does not imply a wholesale metamorphosis. Nor is it to view the protagonist like an animal, as Watkins asserts, as a passive being subject to internal and external forces and pressures. Rather, to become-animal is to "participate in movement, to stake out a path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 13). Internal and external forces are "determinate" only to the degree that their chance interactions participate in the activity of emergence or becoming. Moreover, this is a biological process. In Deleuze and Guattari's use of the term, "animal" is not a category of being but a "level of intensity," merely one of an "ensemble of states" that constitute the human. From this perspective, Daniels does, in relative terms, become an animal. More directly, as Daniels adapts to underground existence, his experience parallels that of a rat he encounters upon first entering the sewer. Turning on a light, "a blinding glare smote his pupils so hard that he was sightless, defenseless. His pupils contracted and he wrinkled his nostrils at a peculiar odor" (28). Later, while wiring his cave for electricity, "the sudden illumination blinded him and he shut his lids to kill the pain in his eyeballs" (52). In lieu of sight, Daniels instead "senses" the terrain or the flow of water (23, 26). He begins to see "with his fingers" (32, 51) and it is his body that lends precision to his movements. Even non-sensory descriptions center on the body, focusing respectively on eating (he chews bones), smoking (the nicotine works "over all the tired nerves of his body," 33), and urinating. Becoming-animal thus implies a liberation of bodily intensities toward new connections within the body that lead to novel means of engaging with the environment. Becoming-animal as a concept

describes a deterritorialization of categorically human modes of engagement with a world, which is precisely how Wright describes the body in "The Man Who Lived Underground."

3.

Wright scales back perceptual descriptions in the novella in favor of describing physical, biological processes that pass through a series of threshold states. Considering the body in terms of the assemblage, deterritorialization is best understood in what Deleuze and Guattari succinctly define as "reverse causality" (336). It is the decrease of relations of intensity of an assemblage that effects a material and semiotic change leading to a new set of relations, what Deleuze and Guattari term "reterritorialization." In other words, it is a series of recursive, nonlinear dynamic changes marked by the passing through of threshold states. Mark Bonta and John Protevi (2004) explain: "In complexity theory terms, deterritorialization works by increasing or decreasing the intensity of certain system states past a critical threshold, which either moves the system to a previously established but non-actualized virtual attractor…or indeed prompts the release of a new set of attractors and bifurcators, new patterns and thresholds" (78). To cite an evolutionary example, this can be observed in the transformation of the hand to more precision-oriented tasks as humans became exclusively bipedal. Considered dynamically, a system crosses a threshold state (it takes up a "new pace," Deleuze and Guattari 1990, 337) which prompts a positive feedback loop causing a reconfiguration of the system. In short, perturbations in intensity correspond to a change in a system's behavior. Manuel De Landa (1999) observes this process at both the organic and inorganic registers and

prefers the term “meshworks” to fully grasp the dynamics of the assemblage. The body is such a meshwork, one that bridges biological and semiotic registers and highlights the assemblage nature of living bodies as well as their “flexible behavioral repertoire” (36).

Wright’s novella illustrates how conceptual/ideological assemblages are deterritorialized just as bodies are. The embodied changes that result from Daniels’ coupling with a new environment also mark the emergence of new social relations. In a particularly interesting and tense passage, Daniels in short order has broken into a butcher’s shop and has looted it of its fruit supply. While inside, he is surprised by a white couple who want to buy a pound of grapes. Daniels poses as a clerk, packs well over a pound into a bag, and “sells” the woman her fruit. When the couple is gone, he does not keep the money, he throws it away, flinging it into the street “with a gesture of contempt” (41). For Daniels, the entire charade is a mockery, his interruption of a common business transaction punctuated by the discarding of the money. Yet rather than reading this as an act of revolt, it is instead a critical gesture. The identification of logical gaps or lapses, exemplified in the arbitrary valuation of hard currency, leads to a radical reinterpretation of the situation. Daniels is not simply devaluing money, but subverting the marketplace altogether. However, he is, in this instance, above ground and well within the reach of ideology. Once he tosses away the money, he sees a newspaper headline: “HUNT NEGRO FOR MURDER,” which causes him to feel “stripped.” Through the press he is not only exposed but drawn back into the very structuring powers he is actively destabilizing. The tension that arises is not only in the fear of being caught (again), but between subjective freedom (below ground) and subjection (above).

Discursive processes work at the biological level. As is made clear when Daniels emerges from the shop and reads the headline, they are just as active on a social register. The relation between embodiment and expression is not simply a matter of parallel concepts. As biosemiotics asserts, structural coupling does not just occur between an individual system and its environment, but also between discourse and bodies. Self-reference implies a discursive relation at work not only between the individual and the environment, but as well among the discrete elements that interact and compose the individual (the embodied organism is the "analog" of the genetic, "digital" code). From this perspective, organisms carve out a semiotic niche just as they do environmental or ecological ones. In humans, language allows us to de-couple self-reference. As a result, we are able to generate and maintain complex social relations. The same sign processes that operate vertically within the individual work horizontally in terms of environmental or group relations which are ultimately codified in norms and laws. Approaching language as the higher order expression of a fundamental biological process does not set the trap of understanding society as a biological entity, rather it allows us to interpret discursive social/ideological relations as a set of contingent, emergent interactions – an active assemblage rather than a static, determinate structure.

The codependence between embodiment and expression is also fundamental to the operation of what Deleuze and Guattari (1986) term "minor literature." Following their definition, a minor literature 1) deterritorializes the dominant language of the state; 2) is always political; and 3) is always collective. As such, minor literature specifies the "revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature" (17-19). Minor literature is not a subset of the canon or a separate

body altogether. It breaks language down from the inside, revealing novel linkages which necessarily connects a text a greater whole, the social milieu in which a literature is composed (is this not also a description of the deterritorialization of the body?). Furthermore, it is collective because the enunciation is inseparable from the assemblage that conditions it. We can see this last point clearly in Wright's autobiographical *Black Boy*. Throughout Wright's life, his literary aspirations are tamped down overtly by segregationist limits on education and expression and only slightly less so by the religious extremism of his grandmother and later the political insecurities of the communist party. One simply needs to recall the cruel irony of his first "literary" job selling newspapers with ties to the Ku Klux Klan to grasp the nature and scope of the ideological situation within and against which he will strive to articulate himself.

The features of a minor literature provide a literary account of Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the assemblage (*agencement*), which functions by way of deterritorialization/reterritorialization. Minor literature is likened to a rhizome, the common image used by the philosophers in thinking through the assemblage. They identify two sides to the assemblage, that of enunciation (collective), and that of desire (machinic). Desire is simply the initial "natural" impulse or striving (conatus). Deleuze (1992) writes that a body "always goes as far as it can" (EP 258). Desire is the tendency of a body to affect and be affected, a seeking mechanism aimed at what is useful in determining it. Taking the statement to be the obverse of the mechanism (but no less a constitutive part, i.e. the statement is also a machinic element of desire), Deleuze and Guattari (1986) write: "It is not enough to say that the assemblage produces the statement as a subject would – [the subject] is in itself an assemblage of enunciation in a process

that leaves no assignable place to any sort of subject but that allows all the more to mark the nature and function of statements, since these exist only as gears and parts of the assemblage" (84). We can only study the assemblage, and by extension a minor literature, in terms of constitutive processes, a "dynamics" of deterritorialization. Deleuze and Guattari are not asking "What is this?" (thus identifying a literature and/or subject by applying a model from outside) but rather how, why, and where are connections being made.[41] This revised line of questioning is concerned with the way in which an assemblage comes together, focusing on the assemblage as movement (line of flight) or activity (process), and therefore in terms of its deterritorialization/reterritorialization or the way it connects and combines with other assemblages. Moreover, the enunciation "is no less strictly determined by the assemblage than are the contents themselves" (85). Expression as process follows the same logic as the production of sense which is, as we have seen, also biophysical emergence. The literary/symbolic (a meaning-making) is therefore enacted by and participates in the system's activity.[42]

The concept of minor literature as a theory of the assemblage is at once a theory of embodiment and an analysis of power relations. Wright's novella functions as an example of minor literature. It reads as an answer to the Deleuzian question "What can a body do?" His story of a man going underground reveals an embodied subjectivity that emerges as a result of the structural coupling between the individual and its environment.

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[41] Cf. Deleuze, "The Method of Dramatization" His discussion of spatio-temporal dynamisms and the emergence of the Idea provides a key with which to approach the assemblage. As well, it shares quite a bit in common with the logic of systems theory.

[42] For Deleuze (and Guattari), an autopoietic reading is also a biosemiotic one. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they write: "As matters of expression take on consistency they constitute semiotic systems, but the semiotic components are inseparable from the *material* components and are in exceptionally close contact with molecular levels" (334).

The contingent, improvisational nature of the subject moreover reveals it to be at once political and biosemiotic.

4.

Formally liminal, "The Man Who Lived Underground" presents more a situation than a story. Structurally, the novella begins in medias res. Daniels thinks "I've got to hide" (19). The tension evoked by the speed of the narrative is doubled in the physical description of the protagonist "crouching in a dark corner." Eschewing exposition or any other narrative development, Wright foregrounds the relation between individual and environment. The rising sound of the police siren indicates the growing physical and ideological pressures that are brought to bear on the body. External pressure evokes a parallel, stiffening response in the body. The tight, clear descriptions which categorize the protagonist's relation to the upper world mark the spatial and ideological framework that determines subjectivity, in this case, one's position vis à vis the law.

The protagonist is "caught up" in two ways. On the one hand, he is physically backed into a corner. On the other, he is caught in an ideological bind. Even if Daniels is, at the surface, outside of ideology (he is relatively "free" to move about the street, but also as a black man and a "criminal" his position is outside the law), it is precisely the exception in this instance that proves the rule. As Althusser writes in his foundational essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1972), individuals are "*always already* subjects, and as such practice the rituals of ideological recognition" (117). Interpellation is the process by which individuals recognize themselves as subjects, constituted and maintained by a number of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) such as

the police, the church, the family, television, and schools. It is a subtle process of (self-)recognition: "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it recruits subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation…He has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him" (118). This recognition, neatly illustrated in the moment we acknowledge the police calling to us, is also a recognition of the subjection to which one freely submits.

