Deleuze, Monet, and Being Repetitive

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> There are pictures that take refuge in the frame, pictures that burst it open and pictures that don't care about it.
>
> —HANS-JOST FREY

> The other is related only to the other: the other repeats.
>
> —MAURICE BLANCHOT

Perhaps to countervail the complexity of what is to unfold, Gilles Deleuze begins *Difference and Repetition* with a simple statement: "Repetition is not generality" (1). In view of the simplicity of the sentence and without the benefit of forthcoming arguments, readers are likely to infer that because repetition is not generality, it most probably has to do with something specific or unique, something that resists universalization as well as abstraction. This hermeneutical tactic, by which the meaning of a statement is decoded momentarily *ex negativo*, yields a reading of the sentence that seems to be confirmed by the passage that ends the first page of *Difference and Repetition*:

> [R]epetition is a necessary and justified conduct only in relation to that which cannot be replaced. Repetition as a conduct and as a point of view concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities. . . . [Repetitions] do not add a second time and a third time to the first, but carry the first time to the "nth" power . . . it is not the Federation Day which commemorates or represents the fall of the Bastille, but the fall of the Bastille which celebrates and repeats in

> advance all the Federation Days, or Monet's first water lily which repeats all the others. Generality, as generality of the particular, thus stands opposed to repetition as universality of the singular. (Ibid.)[1]

Why should repetition entail singularity? How can repetition, both as a conduct and as a point of view, not presuppose a plurality on the basis of multiple occurrences of the same? When I blink my eyes twice, don't I repeat blinking my eyes? When I observe a man knocking on my neighbor's door three times on end, don't I see him repeat the act of knocking on a door three times? In both instances, one sees a particular conduct being reenacted, one time after the other. The result is that the first occasion of the act, a singular occurrence, as it were, is immediately stretched by its second occasion, by another appearance as a reenactment of a prior instance. Because one act can be performed (or can be seen to be performed) more than once, isn't this "more than once" evidence that the act in question can be viewed as a repetition of the same event? Why, then, does Deleuze invite us to think about repetition as the occurrence of singularity? If it makes sense to speak of repeated or repeatable events, how does one comprehend Deleuze's admonition that repetition be understood as "universality of the singular"?

In this essay, using these questions as a lead, I track some of the moves that Deleuze must have made before turning "repetition" into a proper concept, an operative "invention" that guides his earth mapping (*geo-metry*) of being, a neo-Baroque counterdiscourse capable of reconfiguring philosophies of identity as second-order discourses predicated on dissimulation and retroconstitution. By way of this inventive retracing, I intend to do two things: first, to explicate Deleuze's generalized view of "pure difference" through what might be called difference's "expressive self-abandonment," and second, to demonstrate how and to what extent the self-annulling activity of difference as "expression-in-withdrawal" justifies the link he establishes between "repetition" and "what cannot be replaced." In keeping with my narrowly defined focus, I shall limit my analysis to themes that Deleuze introduces at the opening of *Difference and Repetition.* To guide my inquiry, I select as my starting point two sentences from the passage cited earlier:

1. "[Repetitions] do not add a second time and a third time to the first, but carry the first time to the 'nth' power."
2. "Monet's first water lily . . . repeats all the others."

The first sentence directs me to a discussion on Deleuze's reflection on the concept of origin, an immanence-based critique of the "originality" of origin itself that anchors Deleuze's Nietzschean affirmation of the absolute becomingness of events by deconstructing the punctual purity of origin's putative firstness. The statement regarding Monet's water lilies series will provide me a reference by which to show why a certain *untimeliness*, caused by nonreplaceable and nonoriginary repetition, haunts the very passage of presence: an internal vibration *of* the present undermines the event's proper presence as such. By cross-referencing these ideas and relating them to well-known themes within what is loosely called "poststructuralism," I hope to render in slow motion Deleuze's daunting "mobility of thought" and to shed some light on one important aspect of a truly critical thinking that, by alloying ideas as different from each other as Levant is from Prussia into its own signature, rightly justifies Foucault's vatic appellation of our century as "Deleuzian."