Writing in the 1980's, Althusser (2006) comes to understand this encounter to be a much more contingent process. Reading the history of the encounter, he writes:

> Not only the world of life, but the world of history, too, gels at certain felicitous moments with the taking hold of elements combined in an encounter that is apt to trace such-and-such a figure: such-and-such a species, individual, or people…What matters about this conception is less the elaboration of laws, hence of an essence, than the aleatory character of the 'taking hold' of this encounter, which gives rise to an accomplished fact whose laws it is possible to state. (194,197)

The non-essential character of the encounter is crucial here. Althusser's earlier formulation was much more structural. Ideology, the law, the subject – all of these things were complete and operating prior to the encounter (recall the speed with which Daniels is pulled back into his "criminality" by a headline). Conversely, the process here is similar to dynamism (or the logic of sense) in Deleuze in that "being" is grounded in the chance encounter between two series and the way in which this encounter "swerves" (what new relations emerge) following the logic of the clinamen. Both Althusser and

Deleuze attribute the radical contingency of the encounter or event (respectively) to the clinamen, or "swerve" of atoms in a void which sets in motion a chain reaction ("a pile-up" Althusser, 169). In Deleuzean terms, it is the clinamen or swerve that draws out the actual from a virtual field, or, to quote Althusser, "it confers their reality upon the atoms themselves" (169). The process is non-teleological which takes its result back up into the very process that conditions or determines it. As Deleuze (1993) makes clear in his work on Leibniz, at stake in the encounter, understood as the generative interplay of emergent processes, is a temporal rather than a formal principle that "implies the continuous variation of matter as a continuous development of form" (19).

The material process at work in Althusser's theory of the encounter can be further explained in terms of embodied dynamics. John Protevi (2009) writes that "a body is patterned by the social system into which it is acculturated" (32). In his reading of political subjectivity, bodies politic are formed "when emergent effects exert a constraining and enabling effect on the internal rhythms and external connections of individuals" (34). Following the logic of autopoiesis, ideology qua biopower directs the ways in which living beings physiologically and cognitively make-sense of a socially and environmentally embedded situation. According to Protevi, the body is affected by both its physical and social environment and changes in relation to the situation in which it is embedded. Rather than understand (sociopolitical) subject formation as an end-determined, teleological process determined entirely by forces external to the organism, it is a dynamic, autopoietic process that "must be seen in terms of developmentally plastic and co-constituted patterns, thresholds, and triggers that include the subjective level" (36). According to Protevi these forces operate above, below, and beside the subject.

Such forces consist of anything from the "right to life" debate to the overall political tenor of a local public radio station. An analysis of the influence of ideology on subject formation therefore needs to focus on the encounter, what Protevi would term the imbrication of the social and the somatic, which allows us to identify the ways in which bodily thresholds are triggered and an organism's affective capacities are conditioned and directed in response to a specific embedded-embodied situation.

In "The Man Who Lived Underground," as Daniels' body changes, so does his world. Once underground, Daniels begins exploring the sewer system, digging through walls into basements and businesses. His exploration leads him to an undertaker's, a movie theater, a butcher shop and a jewelry store. Throughout his travels, he commandeers tools and food, as well as money, a typewriter, a gun, and an assortment of jewelry. His motivation in taking tools and food is purely utilitarian, but the gun, money, and jewelry are as abstract to him as the world they represent (and from which he is excluded) and have little use to him beyond a curious experimentation. Playfully, he papers the walls of his cave with the money and throws the diamonds along the floor, admiring them as if they were stars. Having stolen these things merely for "the sensation," his relation to them is strictly sensory and playful. The money and diamonds have no intrinsic use or value, just as the watches he hangs from the wall tick away an empty time. This is due partially to his alienation aboveground, revealed in the way he regards the typewriter as "a queer instrument of business, something beyond the rim of his life" (47). Yet however abstract his relation to these objects, he is able to manipulate them precisely because of his distance to them. Unobscured by the social and economic conditions of the aboveground world, Daniels' games reveal the arbitrary and absurd

value placed on these objects. As Daniels throws the diamonds across the dirt floor of his cave (a symbolic gesture enough), he thinks: "Maybe *any*thing's right…Yes, if the world as men had made it was right, then anything else was right, any act a man took to satisfy himself" (56). On the surface, Daniels' realization reveals Wright's proto-existentialist leanings. As Gines asserts, following the existential dictum that existence preceded essence, Daniels' time in the underground "allows him to see what is 'real' more clearly and accurately" (50). From a biosemiotic (as well as Deleuzoguattarian) standpoint, a focus on existence (life as activity) over essence is regarded as given.

Daniels' revaluation is externalized in his reconstruction of the city from below. Tunneling through basement walls, he is able to rework the city's infrastructure, rerouting power and establishing new environmental connections. From an evolutionary point of view, this is a process of niche construction, the evolutionary as well as epistemic way in which animals shape the environment in order to scaffold adaptation and decision making (Sterelny 2010, 466). Daniels manipulates his environment in a way that corresponds to the sensorimotor changes taking place in his body. At first, the random digging is simply a means of moving through this new world. It also serves to forge new connections in space, providing for a creative mobility otherwise restricted by the socio-ideological design of city spaces. It is not a matter of privileged access or where he goes specifically (they are all relatively mundane, everyday places). Instead, the focus should fall on the position he assumes within the total field of the city, physically as well as socially. He not only gains access to backrooms but to "private" or otherwise restricted areas where the real, "dirty" work is carried out, in other words the concealed yet accepted space that sustains the very system that in turn obscures it.

One such place is the refrigerated room of a meat market where Daniels watches a butcher hack at a bleeding side of meat. Wright very carefully separates the violence of the scene from the transaction it enables. The butchering and thus the customer are quite literally kept in the dark: "The door slammed and the light went off…From behind the frosted glass he heard the man's voice: 'Forty-eight cents a pound, ma'am,'"(38). The scene is doubled later on, this time providing explicit insight into the actual relation between the body and the law, as Daniels observes a night watchman hung upside-down while being tortured by police in another back room: "He watched the policemen clamp handcuffs on the man's wrists and ankles; then they lifted the watchman and swing him upside-down and hoisted his feet to the edge of a door. The watchman hung, head down, his eyes bulging" (63). The description of the watchman, functionally hog-tied and hanging, mirrors the earlier description of "halves and quarters of hogs and lambs and steers hanging from metal hooks on the low ceiling" in the freezer of the butcher shop. In the larger context of the narrative, the hanging, beaten body calls to mind Deleuze's formulation of meat as the zone of indiscernibility between man and animal that "manifests such convulsive pain and vulnerability, but also such delightful invention, color, and acrobatics" (21). From a Deleuzean standpoint, humans and animals are separated only by threshold states. Along the spectrum of living things, the animal and the human are nothing more than differing levels of affective, generative flesh. In "The Man," an identical violence tracks from the marketplace to the business of the law, as in both instances, the immediate parallel renders bodies nothing more than meat.

Further complicating the tension that arises between structure and process in an analysis of the encounter, Daniels' tunneling – his active reworking of the very structure

of urban space - reveals the contingency obscured by the totalizing plan of the city in its function as an ideological model. Contrary to lines of thought that either prioritize ideology as that which structures the subject or recognize no distinction between ideology and reality, subject and world (and by extension social and ideological conventions) must be recognized as both contingent and creative – in other words, for their plasticity.[43] At all levels of embodiment and discourse, from cells to social systems, each aligns with notions of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, following a dynamics of form capable not just of shaping itself, but of shaping a world. If we follow Wright's thinking in "The Man Who Lived Underground," it is precisely the "disobedience" of contingent, emergent subjectivity that unfolds into resistance.

5.

One way to understand the reciprocal, material link between embodiment and expression as it operates in Wright's novella is through an examination of jazz improvisation. The jazz form shares an affinity with the Deleuzoguattarian notion of assemblage as both connect to notions of self-organization, sense making, and subjectivity. In the 1955 essay "Living with Music," Ralph Ellison (2001) writes of jazz improvisation as an affirmation of life. In rather philosophical terms, he writes: "Life could be harsh, loud and wrong if it wished, but they lived it fully, and when they expressed their attitude toward the world it was with a fluid style that reduced the chaos of living to form" (6). Form emerges from a generalized ensemble or milieu that includes the various players, their instruments, the available technology, but also the musical tradition and social context in which the

[43] Wright's is an ideology of the body, one that draws what Catharine Malabou describes as the plasticity of the brain in all of its disobedience directly into the body.

players live and play. It is, as Ellison stresses, the result of the delicate interplay between individual and environment (group, ensemble, background). This is evident in Charlie Parker's breakthrough moment at Don Wall's Chili House in 1939. While jamming "Cherokee" with Biddy Fleet, Parker discovered what he had been hearing in his mind but could never play. He recalled: "I was working over 'Cherokee,' and, as I did, I found that by using the higher intervals of a chord as a melody line and backing them up with appropriately related changes, I could play the thing I'd been hearing. I came alive" (Haddix 2013, 42). While Parker's innovation can be credited in part to the obsessive refinement of his playing, the material conditions surrounding and participating in the event are just as crucial. The chance multiplicity of Fleet, an at the time fringe player like Parker who was also searching for an idiom beyond the stereotypical changes favored by the jazz establishment, jazz tradition until then, the blues inflection of Parker's Kansas City roots, the interplay of Fleet's guitar and Parker's sax, the cultural and musical tides of New York City, and the composition itself, a tired standard suited to innovation and improvisation – from this emerged the newborn cries of bebop.

As this brief overview of Parker's breakthrough illustrates, the affirmation that Ellison recognizes in the jazz form is not in the individual, but in the expression, in the always turning over of the new from the multiplicity that conditions it. For Ellison, affirmation is a-subjective, "the jazzman must lose his identity even as he finds it" (36). Even considering the greater traditional scope in which the jazz musician operates (the hierarchy of established players, accepted styles, etc.), Ellison's position is quite Deleuzoguattarian. Jazz improvisation is a progressive circulation of states between but not limited to individuals, instruments, and sound, what the philosophers observe as a

"continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end" (Deleuze and Guattari 2016, 22). As a contingent, emergent, a-subjective form, it allows us to better understand the philsophers' notion of assemblage (*agencement*) as at once mechanical and expressive and the ways in which this concept informs a biosemiotic appraisal of emergence, embodiment, and subjectivity in literary texts.

As if in stride with Ellison's description of jazz expression, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write of the assemblage: "The assemblage no longer confronts the forces of chaos, it no longer uses the forces of the earth or the people to deepen itself but instead open onto the forces of the Cosmos…[it is] a question of technique, exclusively a question of technique. The essential relation is no longer matter-forms (or substances-attributes); neither is it the continuous development of form and the continuous variation of matter. It is now a direct relation of *material-forces*" (342). Deleuze and Guattari are interested in the energetics of the molecular processes that are at work prior to "intelligible forms" – models retroactively imposed upon the very processes that condition them. Jazz likewise calls for a priority of the molecular over the molar. Jazz improvisation depends on the chance interaction of its material parts, as much on the knowledge and skill of the players as the condition of the instruments, variations in tempo, the acoustics of a room, or the varying levels of intoxication of those involved. Moreover, the jazz event is recursive, as the music itself serves as one more constraint, effecting its own autopoiesis. Understanding the jazz event as a self-organizing, self-maintaining unity emerging from contingent material relations makes it a valuable critical tool to investigate the co-emergence of expression and embodiment. The leading question of Deleuze's long book

on Spinoza, *Expressionism in Philosophy* (1992), asks: "What can a body do?" The short answer to this question is affect and be affected, which means what a body can do is defined by its capacity to interact with and enter into combination with other bodies. From an autopoietic perspective, we have seen how the combination of elements (including the immediate environment) leads to self-organization, self-maintenance, and the co-emergence of subject and world. Even his description of composite bodies can be read in terms familiar to theories of autopoiesis: "a composite body's *conatus* [can only be] the effort to preserve the relation of movement and rest that defines it, that is, to maintain constantly renewed parts in the relation that defines its existence" (230). Conatus, the striving or pushing-forward to preserve one's existence, is not a metaphysical or transcendental position. As Deleuze stresses, it is purely physical. A dynamic principle, it is the process by which a thing's essence is asserted by the very power (conatus) of its mechanical existence.

Nick Nesbitt reminds us that this is also a conceptual principle as much as a physical one. In his work on Deleuze and jazz improvisation, he writes: "[Deleuze's] analysis can, I think, be profitably read as referring not only to biological bodies, but to…sounding bodies, of whatever modality" (167). The improvisation is inseparable from the contingent interactions that condition it (from the condition of the instrument to the mood of the player), and is in fact, one of the mechanical elements that determines it. Its expression is inseparable from the contingent relations of its mechanical parts and processes. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari write: "As matters of expression take on consistency they constitute semiotic systems, but the *semiotic* components are inseparable from *material* components and are in exceptionally close contact with

molecular levels" (334). In considering the priority of the molecular over the molar, there is something to be gained from the colloquial reference to jazz improvisation as an "idea." If we consider musical expression as the semiotic content of a dynamic, compositional process, which in turn acts as a constraint on the very process that conditions it, we not only derive a concrete example of Deleuzian dual causality, but also come closer to a Deleuzoguattarian biosemiotics.

Concepts arise along similar process as do bodies. We see this in the organization of social systems, which following Luhmann (1995) are organized "on the basis of a unified (self-referential) nexus of communications" (59). Likewise, psychic systems are unified as a result of self-referential conscious states, which follow from recursive biophysical processes. The idea (expression) does not simply emerge from material interactions, it actively participates in them. In *Logic of Sense*, we see this in the way sense "envelops" a series, functioning like the membrane of a living cell that is both part and product of the organism. The membrane at once serves as a boundary for a network of ongoing interactions as well as participates in the very network which produces it as a unity. Just as the sounding element of jazz improvisation serves as a "compositional constraint," the creative, expressive network "will be immanent and singular, including the concepts that participate in its self-fashioning" (Nesbitt 163, 164).

Evan Thompson highlights Maturana and Varela's definition of the autopoietic system as a machine, a terminological distinction that stresses relations over structure. Just as the jazz "idea" emerges from the contingent relations of its constituent parts, "the autopoietic organization captures the minimal organization of a cell without invoking the notion of life or defining life in terms of the cell" (101). Prior to any solid designation of

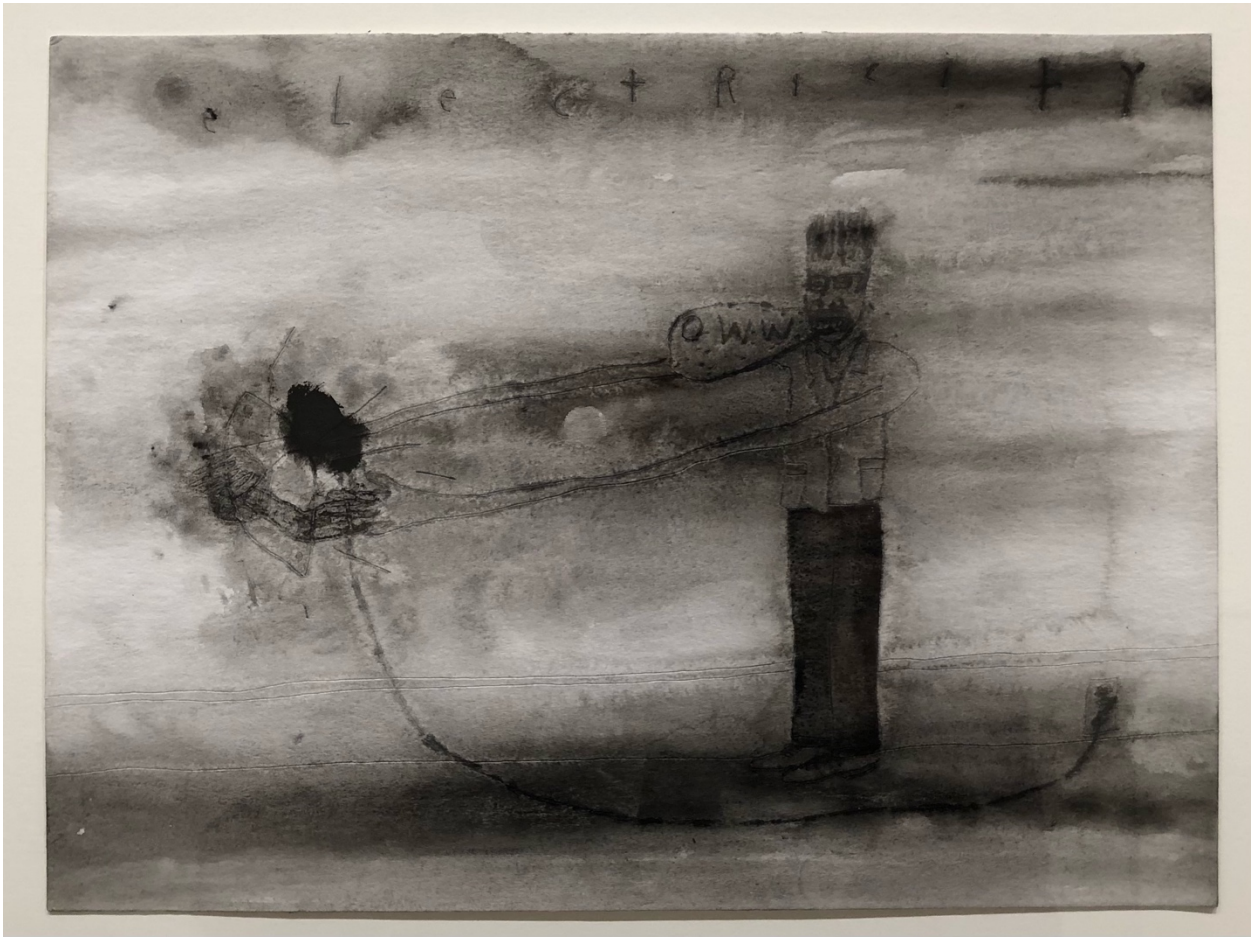
life, mind, or subject, the organization of a living system as a network of recurrent processes within a boundary determines the system's material (and meaningful) interaction with its environment, which in turn supports the internal processes or reactions that take place within the boundary.

This circularity furthermore allows us to examine a tactics of living in the world. It is important to recall here that autopoietic systems are operationally closed but environmentally open, that at the operational level, the adaptation of a system to its environment is contingent on the system's structural coupling with an environment. The structure of an autopoetic unity determines the meaningful recurrent interactions with its environment. These mutual interactions between system and environment illustrate in a concrete way the organism's capacity to affect and be affected. Therefore, the internal network dynamics (the mechanics) of the system also determine the external generation of meaning. The Deleuzian link emerges in terms of an ethics of embodiment. It is not a matter of something imposed on a body from the outside (ie. a formal or ideological structure). Power must be understood in relation to the body and as emanating from the body. This "[frees] the body from that relation of inverse proportionality which makes all comparisons of power impossible" (257). Reiterating the question of what a body can do, Deleuze states that beyond its biological significance, "*taken as a model*, its primary significance is juridical and ethical. All a body can do (its power) is also its 'natural right'" (257). Coupled with Wright's novella, Ellison's description of the jazz event, routed through a Deluzoguattarian biosemiotics, provides an effective means of fully realizing a notion of embodied subjectivity that is at once affirmative and improvisational. Such an orientation allows us to address the ways in which the emergent

subject can be regarded as a direct challenge to external structural and ideological forces that condition it.

The jazz event allows us to undertake parallel analyses of the organic/biophysical and the social emergence of autopoietic systems. Regarding the former, it provides a concrete example for working through the circularity of mechanics and expression in such a way that collapses any ontological distinction between the two registers. For the latter, as a necessary multiplicity, the jazz form becomes a critical tool by which to interrogate how systems function within a social milieu. Albert Murray writes, "art is the ultimate extension, elaboration, and refinement of the rituals that reenact the primary survival technology" (qtd. in Barnhart 2013, 2). Jazz improvisation is at once set within and against a background of tradition, the received history of composition and performance that serves as the raw material for the event. Parker's emergence could not have occurred without "Cherokee," and many of his later compositions are simply reworked standards. Yet the material background from which Parker's new form emerged is also an ideological one (as Bebop was a direct response to the public-facing dance arrangements of the Swing Era). The jazz event is an intensive process, a dynamic, productive distribution of material-forces, revealing how embodied subjectivity is informed as much by the social as it is by the material. Likewise is the (sociopolitical) subject. As dynamic, embedded, and embodied –an assemblage or "meshwork" – the subject is active in its ability to make sense of a world, where "making sense" is the "resolution of a dynamic differentiated field operating at multiple levels" (Protevi 2009, 56). In other words, the material-temporal polyphony of the emerging subject.

Chapter 4: Openness from Closure: Emergence and Expression in the Work of David Lynch.



David Lynch. *Electricity.* Watercolor on paper, 2011.

1.

In the winter of 2019, a solo exhibition of David Lynch's art works was featured at the Sperone Westwater gallery in lower Manhattan. The show contained large-scale mixed media pieces, a collection of small works and drawings, and an assortment of furniture and lamp sculptures. One of the small works, a mixed-media, black and white watercolor piece entitled "Electricity" (2011), depicts a figure with elongated arms holding a square

object plugged into a wall outlet. The object is exploding in a stain of black and a speech-bubble from the mouth of the figure reads “OWW.” Along the top of the piece crude letters spell out the word “electricity.” As a result of an effect of the watercolor, both the figure and word seem be etched into the rubbed, gray background as well as at once emerging from it. The controlled bleeding of the paint and the active, horizontal brushstrokes imbue the work with a sense of movement or force. In form and content, this simple, humorous piece encompasses the spirit of Lynch’s work, from the distorted and affected figure, the semi-defined (dark) environment, the simultaneity of separation (etching) and inclusion (emergence), the cord indicating connection and closure (in the circuit), the force of electricity, and the invocation of the word itself. These are foundational elements in Lynch’s work and clues to unlocking an interpretation of his art that is at once philosophical, spiritual, and even scientific.