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THREE

> Yet we'd have to wait until there were more than two to begin.
>
> —JACQUES DERRIDA

> Only in the denial is there a beginning.
>
> —W. J. SCHELLING

The bell tolls. No sooner does the knell start to peter out than the bell tolls again. While the second strike is still chiming, the bell tolls one more time. And so on. The same pattern occurs when, for example, I shop for tomatoes: I reach for one, then another, and another. One, two, three. Three tolls, three selections of tomatoes, each series beginning with the count of "one." Just as there is a first strike that breaks the silence and a first choice of a tomato that begins to fill the empty basket, one can justifiably speak of an event's "first time," its inaugural moment, by virtue of which the clocking of time, the counting of vegetables, and the like can begin. This first event will have to be regarded as the onset of an unfolding series of events: a barely recognizable spark that creates the towering inferno, the first ominous raindrop that presages the opening of the sky. It is the initial of all initials, the first comer to the gathering.

How does one locate the first time temporally? Where does this first time begin and where does it end? When one speaks of the first time, one is speaking of more than simple becoming; for to speak of the first time as the moment of initiation is not only to speak of the mere passing of events but, more importantly, to discriminate among those events such that one can refer to some as being earlier than others. It is, *in nuce*, to speak of a decision making that disrupts the flux of time as the universal container of being, or to speak of the discovery of a hidden rhythm as the timing of things—a turning and re-turning of happenings that punctuate a temporal continuum and mark it into intervals. To speak of the "first time," therefore, implies not only the imagination of time travel but also the capacity of distinguishing among events that would otherwise pass undifferentiated in a continuous flow. Essentially, it is to speak of the possibility of chronology, a formal framing that makes possible the sequential placement of what are indifferent to any framing in their unfettered mode of being-there. The identification of the first time is thus the birth of objective ordering, the moment when everyday happenings become classifiable on the basis of "before" and "after" in relation to one another. This is the moment of our becoming "historical," but more immediately and practically, this is also the moment of numbering, the moment when things—be they tomatoes, bags of dog food, or dollar bills—can be enumerated by being subjected to the universal signifiers of quantification, 1, 2, 3 . . . , irrespective of their varying and variable qualities. And, from that moment on, we can begin counting things by uttering (or thinking) "one," "two," "three," . . .

To count is human. To count is to organize multiplicity; it is to create order on the surface of things, to connect as well as to separate phenomena, to establish relationships as well as to make distinctions among objects within the visible plenitude. The act of counting may well be the cardinal principle (*archē*) in which is seen the work of reason (*logos*) turning disorder (*chaos, physis*) into order (*kosmoi*). Through the act of counting, we organize things that come under reason's purview, and through setting things apart either formally, by assigning symbols to them, or informally, by simply bending our fingers while saying "one," "two," "three," we play and replay the appropriative act of counting.

Behind the obvious utility of this most practical of human activities, however, lingers the skeptic's question, "How does the act of counting begin?" If we agree that numerical ordering articulates the latent principle of universal measurement by which a multiplicity is organized, how

does one initiate this act of serial organization? To ask a concrete question, when I put several tomatoes one by one into a basket held by a blind person while informing him of my actions by uttering "one," "two," "three," what is it that sets my speech act of counting in motion and determines the kind of effect my utterances have on my sightless partner? On what basis do I link a particular tomato with the uttering of "one," thus designating it "the first" among the many and enabling me to apply "the second," "the third," and the like to the rest? These seemingly trivial questions tie Deleuze's statement with which I began to his critique of "origin," a critique prerequisite to the mutual articulation between singularity and repetition.

"Origin" signifies a beginning point, a first cause. To designate the sounding of a bell at a particular moment as its "first," to use the earlier example, implies an identifiable break in the flow of one's perceptual experience, a certain rupture in one's consciousness that separates a present sound from prior silence and subsequent hubbub in the environment. At the same time, however, one should not overlook the plain fact that we have all heard a bell ringing before. In fact, we must have known what it sounds like quite well. Were this not the case, how could we recognize it as the sound of a bell rather than some random noise? The first toll and all other so-called first instances are, therefore, not really first, for our recognition of their "firstness" is the result of our prior knowledge of precedents—what Peirce calls the "ampliative inference"—on the basis of which judgment regarding the identity of repeated events (indeed, any judgment of identity at all) anticipates its own grounding (32). In principle and in fact, then, the firstness of a particular event, its alleged position as the beginning of a series of like events, cannot be what it is without even earlier beginnings or firstnesses, ancestors whose history or memories, momentarily held at bay, give that "first event" an anterior witness, a future-perfect reference as its condition of possibility.