There is a sense of depth that underscores all of Lynch’s work. Often, simple or mundane scenes betray a hidden complexity just below the image or the action. The textured, multidimensional nature of “Electricity” speaks to this. There are examples throughout his cinema, as well. In the opening sequence of *Blue Velvet* (1986), Mr. Beaumont collapses while watering his lawn, yet the scene is not primarily concerned with the body on the ground or the vertical jet of water from the hose. Rather, the emphasis is on the horizontal movement and convergence of bodies within the frame. A small child approaches the unconscious body as a dog attempts to eat the flowing water, interrupting its stream. The camera then cuts to a close-up of a patch of grass and begins to zoom in on the blades, breaking through the layer of grass to the dirt below where insects wildly crawl and chew the earth below. The scene moves from the sky to the

earth, drawing together disparate elements and forces (a fence and flowers, a fire truck, the various characters that populate the scene, the flow of water, light and darkness, etc.). These elements do not serve to mirror or support human activity. Instead, Lynch's composition suggests connection by way of an affective tributary. These bodies are not responding to one another as much as contributing to the thrust or momentum of a singular activity. In his films, as in his works on paper, Lynch is not simply presenting an image, he is framing life.

Each scene or image in his work is a plateau in the Deleuzoguattarian sense, "a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 22-3). For Deleuze and Guattari the desert is such a plateau. It is a de-centered space of shifts and movement with no uniform boundary between earth and sky. Likewise, the grass in *Blue Velvet* is such a realm of pure activity. At first glance it is still, inert, uniform, but a brief concentration on a given patch reveals it to be a space of pure movement. Just below, the soil is as alive with insects, as are the discrete elements that compose it. Its seeming inertia is in truth a space of sustained activity and becoming. The perpetual motion[1] of Lynch's frames reveals environments as milieus in the sense of constituting a middle, "composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overspills" (1987, 21).

[1] As we will see, even his still frames are active.

Lynch's milieus necessarily include the bodies[2] that populate them. In fact, any notion of "world" that emerges in his work results from the contingent material interplay of bodies within their environments. As opposed to a pre-existing world awaiting the individual, it is the activity that is always present, the milieu or affective matrix as a perpetual motion of material elements in the process of becoming. Bodies are included in and affected by these very processes. For Lynch, there are no "alternate" realities and there are no stable bodies. Rather, reality is always already multidimensional and contingent, evidenced immediately in the dense layering of sound, image, and action that characterizes his cinematic environments. His characters occupy a world of thresholds, of interwoven layers or registers in which bodies are not hard boundaries or partitions but relays for the dynamic material interactions that take up and include the body.

This chapter will shift from literature to the cinema and investigate the ways in which notions of embodiment, emergence, and sense-making are expressed in the films of David Lynch. In Deleuzean terms, expression is simultaneously the explication of multiple elements and the unity of the concept or idea that envelopes them. It is a system of emergence, "at once speech and manifestation" (Deleuze 1992, 53), much like his logic of sense, and likewise bears resemblance to theories of self-organizing systems and autopoiesis. What all three of these principles - expression, sense, and autopoiesis - have in common is their concern with explaining the co-emergence of the many and the one, which is also a core theme of the art of David Lynch. A key to understanding such expressions of emergence in the films of David Lynch is the dynamic interplay of

[2] Because of the affective capacities exhibited in all objects in his films, I use the term "bodies" in this chapter as a catch-all for living and non-living things – all of the active physical elements - in Lynch's compositions.

individual and environment or the principle of openness from closure derived from biological systems theory, which states that the closed, dynamic network of material relations that designate a living system is the very thing that opens up a world of patterned, meaningful interactions.

A compelling argument could be made that a notion of reflexivity operates throughout Lynch's work - all of his films are connected thematically and in term of their content. Such a survey is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, I will focus primarily on two films, *Eraserhead* (1977) and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1994), which taken together exemplify his overall philosophy and aesthetic. However, before analyzing the films, I will examine the ways in which his background in painting influences the composition of his filmmaking. Lynch's debt to Francis Bacon will direct our focus to three painterly aspects of his overall style: the isolation of compositional elements in his work, an emphasis on relation and motion over structure and concept, and the establishment in his films of closed, operative fields that open to emergent activity. Identifying these particular aesthetic impulses in his work will serve to ground the overall theoretical and philosophical discussion of his films. Discussing *Eraserhead*, the motif of the hole will guide an analysis of the ways Lynch superimposes multiple registers of space and reality throughout the film. Space operates like closed circuit concentrating and guiding the movement and activity of both its characters and composition. Next, a study of *Fire Walk with Me* reveals an evolution in Lynch's use of superimposition, this time at the level of the image. Close reading a key scene in the film will illustrate how image and idea emerge simultaneously as a result of the contingent interaction of the discrete material elements that compose it. By treating the frame as a closed, active field, if only

for a scene, Lynch presents the co-emergence of image and idea in such a way as to parallel the co-dependent emergence of body and mind. The final section will culminate in a brief discussion that draws a scientific parallel to the philosophy observed at work in Lynch's films, positioning our reading of art and life on the same ground.

2.

There is a direct relation between film and painting for David Lynch. In fact, his work in film can be traced back to a decisive moment in his time at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts where, while painting, "he sensed what he's described as 'a little wind' and saw a flicker of movement," thus beginning his interest in paintings that moved (Lynch and Mckenna 2018, 67). His early short films, namely *Six Men Getting Sick*, *The Alphabet*, and *The Grandmother*, combine animation and live action. The emphasis on animation and painted sets ebbs throughout his later features, but a painterly sentiment remains in the sense of composition that dominates his work and reveals his influences to be painters rather than filmmakers. For example, Dorthy Vallens' apartment in *Blue Velvet*, the Red Room in *Twin Peaks*, and the street scenes early on in *The Elephant Man*, while singularly Lynchian, are evocative of the work of Francis Bacon. The almost monochrome pink/red of Vallens' apartment is broken by a square of white from the kitchen as well as a chair rail that exaggerates the edges and curves of the room and serves as a boundary for the action within the space, echoing any number of Bacon's figure paintings. The Red Room brings to mind the curtained background of "Seated Figure" (1961) or any of Bacon's Velàzquez paintings and, perhaps the most obvious link, the huge sides of butchered meat hanging prominently from the side of a London

building in *The Elephant Man*. Citing the influence of Bacon on Lynch's work does more than simply establish a shared or inherited aesthetic. It presents a means of working through Lynch's films philosophically. In fact, Deleuze's book on Bacon provides insight into a means of interpreting Lynch's work as the formal and compositional elements in Bacon's paintings do carry over into the latter's filmmaking.

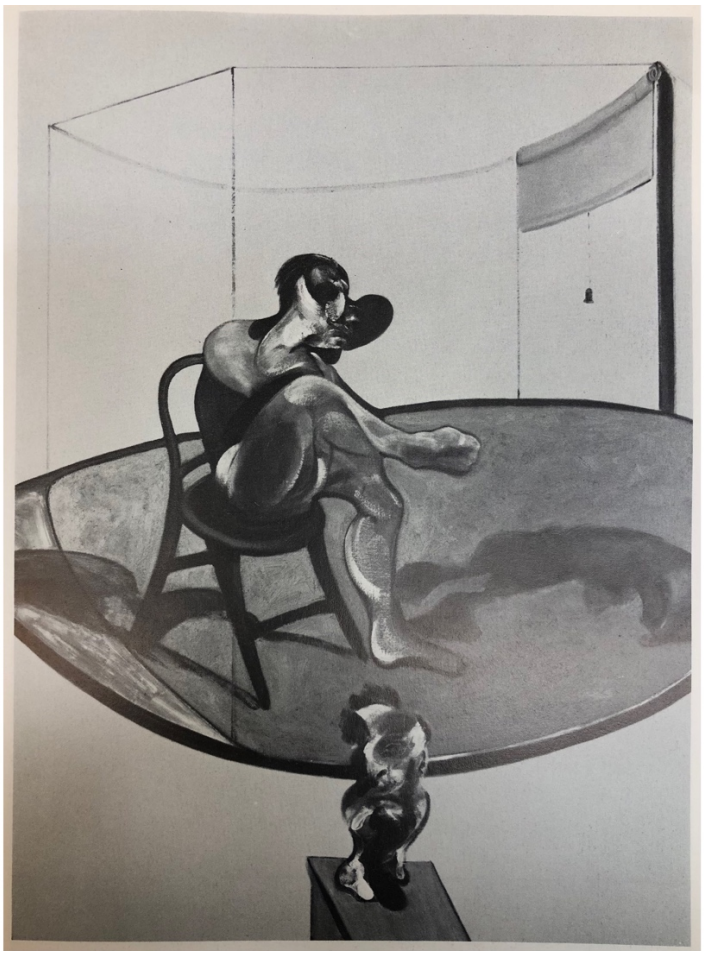
Deleuze's book on Bacon is a work of philosophy as much as an aesthetic appraisal of a specific artist and as such, like all of Deleuze's books, needs to be read in connection with the entirety of his work. Philosophically, there are links to *The Logic of Sense*, both books on Spinoza, and his work on Leibniz. As an aesthetic treatise, it falls in with his later books on cinema. A similar claim that no single element can be divorced from the whole can and should be made about the work of David Lynch. For instance, one of his earliest 16mm "experiments," a speeding explosion of color giving the impression of a portal or wormhole, is echoed almost identically in the now-famous atomic bomb sequence in Part 8 of *Twin Peaks: The Return*. Lynch's films have been categorized in two eras, notably by Martha Nochimson (2013) who recognizes *Lost Highway* as the shift to a focus on "threshold experience as a defining characteristic" in his later work (35). While there are, of course, marked aesthetic differences between the early and late-stage films, similarities in both form and content defy straightforward classification. Even if the later films reject the shreds of normal reality allowed in the earlier work as Nochimson asserts, Lynch is nevertheless, from 1967 onward, working through a single idea – an examination of life as innate creativity across and through the interwoven layers and registers of "reality."

Michel Chion (2006) recognizes a two-dimensionality in Lynch's work, further attesting to the director's treating each frame as if it were a canvas. Chion identifies the tableau-like composition of Lynchian spaces, from diners to dream-spaces, which "enclose" the characters. This two-dimensionality, which flattens both space and action, serves as the background against which, in Chion's estimation, the troubled and multidimensional character of Laura Palmer in *Twin Peaks* will be set. He traces this aesthetic choice to the treatment of space in Lynch's short-films, namely *The Grandmother* (1970), yet Chion focuses much more on particular similarities (for instance the dress of the young boy to that of Mrs. Tremond's grandson and Dale Cooper in *Twin Peaks*, or the subtle allusions to incest that will come to the fore in *Fire Walk With Me*) rather than the ways in which the composition of the film betrays the experimentations of a fine artist as opposed to the explorations of a filmmaker. Yet Lynch, in many ways, remains the painter, and it is from this perspective that Chion's observation of two-dimensionality can be expanded.