Because the firstness of the present depends on that of the past, firstness as new beginning cannot be but an invention. Yet, as just indicated, the invention of a "first time" cannot come to pass without the help of its own shadowy ancestors, its own anterior appearance that vouchsafes to it its standing as a member of the group of which it is said to be first. What emerges here is an apparent paradox of the first time, a conceptual peculiarity that undermines the claim to primacy of any first instance that purports to be original. Ordinarily, what comes first is thought to be nothing if not original, and what is original is always regarded as first. Because

firstness and originality imply one another, the "first time" properly characterizes origin, and "originality" denotes the distinguishing feature of what appears first. Can this relationship of mutual implication be maintained without contradiction? If originality always qualifies firstness, and vice versa, is it ever possible to establish an order of priority with regard to recurrent events, one of which necessarily precedes others and thus appears as the first time, the originary moment, of the series?

The answer is not what one would expect. The first time cannot claim an unconditional status of being original because if it were the only first time, if it were to remain the first time all the time, it would not be the origin of anything at all. For the first time to be the first time, to be prior to all other moments, there must be a second time, a latecomer. (Incidentally, one should not forget to ask: If the first were *truly original*, how could it be recognized?) From this moment on, the first time is doubled, for it must necessarily keep this second time close to itself to exist; in fact, it can only exist in an unalterable and unadulterated proximity to a second time that reflects to it its firstness. Ironically enough, this second time now takes on a priority in the very constitution of the first time because it is this second time that makes the first time the first, and not the other way around. A remarkable consequence follows: because the first time depends essentially on its second time to appear as the origin, the first time, for all its claim to chronological priority or nonderivativeness, turns out to be *not* the first time but, rather, the third time; for it now exists in essential relation to both the second time and the supposedly pure first time that anchors the whole temporal sequence.

This tertiary constitution of the first time reveals that what is usually taken to be the origin of a sequence is in fact the effect of a proleptic cum analeptic fabulation. Signifying a beginning that has already begun, the firstness of the first time, that is, the apparent simplicity of origination of the first times, registers not the outset of a clean linear determination, but rather, the denouement of an obviated play of delay and anticipation, a play that stages an imaginary rupture as the phenomenon of beginning by repressing its own *fabulous* formation. It is this trackless "initial forgetting," captured by Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* and articulated more generally in Nietzsche's tropography of becoming, that instills a troubling murmur in the regular rhythm of numbering and, in doing so, actively disrupts the fast order that any act of counting must assume.

Reappearing as the trace of the third time, the first time never has its own proper place, for it does not and cannot take place when it is

thought to take place; instead, it is constituted (and hence can only be recognized) as such *après coup*. This retroactive constitution ratifies the claim that any instance claiming to be the first, despite its nominal entitlement, can never be an absolute, unattached singular; rather, it insists as an effect and persists as its own trace in a series of the many—its topos stretches out through its own irrevocable othering as repetition, and its economy (*aikos-nomia*) ranges beyond its own home site. The first instance, if it were ever possible to locate it, can never be found as a *factum brutum* but only as always already historicized.

Retroactively constituted—that is, appearing as original provided that what constitutes it happens later—origin as such is essentially delayed: a delayed origin, plagued from start to finish by the specter of secondarity. Similarly, because the first time is in truth the progeny of the third time and can distinguish itself only to the extent that it does not make any radical break with its ancestral authorization, the act of counting cannot be but a belated act, and the voicing of "one," for the same reason, is essentially an echo of a silent "three." To begin the act of counting, to utter "one," is to repeat in that very verbalization a prior sounding of "one," "two," "three"; it is to reenact the opening scene of an untold history of numbering, to invoke, again and yet for the first time, the beginning episodes of a withdrawn or muted play that unfolds, imperceptibly and in advance of itself, the circulation of two plus one. Here Deleuze joins Derrida in Nietzsche's premises:

> Death is at the dawn because everything has begun with repetition. Once the center or the origin have begun by repeating themselves, by redoubling themselves, the double did not only add itself to the simple. It divided it and supplemented it. There was immediately a double origin plus its repetition. Three is the first number of repetition. (Derrida 1976, 299)

In the beginning was three. Before "one" can arrive, there must be this odd number "three," a number of asymmetry and hence of dynamism. Would repetition mean anything if there were not a surfeit of the same to fund its return? Would one continue to partake of the ritual of exchange, may I ask, if exchange were always *even*? Inasmuch as "one" characterizes identity, and "two" marks the emergence of difference, "three" signifies the anamnestic beginning of becoming, of the possibility that we can say "one" now and in the future, again, again, and again. It is

this number, three, that grounds the act of counting by generating what *will have already begun* at the beginning, and it is the (un)voicing of "three" that, by having repeated itself in the first instance, fills the breath before speech and compresses the larynx to produce the phoneme. A certain patience, an exculpable miscalculation, and, one might say, a certain compromise of one's freedom is thus required before one begins the act of counting. One cannot begin all by oneself, and one does not really begin with "one." One must wait for the propitious moment in order to begin; in fact, as Derrida states, "We'd have to wait until there were more than two to begin." There must be more than two; there has always and already been three, a magic number that affords any first instance the possibility of infinite recurrence by carrying itself to the nth power.

In the beginning is another beginning; for every beginning, whenever it takes place, can only be the result of a quest for beginning and hence can only be a descendant of what has already begun. Herein lies the Kleinian/Mobian paradox of beginning as "eternal past"—an "always already" that, being exoteric to both memory and anticipation, breaks the indifference of One, the primordial stasis, thereby constituting the singular instant of the present as the durable foundation of history. "There would never be the *phenomenalization* of time itself," as Slavoj Zizek writes,

> without reference to a past which was never present—that is to say, temporality, in its original dimension, is not a single line of events that runs from the past through the present to the future, but involves the tension of relationship to an act which, precisely in so far as it was never present, in its very withdrawal, is always here as the (past) foundation of the present. (1996, 22)

The true beginning is not and cannot be at the beginning. And what stands at the beginning is not and cannot be present; for to begin is to have begun, and to have begun is to have actively forgotten the beginning's past, a past that, though forgotten, nonetheless never ceases to haunt the present—a present past as much as a past present that becomes the future *other*wise. When the past is taken into account, when the past is recognized as *effective*, all one can say is that every beginning is a *beginning over*, which is to say that no beginning, as such, ever existed. In the beginning was *was*. Beginning expresses itself, but only in the past tense. Beginning always withdraws itself into another beginning. In fact, it must withdraw itself if it wishes to express itself. Seen in this light, beginning is

always and already doubled: a beginning *breaching* and *broaching* at the same time from the very beginning. One must begin, but one can begin only *in the middle*, before one or after three.

THE TIME OF PAINTING

> Painting brings its lighting with it wherever it goes.
>
> —LEONARDO DA VINCI

It is well known that Monet often lined up "as many as five or six" easels in his garden as he tried to commit to canvas what only "the innocence of the eye" could see (quoted in Smith 99). The day is good, the flora looks glorious, and the scenery, as always on a good day, fills the eye. A perfect day for painting. Carpe diem. Monet is ready; he is always ready. But why does he need so many canvases? Nothing in the garden seems capable of causing any damage to the piece(s) he is working on. What is in the scene that calls for this kind of multiple copying? Monet seems in a hurry, spending "only a few minutes" at each canvas, as his friend Maupassant reported (Smith 26). Why? What is the urgency that causes him to run from one canvas to another, applying paint to each in speedy touches of his brush? A curious scene indeed. If it is any indication of his method of capturing "primitive sensations," what does this method say about Monet, about "having an impression"? Specifically, what does it tell us about "impressionism," about Deleuze's statement that Monet's first water lily "repeats all the others," that is, about the relation between representation and singularity?

In retrospect, the twofold message behind *Impression: Sunrise* (1872), exhibited as part of a show by the group Societé Anonyme des Artistes-Peintres in April 1874, is clear. Two texts, slightly phased, are presented in the painting. On the one hand, the painting could be read as a gesture of defiance against the classicism-based hegemony affirmed annually by the Salon competition. On the other hand, and more significantly, the painting also posts a manifesto of a new photologic that, enfolded in the "glance" as an aesthetic stance, legitimated casual looking as a serious profession, the profession of the flaneur. The flaneur is bent on capturing the Other through trackless ambulation and diversionary voyeurism, the Other to which "modern" art ought to bear witness being the quotidi-

an world (and the experience of constant movements in it), and the proper method of capturing it being the flickering brush stroke. What the group and, in particular, Monet introduced to the public in 1874 was nothing short of a moral vision that affirmed the self-sufficiency of subjective perception in its modern mode: a new cosmopolitan consciousness of which the rejection of what Paul Cézanne later referred to as "retinal paintings"—be they by Nicolas Poussin or by a certain Adolphe-William Bouguereau—was but a local symptom.