Very early in his book on Bacon, Deleuze identifies what he describes as "techniques of isolation" in the painter's work. This is most evident in the ways in which Bacon frames bodies, for instance the cube surrounding the subject in "Seated Figure" (1961) or the combination of circle and cube in "Two Studies of George Dyer with Dog" (1968). These shapes serve as a boundary for the figures, isolating them not from the compositional elements of the paintings, per se, but from any semblance of narrative, isolating the movement and activity of the figure in such a way that it escapes representation or symbolization. The activity of the figure becomes what Deleuze would term a "matter of fact" which results from the emergent relation of coupled figures rather

an intelligible relation of ideas. The relationship is an interplay of elements rather than an overlaying of concepts. Lynch's two-dimensional frames, the often flat presentation of his work, have a similar effect. Consider the earlier description of Dorothy Vallens' apartment from *Blue Velvet*. The floor-to-ceiling pinkish red is interrupted only by the white square of a kitchen and a chair rail that runs along the wall. The rail, alternately straight and curved, has the effect of confining the movements of the characters (as well as the objects throughout) to an exact space. Thus, when Jeffrey watches Frank Booth assaulting Dorothy, the scene is doubly isolated; 1) as a performance for the voyeur in the closet; and 2) as an entanglement of bodies and forces that could only converge in a specific space under specific circumstances. In *Eraserhead*, the radiator serves a similar function. The Lady in the Radiator stands on a curved stage within the radiator,[3] all of the activity between her and Henry is confined to this space. The entire film is directed towards and culminates at this spot. Rather than highlighting a break between flat spaces and character types (the RR Diner, "Big Ed" Hurley) on the one hand and ethereal, dream like space and deep individual characters (the Red Room, Laura Palmer) on the other as Chion argues, two-dimensonality in Lynch's work emphasizes a given space (including its objects and characters) as an operative field, facilitating an exploration of the ways in which figures and forces are directed and intertwine, the closed space is in fact open to contingency and chance, to the momentum of its own emergence.

[3] Another double boundary.



Francis Bacon. *Two Studies of George Dyer with a Dog,* 1968.

Jeremy Powell (2014) makes an interesting claim regarding Lynch's "literalism," the idea that objects in the films take on a "double structure," operating at once in direct relation to the other elements of the film while also taking on a contingent presence. He cites the creamed corn in *Twin Peaks* (referred to in the film as *garmonbozia*, "pain and sorrow"). The evacuation of meaning requires that signification is here expressly non-narrative, derived solely from the composition of the film's material elements. Powell presents a convincing analysis, yet his focus is directed toward a reading of time in the later films that only marginally engages how such an interpretation is also one of emergence and embodiment. Nevertheless, if we are to take Lynch literally, we should do

so at all levels of his work and treat his mysterious/dream spaces with the same assumption of reality as we do his objects.

Robert Sinnerbrink (2005) writes that Lynch composes "visual and aural sequences that combine images and sounds liberated from a purely narrative function with images evincing a complex cinematic reflexivity." I wholeheartedly agree with this assessment, as my reading of *Fire Walk with Me* will show. Yet Sinnerbrink, like many of Lynch's critics, relies more on narrative reconstructions (his analysis of *Mulholland Dr.* is a point for point disambiguation of the story) than a dynamics of the cinematic image. Nevertheless, Sinnerbrink is approaching Lynch's work as "philosophy in action" rather than applying extant conceptual structures to the films (he views such treatments as "reductive," and I share this sentiment). Other purported "dynamic" interpretations of Lynch's work fall short. Martha Nochimson, in her book *Swerves*, studies Lynch (beginning with *Lost Highway*) from the standpoint of modern physics. She asserts that the Lynchian "threshold experience," the blurring of the line between reality/unreality in his work has shifted in his recent films from a dream logic to "a quantum mechanical cinematic vocabulary" which "[evokes] a multi-leveled materiality" (40, 43). The two concepts which guide her reading are "entanglement," in which multiple particles respond to stimuli as if they were a single entity, and "superposition" which states that prior to observation, a single system exists in all possible states at once. Yet, for all of the value of this reading, Nochimson's positioning of quantum science against the illusory manifestations of culture and domestic life falls into the trap of a psychoanalytic reading. For example, in her analysis of *Lost Highway*, the character of Rene/Alice as unobtainable object pivots the dynamics of entanglement and superposition toward a

dialectic of desire, an interpretation which is inherently structural. Not only does this echo her earlier, phallic rendering of *Twin Peaks* (1995), approaching the films in such a pre-structured way stifles the emergent dynamics of both a quantum mechanic and systems theoretical approach.

Rather than following suit, understanding uncertainty and instability in terms of the contingent emergence and the embodied dynamics of living systems retains the multidimensionality of quantum physics, resists the impulse to assign a structure to relational processes, and allows us to observe this threshold experience across Lynch's work, rather than limiting it to its explicit rendering in his later films. More importantly, it requires that we work primarily at the level of the composition. The next section will explore a sustained reading of *Eraserhead*, concentrating on the motif of the hole as a means of marking a closed space, localizing affect, and opening up a world. I hope to develop a truly comprehensive approach to understanding the dynamic relations in Lynch's work that emerge from isolation of figures within an operative field. Throughout the films holes function to mark operative space, in effect limiting the movement of a film to a specific confined, but nevertheless total, space.

3.

At the surface, there is little hope of a rational way into *Eraserhead*. Its world is hermetic, sealed off from the rational and the concrete. Yet there are points of entry. It is a film that alternately focuses on the mail, on plumbing, electricity, a radiator, the totalizing pressure of industry, sex, and the family. What all of these things have in common is they are at one and the same time means of connection/concentration and

means of dispersal. The tension between these seemingly contradictory terms defines the world of *Eraserhead* and the bodies within it.

The film begins with an image of Henry, the protagonist, superimposed over a shot of a planet. The camera then approaches the barren planet and follows the semi-terranean canals and burrows that mark the face of it. This leads to a hole, a passage, a way into a place from which a force emanates. Within, The Man in the Planet sits at a row of levers. With each pull, a process is continued, evidenced by the cutting back and forth between shots of the Man and Henry floating in space, a spermatozoon swimming from his open mouth. The pulling of the levers simply passes the spermatazoon through and, as with aspiration, the image pulls back like drawn fluid through a hole and fades to black. We reenter the film through another hole, for a moment the screen burning pure white until the picture fades into a close up of Henry standing before a large building. The motif of the hole places Henry – and the film - within an operative field, a Deleuzean round area wherein processes are isolated and extracted. It is a liminal space where something – an event – is already taking place.

Despite the challenging imagery throughout the film, its story is simple. Henry has impregnated his semi-estranged girlfriend, Mary X, and as a result, his floating, ne'er-do-well existence is thrust into the domestic. Moreover, like the "X" in Mary's name, the characters are likewise simple, almost incidental. "Person X" – the individual is a variable. This is where interpretation of the film hinges. *Eraserhead*, and to a greater degree Lynch's body of work, eschews the primacy of character and, by extension, the body. Instead, just below the surface of character, Lynch focuses on the conditions from which they and their behaviors emerge as a direct result of the interaction of a set of

sensations and affects that include both the body and the environment. The value of keeping any interpretation of the films restricted to the material relations of the composition itself is that it maintains simplicity without being reductive.[4]

To take up the matter of the body, it is responsive to and affected by external forces. This is made clear by the tension of the film's environment. Semi-industrial, it is a world in-between, much more mood than town, the constant machinic din gives the impression of a space pulsing with an unseen, mounting pressure. Lynch describes such places as "fringelands." It is a "world neither here nor there" where "pressure…is always building" (Lynch 2005, 56-7). Lynch realizes such forces and pressures at work in the constant mechanical hum, echoes of clanging and conveying, the factory horn, the hiss of the radiator, the music in the air, and most importantly, electricity. Electricity, as force, conducts concentrated, invisible energies toward a specific space. The radiator functions in the same way. Bodies are likewise conductors. Speech and movement are often forced, distorted, or impossible, as if influenced by some external, infiltrating presence. For example, during the dinner scene, Mrs. X's body convulses while a miniature chicken bleeds out onto Henry's plate, or at the end of the film, Henry is faced with the massive, eviscerated body of the baby. In both scenes, embodied activity rises with and culminates in a surge of electricity. The idea of the entryway introduced by the image of the hole in the planet is transposed to electrical sockets and the radiator, emphasizing localization, occupation, and entrance. The body, as well, is a conductor. Lynch's "fringelands" are not other worlds, but interpenetrating levels of activity. In this way, Henry's entire city

[4]Moreover, it avoids imposing structure from the outside. For example, Godwin (1985) presents and exclusively phallic reading of *Erasherhead* which wholly tames the dynamics of the film. This is exemplified by his declaration that the baby "can only be one thing: the penis" (42).

conducts, the environment operating as a singular mechanism layering forces that infiltrate the individual, collecting him up into something much more totalizing and cosmic.

Two scenes in particular exemplify the film's insistent and totalizing connectivity. The first involves the worm or gland-like object Henry hides in the painted cupboard on his wall. Early on in the film, Henry twice checks the mail. At first it is empty, but later, he discovers this object in his mailbox. After a nightmarish scene in which Henry's bed is littered with giant spermatozoa, the camera focuses on a shot of the cupboard. A high-pitched tone gains in intensity as the shot darkens and a single light is trained on the cabinet. The doors open to reveal the worm in a circle of light as if on-stage. Suddenly, the worm begins to move, crawling end over end into the shadows. It emerges, having seemingly climbed to the face of the planet where it crawls and dances, intermittently burrowing into the ground, increasing in size with each return to the surface. Finally, it rises with an open mouth into which the camera descends. The camera then pans down a wall to a hole. Inside, we see Henry sitting on the edge of his bed. From this vantage point, it becomes evident that this hole is standing in place of the window in Henry's apartment, which happens to immediately face a brick wall. As we will see, this is not a folding but a concentration of space. Neither, despite the impulse to the contrary, are we dealing with an actual "wormhole" because these are the various dimension of the same space. The move through the brick wall emphasizes the ease in which levels of reality interpenetrate. In the films, this is as true of plumbing as it is of dreams.

The second scene, just a few minutes later, takes place just after Henry and his neighbor make love. Henry's bed becomes a pool of white fluid and the pair sinks below

the surface. Next, we are given alternating shots of the neighbor and the planet, as if she is bearing witness to Henry's world. From the shadows, The Lady in the Radiator approaches and sings "In heaven everything is fine." We now see she is standing on her stage inside of the radiator where Henry joins her. The sound of swirling air that fills the scene leaps to a sharp, mechanical pitch and a blinding, white light washes out the frame as he tries to touch her hand. This repeats before the Lady disappears. For a moment, The Man in the Planet appears. Now alone on stage, Henry backs into a corner as a dead tree, identical to the one on his bedside table, wheels out from behind a curtain. A dark fluid pours from the base of the tree and Henry's head pops off, slowly replaced by that of the crying baby. On the floor of the stage and surrounded by this fluid, Henry's head drops below the surface and falls to a street where it is collected by a young boy who brings it to a pencil factory. Inside the factory, a man at a machine removes a sliver of brain and inserts it into a machine where it is portioned into erasers. After testing the final product, the scraps (and by extension Henry) are collected and brushed into the air. After the scraps float and dissipate, the film returns to a shot of Henry sitting on his bed.