In *Impression: Sunrise*, the meaning and method of Impressionism are already clear. For Monet, to paint is to paint *according to necessity*. This means, first and foremost, submitting to the summons of the *manifest*, the absolute visible, the singular present one cannot not see. To paint, in other words, is to capture the *present* in the present, to re-present the present as present. For Monet, then, painting is essentially *photo-graphic* (writing with light); it remains from start to finish a matter of, to use Maupassant's word again, "printing"—making a copy of the other as color, as light. "A painter," as Jean-Luc Nancy remarks, "does not paint things in light, but the light of things, their luminous presence" (1995, 351).

In attempting to paint the light of things, however, the painter immediately encounters the second necessity of the act of painting: the struggle against time. This necessity is born the moment "the fixed, animally ecstatic eye" is greeted by what *passes* in front of it, and it is most acutely felt when the eye is trained on the light of things, when, that is, "subjective" vision confronts what seems to escape vision's appropriation, namely, the freedom, the *auto-nomos*, of time as it shows itself as the light of things. Light comes from the sun, the ultimate source of illumination, whose rays give things their luminous presence. The sun rises, it shines, and it shines in its coming. The coming of the sun brings things into broad daylight, giving them their proper place in light, defining their contours, their identities. No sooner does the sun rise, however, than it begins an arc that eventually leads downward. In fact, the sun's coming is at the same time its departing, and its rising is the same as its setting—depending on where one stands. As the sun departs, shadows elongate. As shadows grow, darkness descends; as darkness devours the field of vision, things withdraw into invisibility. The ultimate source of things' appearance, therefore, is also the ultimate source of their disappearance in that the periodic withdrawal of the sun's radiance means the regular loss of the illumination of things.

The sun's coming and going—rather, its coming by going and its going as immanent return—thus injects time into the act of painting. Inasmuch as the sun shines on everything under itself, time times everything passing through its flow. This flow of time times not only things of light but also the light of things. The sun rises and the sun sets; time passes; light changes. As a result, to paint things in their luminous presence becomes a struggle against time, a struggle against light-sensitive timing as the condition of things' time-sensitive illumination. As Paul Virilio says, any *take* (mental or instrumental) is simultaneously and inescapably a *time take*, a conquering of things' exposure against the limited *depth of time* (91). By *taking in* light, by *taking in* the luminosity of things in light, the painter—knowingly or not—graphs time. The painter is as much a photographer as a chrono-grapher.

"Painting brings its lighting with it wherever it goes." By the same token, light carries the painter with it wherever it illuminates things as the measure of time. The painter follows the light, as a child follows the mother. Light is thus captured by the paint; it is *within* the paint. However, there can be no "within it" without the experience of loss, just as there can be no "within the self" without the departure or absence of loved ones.[2] This is so without exception. Because the act of painting collapses time and light into one, the painter, as a writer of light, is characteristically nostalgic to the same degree that painting, being photo-graphic, is always after the light. Consequently, not only must painting be beholden to time's absolute passing, it must also surrender itself to the edict of optical othering, turning itself—immediately and imperceptibly—into an Icarian dream of parousia, a fatal pursuit of the runaway sun as the only response to a heliocentric imperative.

Because the present awaits light to be visible, the painter can never be punctual; his or her proper moment belongs solely to the past, perpetually timed, as it were, by what has passed absolutely. A belated chronographer, the painter sees the present but can record only the past. For this reason, painting, being photo-graphic, can never be more than recollection; it is always about a scene once seen. Painting, being photo-graphic, and the painter, as writer of light, both come to pass only in the past tense. To paint is to attempt to seize, against all odds, the passing of light, to overcome the gap separating the hand and the eye. The image of Monet dashing from canvas to canvas in the garden in Giverny is tragicomic, but it is inevitable. Painting's truth dictates that Monet's acts be repeated.

PAINTING THE SERIES: *SINGULI, SERERE*

Each time, this, this drawing, this stroke, this splash, this color. Each time unique, irrepeatable, irreplaceable: what the signs of discourse cannot be.