Both scenes rely on the dream logic[5] that ultimately dictates all of Lynch's work, especially *Eraserhead*. Despite the convoluted - and at times extreme – imagery, it is not incoherent. In each of these scenes (and throughout the film) there are concrete links and connections everywhere. Furthermore, the mouth of the worm resembles the holes in both the beginning of the film as well as in place of Henry's window. Spatially, the settings in

[5] This is a sticky but unavoidable term. Although Lynch's films do absolutely follow a "dream logic," they rely on the randomness of the dream as a guiding principle. What "speaks" through the films is not a pre-structured truth or "reality." Instead, it is the images in their contingent association that in turn provides a "logic" to the films. It is in this way that we can continue to talk about dreams while sidestepping any psychoanalytic over-determination.

each of the scenes overlap. There is seemingly no distance between Henry's apartment and the planet. Nor is there any apparent distance between subjective and objective "realities," or objective reality and dreams. Via the hole, registers or dimensions of reality intertwine as spaces are superimposed one upon the other. As traditional spatial boundaries are dissolved, the hole represents less a tear in the fabric of reality than it does a treatment of space as itself a circuit.

Chion asserts that the syntax (shot selection, editing, etc.) of *Eraserhead* and its traditional narrative structure are what serve to fundamentally unify the film. He identifies similarities to silent film (the use of cuts to visually inscribe meaning and reference) in order to secure, at least technically, the film's insistent continuity. Yet, while this analysis provides a more than adequate explanation of how the film presents a sense of unity or consistency, it falls short in identifying or interrogating what ideas Lynch is attempting to elaborate with the film.[6] Lynch has been consistently guarded when it comes to explaining his work. Descriptions of his films are often cagey at best (*Inland Empire* is simply about "a woman in trouble") and he has never revealed just how he constructed the baby for *Eraserhead*. Perhaps, rather than seeking an answer or key to decoding the film, we should take Lynch's reticence at giving too much away as an invitation to think through the problem with him. Often, when discussing the genesis of a film, Lynch will simply chart his ideas (in a talk a number of years ago at the Strand Bookstore in New York City, he mapped *Blue Velvet* in the following way: "I saw an ear.

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[6] To this end Chion tends to draw meaning or significance from connections to other films and works, for instance, he connects the Lady in the Radiator to the Grandmother of the eponymous short film. As we will see, images and characters often do persist across films for Lynch and warrant comparison (*INLAND EMPIRE* ends with a veritable parade of characters and tropes). These connections are important and Chion's work in mining them is valuable. The next logical step is to examine how these "tropes" (for lack of a better term) operate within the films and what emerges as a result of their activity.

And then I saw some grass…"). Formally, his films follow a sort of ambulatory logic, a single idea drawn to its culmination only by moving through it. Therefore, rather than isolating the "what" of any cinematographic unity or continuity, the idea at the heart of the film, or the ways in which a film guides or maps a given thought, we should rather ask how the films effectively doubles the very process of thinking itself.

From a Deleuzean standpoint, (Lynch's) cinema becomes a means of doing philosophy. This is an inherently creative process, as Deleuze's work on painting and cinema attests. In the book on Bacon, Deleuze coordinates structure, figure, and contour in a single movement or "tension" (28). The coordination of this movement, enveloping the figure like a membrane, closes it off from its material surroundings (its "natural milieu") while at the same time "assures the communication in both directions between the figure and the material structure" (29). The coexistence between material and movement/tension is what constitutes the rhythm of emergence. The term "milieu" is important to recall here. In *A Thousand Pleateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari specify milieu as "always a middle." Both thought and matter emerge from this "middle," like a rhizome. The rhizome does not follow the logic of structural or binary relations; rather it functions by way of active, contingent, emergent links. Moreover, the rhizome does not terminate in a single idea or concept. There is no transcendental core to be secured or uncovered. Rather, it is pure activity, a consistent becoming that creates plateaus only to link to other points or lines of flight.

Thought follows this very movement. Space, as well, in *Eraserhead*, is rhizomatic. Through a series of holes, the planet, the city, Henry's apartment and the varying levels of reality that converge within it, are superimposed one upon the other. At

any moment, the place occupied by the individual is an active middle-point at the confluence of any number of points in space. The realization of multiple dimensions or registers of reality linked by an image of a hole is common in Lynch's films. In *The Elephant Man* we are guided into a dream through the hole cut out of the sack Merrick wears over his head (interestingly enough, this dream world is incredibly similar to the factory-desert of *Eraserhead*). Through the ear, *Blue Velvet* moves from peaceful suburb to the criminal underworld centered around Lincoln St. In *Mulholland Dr.*, the empty box serves as entryway to the painful, isolating "reality" of Diane hidden behind Betty's idealized Los Angeles. *Twin Peaks: The Return* is littered with wormholes between dimensions. Whether clearly a dream (*The Elephant Man*), potential fantasy (*Mulholland Dr.*), or an actual "alternate dimension" (*Twin Peaks, Blue Velvet*), none of these spaces lacks any more reality than another as all exert a material influence on action as well as thought in (and potentially across) the films.

Deleuze (1986) asserts that cinema doubles for the process or movement of thought. One of the ways in which cinema succeeds in this is in the construction of the "any-space-whatever." It is the shifting, virtual space that emerges as a result of the relation between the elements that compose it, a space emptied of any determinate quality or coordination. Deleuze writes that the any-space-whatever is "an amorphous set which has eliminated that which happened and acted in it…the amorphous set in fact is a collection of locations or positions which coexist independently of the temporal order which moves from one part to the other…it is a pure potential, it shows only Powers and Qualities, independently of the states of things or milieux which actualise them" (120). For Deleuze, the image is not merely a chance quality of mise-en-scene or shot selection.

Space, and this includes the action and elements that compose it, must be understood as emerging as a result of the pure potential – virtual - coordinates that are presented on the film. This goes beyond, for example, the lively courtyard in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* or the ever-changing Zone in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, although both approach Deleuze's formulation. The cinema of David Lynch is a cinema of the any-space-whatever. Not only do rooms, open spaces, objects, and images overlap and superimpose to disrupt any straightforward coordination of elements – later we will point to his use of the close-up to short-circuit the connection between image and "reality" – Lynch's shots consistently remind us that there is no pre-determined link between the elements presented and a given "reality" or idea. Rather, what is at stake in his films is the ways in which an idea emerges (becomes "actual") and in what direction the introduction of a new thing or element draws out the virtual relations at work in a given frame (and even across frames). Lynch does not simply superimpose images; he layers image, sound, and action in order to capture the rhythm of something wholly contingent and singular. In this way, thought as process is embodied in the cinema.

4.

In *Cinema 2* (1989), Deleuze writes: "the object of cinema is not to reconstitute the presence of bodies, in perception and action, but to carry out a primordial genesis of bodies" using the constitutive elements that compose the image (201). This is the composition of a space prior to action "where disparate sets overlap and rival each other, without being able to organize themselves according to sensory-motor schemata" (203). If the superimposition of space (as well as levels of reality) serves to frame or isolate the

body as a relay for the attendant forces at work in its environment, subsuming the body into a larger mechanism in *Eraserhead*, Lynch takes a much more holistic position with *Twin Peaks* and presents rather a study of life as emergent creative expression. Instead of highlighting the tension between body and environment – a tension that culminates in *Eraserhead* with Henry's annihilation against the pressures of an industrial world – in *Twin Peaks* the industrial hum is replaced by a natural ambience that is equally if not more sprawling, consuming, and totalizing. Superimposition shifts from the level of space to that of the image. As such, the superficiality of Lynch's painterly, two-dimensional spaces gives way, revealing the depth of material points from which the (cinematic) image emerges. As an expression of life, the cinematic image examines the virtual connections (environmental, material, and cosmic forces) that condition it. What we see in Lynch's evolution from *Eraserhead* to *Twin Peaks*[7] is not a sustained focus on the tension between body and world (or a preference for one over the other, Lynch is not solely a composer of "environments" or "worlds"), but the development of an irrational, disruptive cinema that explores the ways in which body and environment link and emerge in a single image. In this regard, *Fire Walk with Me* does not signal the end of Lynch's early-stage of filmmaking. There is no clear break. Rather, we should view the films as a consistent evolution and refinement of a single idea that can be traced back to the late 60's.

Twin Peaks is a creation story and can serve as a study of what Deleuze terms the "primordial genesis" of bodies in cinema, of a becoming visible of the image. The figure as well as the idea emerge as a result of the interaction between distant and discrete

[7] It is a span of seventeen years from *Eraserhead* to *Fire Walk with Me.*

material points. It is important to clarify here that I am not treating the image and the body as interchangeable terms. Instead, we must understand that in the cinema of David Lynch, the body and the image are treated as emerging from similar processes. The image, like the body, is a collective. According to Brian Massumi (2013), "the body is a seat of bare activity: a region of indistinction between the human and matter where something doing is always already just stirring, before it starts to take definitive experiential form" (27). Aesthetically, the body's lived (sensorimotor, perceptual) activity is inherently creative to the end that it marks a distinction – gives form to a world – from within the material milieu in which it is included. The body channels organic and inorganic, non-human/animal impulses into a singular activity historically designated as "human." Moreover, much of this activity is pre-cognitive and nonconscious, arising before the individual. Cinematically, Lynch doubles this process. Even his most simple shots are active, layering sound and image in such a way that a shot of a stoplight slightly swaying against a black sky or of fog rolling down the tree-lined face of a mountain suggest not a staged image, but one that emerges as a result of the interplay of material elements that happen to be captured in this moment.