—JEAN-LUC NANCY

Nancy describes the painter as "the stealer of time, of each instant of time, of his present . . . of the present given to him each day, the present of the present day" and asks: "How can one steal what is given? It's a painter's secret" (1995, 344). But what is the painter's secret? Where does the secret lie? One steals what one knows or believes is already there: the present. And one steals what one lacks but wishes to have: the present. To say that the painter steals time is to say that he or she seeks to appropriate it by making multiple copies of the present, and to say that the painter steals the present is to recognize that the multiple copies he or she makes of the present merely recollect the light that has already passed. The painter's secret, if there is any, is precisely his or her inability to stop the passing of time as light and of light as time:

> With discretion, the painting would say: painting is already past, with the passing of time. . . . But to say: painting has passed by, there where you're looking, and there nothing left to see, nothing but this passage, this passing, mobile-immobile, coming and going, barely existence, birth . . . and so perfectly real ("there is a point of perfection . . . "). You see, you'd have to know how to do nothing but realize this. (Ibid., 362)

Herein lies the secret anguish accompanying the painter as his or her eye and hand track the movement of photo-chrono-logical ousia. Now perhaps we understand better Monet's hurry in the garden, the heroic effort behind his "dissolution of the evenly colored surface into spots and dabs of color, the decomposition of local colors into *valeurs* . . . the play of reflected light and illuminated shadows, the quivering, trembling dots and the hasty, loose and abrupt strokes of the brush, the whole improvised technique with its rapid and meshing sketching" (Hauser 169).

Although one cannot re-present the present without essential loss, one must nevertheless paint things in their luminous presence. Two mutually annulling theses thus characterize the anguishing fate of painting as photo-chrono-graphy: one cannot, and yet one must. The "must"

signifies an imperative to paint things in their luminous presence, and in response, the painter freezes a present, *graphing* a moment into eternity. On the other hand, there is a "cannot," a preordained message to the painter that foretells the failure of his action. This predestinal sending defines the act of painting as one of martyrdom, for all the painter can do is bear witness to things' passing luminosity without offering any real proof, testifying through passion rather than reason to an instance of light—each time, as a "this" that is always becoming "that." "Each time, this, this drawing, this stroke, this splash, this color. Each time unique, irrepeatable, irreplaceable" (Nancy 1995, 345). Each time, painting's telos is eclipsed; each time, its congenital nonsuccess is borne out, a fatality confirmed by the absolute singularity of a mummified "this," an entombed "past present" beyond knowledge and beyond mimicry. Each stroke, each color treads each time on the tail of a fleeting instance of light, a fleeing thisness that denies the possibility of generation and generality, of accumulation and growth.

As a photo-grapher, Monet began by printing a "this": the luminous presence of things, "each time singularly" (ibid., 346). Each time, this stroke, this color, this splash, again and again. "Colors, once and for all . . . Gone with the sun." Bear in mind, though, that "color is always the color of 'each time': each time, in each place, *local* color, literally" (ibid., 352). This green is not that green, although the two may look alike. This yellow is not that yellow, this blue, this pink, this ocher not that blue, that pink, that ocher, each being the monument to a unique, instantaneous stroke, one after another. Monet tried to fix on canvas the luminous surface of things, for this surface comes closest to his ideal of *instantaneity*; that is, this surface is coextensive with the painter's photographic attention, marking the singular other of which painting must take care, if only because this surface, the luminous face of things one cannot not see, is, as Nancy writes, "what constitutes the *discretion* of painting . . . in the mathematical sense of the word: the discontinuity of stroke-by-stroke" (ibid., 345). *Discrete, discretion, discretus*; separated, this set against that, as if in crisis (*krisis*: decision; *krinein*: to separate, to decide), almost catastrophic. Each stroke is unique, absolutely different, heterogeneous, and yet each stroke repeats itself by following the one preceding it, thus forming a sequence, a series, a *discourse. Discourse, discours, discursus, discurrere, discurrere*: running in different directions or running back and forth. A good painter must run; he or she must always be alert and swift, all the while

observing the changing light of things. Monet was a master photo-grapher. In exercising his discretion, he was at the same time *at* the discretion of an *other* urgency. He ran; he surrendered himself to running after the sun—not only in the garden but also on canvas—for time is running out.

One should thus restore painting to a discrete act, an *in*-directed act that places on painters the burden of controlling the frisson of pitting themselves against the transient experience of seeing. This stroke, this stroke again; one stroke after another, one canvas after another, one series after another. To paint is to paint again; in other words, to paint the reality of painting in and through painting. A painter's task is to produce a series of discrete presences, a continuum of discrete thisnesses as testimony to the luminous presence of things. Painting is as much a discourse on time as it is a discourse on thisness. Painting is a discourse on time because, whatever else it may be, it is always a discourse on thisness.