The activity central to Lynch's compositions is apparent throughout *Twin Peaks: The Return*, yet it is in *Fire Walk With Me* that he first truly embraces the cinematic image as active and emergent. Towards the end of the first chapter of the film, the film shifts from Deer Meadow, WA to FBI Headquarters in Philadelphia. We are given a shot of Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) reminding Gordon Cole (David Lynch) of a dream he had. He then conducts an experiment where he stands in front of a surveillance camera, intermittently walking to another room to check if his image has remained on the

monitor. When this anomaly presents itself (Cooper is effectively in two places at once), missing agent Philip Jeffries (David Bowie) exits an elevator and wanders into the Cole's office. He begins rambling about "Judy," points to Cooper, and asks "Who do you think this is there?" At this point, two images are superimposed on the scene, a layer of television static and a masked Black Lodge spirit clutching a stick and jumping in place. The scene then dissolves to a room where The Man from Another Place and Bob are seated at a table surrounded by a pair of Woodsmen, Mrs. Tremond and her grandson, and the dancing spirit. The Man talks about "garmonbozia" (creamed corn/pain and sorrow), a formica table, and mocks a wedding ceremony. As he rubs the table, the television static continues to push into the frame and Philip Jeffries' voice can be heard declaring "We live inside of a dream." His voice continues over the scene explaining where this is taking place (above a convenience store). A close-up of a mouth intones "electricity," there is another overhead shot of the room, and now a third image, the curtains of the Red Room are superimposed over a shot of the corner of the room. Mrs. Tremond's grandson covers his face with a plaster mask, removing it to reveal the face of a monkey. Jefferies' voice rises in intensity and the scene dissolves to an overhead shot of the black and white floor of the Black Lodge, The Man and Bob passing through one of the curtains. The static rises and a screaming Philip Jeffries is superimposed over and contained within an overhead shot of the lodge. There is finally a series of quick cuts alternating between Jeffries in the office and television static, this dissolving into a shot of powerlines against a blue sky and finally an empty chair (it is worth nothing that both the sky and the carpet of Cole's office match the color of the static that permeated the scene).

Before interpreting the scene, it is crucial to pull apart and identify its various elements. Lynch gives us three (maybe four) places. There are also five speakers. The polyphony of voices is layered into a rising collage of diegetic sound and music. It is worth noting that the sounds in the room above the store are reversed, as well the dialogue of those characters was recorded backward and played forward. In regard to the editing, the superimposition of images is primarily the effect of a series of slow dissolves, enhancing the sense that these moments are occurring simultaneously rather than in flashback. Further troubling the notion of flashback is the use of static in both the dissolves and cross-cuts. An image of static in extreme close-up opens the film and has no immediate bearing on the events in Cole's office or in the room above the convenience store, thus, the recalling of this particular image (and the murder of Theresa Banks that it accompanies) upsets any clear-cut temporal organization of the scene. Not only do images and spaces overlap, but time does as well, as if both time and space are converging at a single point.

Early on in *Twin Peaks: The Return*, Mike, the one-armed man, asks Cooper, "Is it future, or is it past?" This line, interestingly enough, was originally given to The Man from Another Place in a scene cut from the end of *Fire Walk With Me*. The simultaneity of space, image, voice, and sound in the scene described above forces Mike's question into the heart of the film. Moreover, it provides a key to both Lynch's aesthetic and the philosophical and thematic thrust of *Twin Peaks* as a whole. Michel Chion reads the merging of the two scenes as a case of parasitism, the convenience store episode disrupting and adding a layer of cinematographic confusion to Phillip Jeffries' confounding reappearance and disappearance. His formal analysis follows the structural

impulse guiding his reading of Lynch's oeuvre, most evident in his Oedipal rendering of *Blue Velvet.* The risk here is a focus on the superficial, of reading Lynch purely at a surface without depth. Of *Fire Walk With Me*, Chion writes: "The inserts of nature and the forest, which are so beautiful and terrifying in the series, here seem paradoxically like a foreign body, a remnant, perhaps because they point to an idea of depth (the depth of nature) whereas the truth of the film lies in its relation to the surface" (144). At the surface, the intrusion of the meeting at the convenience store does seem like a case of parasitism, of something alien imposing itself onto a few feet of film. But Chion's analysis privileges the plot as central to an interpretation of the film, which, considering Lynch's later work, presents its own set of difficulties. Lynch has stated to the contrary his interest in returning to *Twin Peaks* as an exploration of its depths, namely the contradictions in the character of Laura Palmer whom he describes as "radiant on the surface but dying inside" (Rodley 2005, 184). The character study is merely a way in, an initial inside/outside distinction that leads not to individuals but sets of active relations. Ultimately, the film reveals a productive, creative activity –(liveliness/life) – that ranges across a material spectrum.

The explicit multidimensionality in *Fire Walk With Me* (and *Twin Peaks* as a whole) allows for a reading of emergence at both the level of the image, from the standpoint of cinematography, and of bodies. Reading these elements in conjunction reveals the film to be doing the work of philosophy. Brian Massumi, in discussing the perceptual experience of the event, writes that the semblance (the surface-event or "extra-being") is inseparable from a sense of "aliveness." Because the emergent event is always already the expression of a self-organizing activity, it is fundamentally an expression of

life. Semblance, what we see at the surface, is not some elusive, metonymic object of desire, but the "[explosive] opening onto bare activity…'shattering' the work" into "a totally singular dynamic unity," "an intensity-expressing experiential event that is wholly and only its own self-floating occurrence" (178, 179). The relations of compositional elements, beginning with the line, mark a boundary and establishes an inside and an outside situating not only a separation of parts (in space), but the active, recursive activity of differentiated forms. Massumi refers to this as a "double openness." In systems theory this is the principle of maintaining openness through closure (i.e. creating a connection to the environment precisely by separating oneself from the environment). Art as activity, the emergence of a coherent unity from a virtual background as a result of the "coupling of two continual variations" (95) does not simply mirror those processes from which bodies emerge, but provides insight into the depth of processes at work in living bodies. What we recognize and identify with as life is the recursive operation of a bounded system of relational embodied interactions (habits). *Fire Walk with Me* marks the first time Lynch successfully expresses art and life in a single statement.

As we discussed earlier, two-dimensionality in Lynch's films functions to establish an exploration of the ways in which the material elements of a shot or scene intertwine and result in an emergent action. Surface, therefore, is always the revelation of an operative depth. Very early in *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze states that surface effects are the manifestation of the mixture of material elements in relation. Becoming "is no longer a question of simulacra which elude the ground and insinuate themselves everywhere, but rather a question of effects which manifest and act in their place" (7). What emerges is simply the expression of material relations. This is less an analysis of cause and effect

than it is one of active, emergent relations. “Cause” is the contingent material interplay of discrete elements. Brian Massumi describes this activity as “being mutually enveloped in a more encompassing event of change-taking-place” where the surface “expresses their differential in the dynamic form of its own extra-being” (21). In the deleted and extended scenes from *FWwM* included in the release of *The Missing Pieces* (2014), we are given this scene in a traditional, linear structure. While interesting, the result is rather static, as each shot is isolated from the others. What is missing is the activity of the various shots that occurs as a result of the layering of various shots. Superimposition in the final cut of the film does not merely juxtapose or obscure a series of images, it lets them go. The discrete elements link up, blur, or diverge, generating the emergence of a dynamic network structure. It is not a clear or coherent picture that marks the image, but the activity that in turn envelops the multiple bodies, images, and elements. What Lynch captures in *FWwM* is the composition of a two-dimensional surface that reveals the contingent material process that conditions it. In short, the image is the activity.

5.

In his book on Francis Bacon, Deleuze writes of the ways in which art frees itself from any pre-determined organization and in turn marks “the intrusion of another world into the visual world of figuration” (82). Random marks, rubbed paint, and blurred faces are the a-signifying traits of the painter, drawing to the surface sensation and chaos rather than structure or representation. The chaos Deleuze refers to in these breaks is not arbitrary. Organization is introduced in the form of the diagram which guides the trajectory of material points from which a figure emerges. The diagram, therefore, draws

chaos toward a notion of the cosmic, the random collision of elements (paint, line) is rather the interaction of discrete material points in relation to each other. Cinematically, Lynch has introduced both chaos and the diagram into his work through superimposition, the dissolve, and the extreme close-up to the end that the image emerges as a result of a circuit or network of activity from which the image emerges, and composes itself.

The study of complex, dynamic systems provides a concrete means of understanding emergence within and against a field of activity. In dynamic systems theory, a phase space represents all of the possible states of a system. Prior to the introduction of an attractor, or element that draws the system beyond a certain threshold, the system exists in all possible states at once.[8] It is a space of infinite potential, the totality of a system's virtual coordinates. For Deleuze and Guattari (1994), the virtual is void, chaos, "containing all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms, which spring up only to disappear immediately" (118). Rather than a register of pure potentiality, it is better realized as a zone of radical contingency, where spatial and temporal dimensions are interwoven and unmediated. As such, the virtual constitutes a plane of immanence that "envelops infinite movements that pass back and forth through it" (36). In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari describe the plane of immanence as sectioning off chaos, it is now a virtuality that consists. This consistency is "real" to the end that it contains the determinate coordinates of an emergent event without it being actual(ized). What consists, then, is the phase space, or the totality of states of affairs from which a body emerges. Theories of complex living systems provide a similar reading of emergence when at certain thresholds a system reaches a critical point in

[8] There is a similarity between phase space and the principle of superposition which could serve to bridge the gap between our reading of Lynch's films and that presented by Nochimson.

which a higher-order structures are observed. In this way, the plane of consistency as phase space represents a material and temporal totality, in other words a cosmos.

Shifting the understanding from the cosmic to a contingent plane of material interactions giving rise to both bodies and concepts is crucial in any interpretation of Lynch's work. It is especially valuable in assessing how his cinema is a means of doing philosophy. As Deleuze and Guattari attest, art, like science and philosophy, is a means of confronting chaos. It does this, primarily, by composing the virtual: "By means of [its] material, the aim of art is to wrest the percept from perceptions of objects and the states of a perceiving subject, to wrest the affect from affections as the transition from one state to another: to extract a bloc of sensations, a pure being of sensations" (167). The function of art, therefore, is a return to the pre-perceptual, noncognitive materiality. It is a means of actively doing philosophy, of charting the emergence of concepts that in turn do not naturalize the chaos of the virtual, but express activity as its very being. Art preserves the emergence of the event as activity, a becoming "real" of the virtual "on the condition that it all opens onto and launches itself on a mad vector" (185). This mad vector is the diagram, the non-figurative, relational arc that guides sensation.

This is precisely how Lynch approaches his filmmaking. Testament to this is perhaps the final scene of *The Return*. Agent Cooper has led Laura Palmer/Carrie Page to Laura's childhood home in Twin Peaks, presumably bringing the narrative to its proper closure. This, of course, has taken place through a winding path of alternate dimensions and wormholes, doppelgangers, six cities, two countries, the atomic bomb test at White Sands, and multiple years/timelines that run parallel and occasionally intersect – again, the guiding question: "Is it future or is it past?" But as they question the current owner of

the house, it becomes apparent that Laura does not, or has she ever, lived in this house (it was previously owned by a "Chalfont" – a name connected with Mrs. Tremond). Stunned, the pair backs away from the house and Cooper asks, "What year is it." A light turns on in the house and the distorted voice of Sarah Palmer can be heard calling out "Laura?" Carrie/Laura screams as the frame cuts to black. The immediate impression is one of anti-climax. The film has failed to resolve itself, and twenty-five years of storytelling has dissolved into typical Lynchian ambiguity. Yet the ambiguity, the creeping-in of a voice from elsewhere - everything rises to the level of the scream as a culmination of distant material points in collision. The stuttering narrative allows this dynamic movement to break through.