One could also speak of a growth of discrete colors into a painting, of their being thrown into space as patches of color on canvas. As color patches fill the coarse cloth, pigments start to blend. As a result, the painted scene/seen gradually transforms itself until it settles into a picture, a figured flatness, that records the volume of passing impressions. The sun rises; amber meets lilies in the pond. A good day for painting. This sunrise, this scene, this painting, again and again, quickly forming a series, a sequence of discrete thisnesses that bear witness to the luminous presence of sunlit things.

Singuli, one by one. *Serere*, one plus one. Water lilies then and there; water lilies again here and now. Haystacks, this one plus that one. Morning and afternoon; summer and fall. Paintings grow as organic photographs, blooming in time, one after another, into a series. A series tracks the movement from one to many. It is an organized multiplicity, a composite whole whose unity synthesizes the modal expressions of its many parts. As an expressive multiplicity tracing the changing light of things, Monet's series realizes its virtue by spatializing time, namely, by *graphing* what in reality cannot be visualized as such. By keeping a particular present in focus, a series, as time-lapse photography demonstrates, renders time's absolute passing into discrete monuments that in their proper sequence recall transient thisnesses accessible to the painter/photographer as (pre)subjective impressions. This capacity of a series for discretion is what catches the Impressionist's fancy, making the series a method favored by the writer of light.

PAINTING *THIS, THIS* PAINTING: *REPETITIO*

Leave it aligned, nothing more. *Nullus dies sine lines.*

—JEAN-LUC NANCY

Did Monet not align the visible? Did he not approximate—mimetically, or, more to the point, anecdotally—the *singuli* of light?[3] Through his paintings, he invites us to see the visible as he realigned it. "See the visible in this way"; this is the ordinary command of painting (Nancy 1996, 59). Before realizing itself, certainly before settling into a specific image, painting issues an invitation to the visible, luring it by promising to embody the visible in lighted scenes of color and shape. Come and see *this*: this scene, this image, this painting, this scene in this painting.

Bertrand Russell claims that "'this' is the only truly proper name" (Genova 39). He believes that "this" is the only word that, being equally attachable to and detachable from any particular referent irrespective of contextual variations, at once owns and is owned by the other that it indexes; it thus uniquely names that other by merging with it without residue. For him, "this" is the most deictic of all deictics: it indicates what it does as it does it. Is Russell justified? How could "this" be a *truly* proper name if, in naming others, it sinks flatly into them? If the other that "this" names completely absorbs it, how can "this" maintain its own identity, which is the basis of naming, its own naming included? To what is "this" a proper name? To the thing it names or to itself? How could "this" be *proper to* a thing simply because its utterance can be attached to it? Doesn't naming, and indexing too, presuppose distance and thus difference between words and things?

If, as Geoffrey Bennington remarks, the reality designated by deictics exists only in and through their own performance, shouldn't we consider deictics practically impotent signs, impotent because of their parasitic nature, their woeful reliance on an extrasemiotic other? (274–95). After all, how does "this" index anything if, in indexing, it does not at the same time index the fact that it is indexing? Would Russell ever take issue with the fact that indexes do not index themselves? It seems that before "this" can perform its indexing successfully, an act of indexing must have already taken place, a recursive, self-doubling act that no signifier, deictic or not, is able to achieve *on its own.* Indeed, if "this" were truly *proper*, if it belonged essentially to itself, it would not be capable of naming anything; conversely, to the extent that it names (or points to)

something other than itself in the unique way it does, it does not seem to be truly *proper*.[4]

Painting as the becoming-sign of time; "this" as an improper index; obvious differences between painting and indexing notwithstanding, Monet's discursus can be interpreted as an acting out of Russell's belief, a light-sensitive enactment of indexes' peculiar "constitutive imperfection," an imperfection that "this" uniquely exemplifies. Although Russell never dreams of becoming a photographer, Monet philosophizes—photographically—in the garden, painting a "this" with each painting in the series. However, in the same way that one cannot begin to utter "this" felicitously without having already committed to its use in the future, one cannot hope to paint a "this" without acknowledging that the "this" one paints can make itself present only as a "that." In this, there is not much mystery. *This* is here, and *here* is now here. But, however true that was a moment ago, now *this* has become that, and *here* is already there, at the beginning, for "something else was—and now, again, no longer is—here" (Frey 23). "This" and "here" are words with which one can only lie. Painting and writing thus share a similar fate, disappointing and disappointed in equal fashion by aiming at what always flees the scene of presence.[5] One can conclude, for the moment at least, that just as Russell's belief regarding "this" is constitutively problematic, Monet's strokes executed against the glare decline into failure.