Lynch's frames are composed with an affective thrust. In an interview with Chris Rodley, asked about the subject of crying in *Twin Peaks*, Lynch responds: "crying in general. It's powerful if they really are feeling it. It's like a yawn: it transfers over…In this case, it's when something cements this identification, and it's unleashed" (167). Sarah and Laura Palmer are seen screaming and weeping consistently throughout *Twin Peaks* in close-up. Not only does the close-up emphasize the emotion of the scene, it serves to entirely separate the face from its surroundings. The image is cut-off from everything but its activity. Following Deleuze, it abstracts the face from the sensory-motor coordinates that would ordinarily link it to the continuity of the film or the overall structure of the scene. In this way, the close-up does not translate an idea, it expresses instead the singular affective diagram of the micro-movements that compose it. In *Twin Peaks: The Return*, the frame shakes violently as Laura screams and the entire image is destabilized. That which Deleuze recognizes in Bacon's use of the rub is shifted to the

camera-shake, the figure *is* the movement. The effect of superimposition, both figuratively through the motif of the hole in *Eraserhead* and literally in the overlaying of images in *Fire Walk with Me*, is here concentrated in a single shot. Lynch "unleashes" in the close-up the micro-movements that compose not only the image, but life, as it emerges from an over-spilling of the virtual.

Coda: Toward a Deleuzean Biosemiotics

A core theoretical aim of this dissertation has been the development of a Deleuzean biosemiotics. Examples from literature and film have allowed us to track the ways in which life, as an emergent, autopoietic, and therefore semiotic process can be narrativized and represented. The tutor texts also illustrate that such notions of active, emergent life have been a concern of authors and artists well before we had a theoretical or scientific vocabulary to support these ideas. If there is any value to the literary and cinematic examples provided, it is not in proving that a theory of biosemiotics is "real," but that it is productive. As I have shown, a biosemiotic approach provides an effective means of tracing emergent processes of life and sense-making from the individual level outward. By way of a conclusion, I would like to engage Deleuze one last time, focusing on two sections of *A Thousand Plateaus* that echo his notion of dual causality referenced in the introduction and, in my estimation, lead to securing a theoretical foundation for a biosemiotic approach that highlights its universality. Biosemiotics bridges science, theory, and the arts. A Deleuzean biosemiotics coheres and mobilizes these concerns and, in my estimation, remains the only approach that is consistently biophysically and aesthetically productive from the point of view of individual emergence. Deleuze, I believe, would be receptive to such a project. For Deleuze, "subject" and "process" are essentially interchangeable terms, and while he would unquestionably insist that we take this notion of process beyond "life," there is a clear connection between life and mind throughout his work. There is still much work to be done, but if we continue to focus on this element of his work, a biosemiotic approach to literature and the arts becomes not

only productive but practical, without sacrificing Deleuze's commitment to recognizing self-organization at work in both living and non-living things.

The leading question of the third chapter of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* reads, "Who does the earth think it is?" The chapter follows a lecture by the fictional Professor Challenger, created by Arthur Conan Doyle, detailing the earth as a dynamic system, fundamentally unformed and unstable, but ultimately self-organizing. For Deleuze and Guattari, order and form emerge by way of a process of stratification, which organizes molecular activity into molar aggregates. This is a universal process that acts upon organic and inorganic matter alike, hence the reference to the earth as a cognitive system. Nevertheless, the philosophers do go out of their way to distinguish organic and inorganic emergence. They write: "there is no vital matter specific to the organic stratum, matter is the same on all strata. But the organic stratum does have a specific unity of composition, a single abstract Animal, a single machine embedded in the stratum, and presents everywhere the same molecular materials, the same elements or anatomical components of organs, the same formal connections" (45-6). In short, while Deleuze and Guattari do not admit a difference in substance, they do recognize a distinction in form in terms of specific "[unities] of composition" relative to emergent systems. This modal distinction between form and substance reveals a double articulation at work, the first at the level of content (molecular interaction), the second at the level of expression (emergent unity). This is the key insight, from a biosemiotic perspective. Just as in the early Deleuze, sense envelopes subatomic elements into a cognitive network, expression likewise amplifies molecular activity and determines the contact an organism maintains with its exterior world.

Form relates to the network of activity that conditions the ways in which a system makes and maintains contact with an exterior milieu. In other words, self-organizing processes are at once formal and topological. Expression envelopes local, microphysical operations and in effect determines the organism's world. Despite the formal designation of an interior and an exterior (a "self" and a "world") and an emergent relation between the two, Deleuze and Guattari remind us that these qualities are wholly interior to the emergent system. Self and world are co-emergent properties of the same system. Expression, as a boundary condition, functions like a membrane in autopoietic theory. They write, "the limit between [interior and exterior] is the membrane that regulates the exchanges and transformation in organization…and that defines all of the stratum's formal relations or traits" (1987, 50). Interior and exterior, self and world, are simply the two poles of a single process.

Such a multidimensional, self-organizing process comprises what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the "warp and woof of content and expression" (86). Because expression serves as a membrane, it coheres and regulates molecular activity (content). It is important to note that expression is not a representation, rather it is just one register of a single process. Deleuze and Guattari write: "An assemblage of enunciation does not speak 'of' things; it speaks *on the same level as* states of things and states of content" (emphasis original, 87). Taking content and expression to "speak" on the same level leads directly to a semiotic understanding of emergent life. Thus "perceptions and actions in an associated milieu, even those on the molecular level, construct or produce *territorial* signs (indexes). This is especially true of an animal world, which is constituted, marked off by signs that divide it into zones" (54-55). The organism, as emergent assemblage,

territorializes (marks domains of significance) in its world. If expression is considered as continual modification of a system of interactions with an external milieu, it is fundamentally interwoven with a notion of "effective action" or the cognitive activity inherent to living systems. From the perspective of biological systems theory, cognitive activity produces a surplus of signification, an *Umwelt*, or world of meaningful interactions for the system.

Taking "representation" to be nothing more than a congruent register of embodied action, the issue becomes not so much whether a given work of art is "representative" or "non-representative." In fact, I would contend that a biosemiotic approach to art is indifferent to such a distinction. Rather, art (this includes literature, film, and the spatial arts), is fundamentally realist. Despite her experimentation, Virginia Woolf maintains a commitment to character a plot that is all but absent in the later work of Samuel Beckett, yet both "represent" in their fiction processes of embodied subjective emergence that track with the activity of living systems. The autopoietic notion of openness from closure grounds an understanding of life as inherently creative (and I would without hesitation claim it to be aesthetic, as well). The emphasis on embodied processes allows us to move away from strict binary distinctions of form and content, or between representative and non-representative art, and focus squarely on life and meaning as two sides of an active, collective assemblage of expression.

Deleuze and Guattari insist that expression is molecular and molar. It "no longer concerns a single aggregate or subject" (59). What is represented in expression is the emergence of an active multiplicity. Relying on a series of organic, biophysical examples to secure an understanding of this on the organic stratum, they write: "Expression

involves nucleotides and nucleic acids as well as molecules that, in their substance and form, are entirely independent not only of molecules of content but of any directed action in the exterior milieu" (59). Expression is not determined by a specific set or combination of molecules. Likewise, an exterior milieu is not established by a predetermined relation to an environment. Both individual and world are enacted by the self-organizing, self-maintaining activity of discrete elements as they form a network of recursive interactions. Organic form is not a structure, which would imply a predetermined form or activity acting on the individual from outside, but a "structuration." The emergence of an individual form or "self" is also the emergence of an associated milieu or world with which the organism interacts. In this way, expression qua organic emergence is both molecular (on the local, compositional level) and molar (on the global, subjective level).

The construction of an associated milieu contingent upon the activity of molecular interaction accords with what Jesper Hoffmeyer (2014) recognizes as the "semiotic scaffolding" of emergent life. He writes: "since genes cannot influence anything in this world except through cellular activity it follows that cells must somehow 'comprehend', 'interpret' or 'understand' these 'instructions', and this effectively brings us from the 'secure' world of traditional efficient causality into the much more open world of semiotic causality" (160) which is simply another way to explain autopoietic sense-making as the global expression of a localized network of interactions. Just as Deleuze and Guattari recognize expression as a function that maintains the consistent, productive relation between system and environment, Hoffmeyer explains that in higher-order multicellular life, the "construction of sophisticated senso-motoric systems coupled to a corresponding finely-tuned regulation of a *milieu interieur* [could] safeguard the stability

necessary for reliable performance" (167-68). In basic systems the stability of the network (interior milieu) maintains the stability of its interactions with an outside, or external environment. As a system becomes more complex, so does its repertoire of interactions with its environment. While the relation between individual and environment is proportional in complexity, a basic operational logic tracks across all living systems.

In higher-order systems, self-maintenance is guided by perception. Recall that for Deleuze and Guattari, perception and activity are given as equivalent. Hoffmeyer and Stjernfelt (2015), on the contrary, remind us that "perception presupposes semiosis but semiosis does not presuppose perception" (10). They write: "Perception, understood as the process of creating internal models of events or things in the surroundings, is a high-level activity based on the integration of hundreds, thousands, or in some cases, even millions of semiotic interactions in the body and between the body and its environment and facilitates, in higher organisms, comprehensive mental maps of relevant aspects of organism surroundings" (9). In no way does this position undermine the project of a Deleuzean biosemiotics. In fact, the apparent equivalence between perception and action in the Deleuzoguattarian formulation is incorporated into a discussion of the ways animal life territorialize (in other word, make sense) of environmental conditions. The connection between semiosis and perception, that latter in this instance a higher-order function related to and conditioned by the former, parallels the distinction between cognition and mind in autopoietic theory, as "mind" is an emergent property of complex, cognitive systems.

The related notions of perception and mind presuppose more fundamental semiotic or cognitive properties. To use Hoffmeyer's language, these lower-level (but no

less essential) processes not only ground interpretation, but are themselves interpretive as contingent molecular interactions are what in turn enable the organism to engage with and make sense of a world. Drawing a connection between interpretation and sense-making in this way allows us to acknowledge "representation" as an embodied, creative process. A theory of biosemiotics, interwoven with Deleuzean philosophy, is at once scientific and aesthetic. In her 1973 novel *Água Viva*, Clarice Lispector writes: "I want to be 'bio'…I write with the flow of words" (61). Lispector's novels narrativize the co-emergence of life and mind as the author follows the flow of words in order to articulate a notion of embodiment from which her words emanate. Like Beckett, Lispector's novels "represent" emergence and in this way they are fundamentally realist. If there is to be any insight gained from the biosemiotic approach put forward here, is it not that art and life are equivalent. A notion of life grounded on notions of emergence, cognition, and meaning, however, is inherently creative. Literature and film serve to track individual emergence and sense-making. A Deleuzean biosemiotics allows us to weave these processes at all registers of life.

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