Painting as an event (*evenir*: to come out) of failure? Painting as failed event? Painting is failure insofar as it falls short of accomplishing what it intends to and is thus incomplete in some way, insofar as something fails to come out in it. At the same time, the painter sooner or later stops painting: the work is finished, and the painting is complete, unalterable, gallery-ready. For this one ought to grant the painter his or her accomplishment and the painting its completion. In light of these two opposing observations, one must immediately ask about Monet: What is it that, by refusing to come out and hence escaping his discrete acts, nevertheless turns his water lilies series into a success? To phrase it in another way: What is necessarily lost in Monet's painting, and how does this necessary loss structure his serial discretion and so constitute itself as the cause of the photo-graphic fulfillment that the water lilies series is? Above all, how does this wheeling mutation of failure into success and success into failure in the event of painting relate to Deleuze's remark that Monet's "first water lily . . . repeats all the others"?

Instead of addressing these questions directly, let me begin with a

simple thought experiment. Imagine a series of similar pictures, S. To economize my discussion, let us limit S to only three members, S^1, S^2, and S^3. Now suppose someone (call him P) is shown S^1, S^2, and S^3 and is told that one was copied off a lost original (call it S^0), a second copy was made of the first, and a third copy was made of the second, all on a discontinued copy machine that, unbeknownst to P, with each copying generates a subliminal distortion (call it SD). Moreover, the secretary who made S^1, S^2, and S^3 died years ago, and no one knows the order in which she completed her job. P's task is to place S^1, S^2, and S^3 in the exact order in which they were copied by the deceased secretary. How does P do it?

Because to P, S^1, S^2, and S^3 all look the same because the distortion is subliminal, P is justified in thinking that S^1, S^2, and S^3 are equally faithful reproductions of the original. To the extent that S^1, S^2, and S^3 are equal reproductions of S^0, P faces the considerable challenge of making a choice among six possible sequences:

1. $S^1 \rightarrow S^2 \rightarrow S^3$
2. $S^1 \rightarrow S^3 \rightarrow S^2$
3. $S^2 \rightarrow S^1 \rightarrow S^3$
4. $S^2 \rightarrow S^3 \rightarrow S^1$
5. $S^3 \rightarrow S^1 \rightarrow S^2$
6. $S^3 \rightarrow S^2 \rightarrow S^1$

How does P determine which of the sequences above corresponds to the secretary's copying procedure? Given the limitations of P's situation, barring pure luck there is no way for him to complete the task successfully. To determine the right sequence, P needs, above all else, to have access to S^0 and to know what S^0 looks like, but this is exactly what he lacks. The cause of his failure, in other words, is that because S^0 is unknown, P has no "effective reference" against which to contrast and compare S^1, S^2, and S^3, respectively. Without these contrasts and comparisons, P will not have at his disposal the kind of information—what can be called "discriminating differences"—necessary to determine how S^1, S^2, and S^3 stand in relation to S^0. Although a close inspection may reveal to P that S^1, S^2, and S^3 are indeed slightly different (assuming that P miraculously improves his vision so that he can perceive SD), the difference(s) so perceived, even if cumulative, are *internal to* the series itself. (It should be noted that although it is possible for P to seriate S^1, S^2, and S^3 on the basis of the perceived differences among them, the sequence so reconstructed reflects

the distorting character of the copy machine, *not* the original sequence in which the copies of S^0 were fed into the machine by the secretary.) Because these differences remain internal to S, that is, because they cannot be used to relate various amounts of SD back to S^0, P's knowledge of them is of no use in helping him to determine the specific distortion that S^1, S^2, and S^3 each displays relative to S^0. The result is that S^1, S^2, and S^3, despite the perceived differences among them, will continue to appear to be equidistant from S^0. And this puts P exactly where he was at the beginning. However much his vision may improve, however closely he examines S^1, S^2, and S^3, he is in principle blocked from arriving at the "discriminating difference(s)" indispensable to reconstructing what by now can only be called the lost art of copying of a certain dead secretary.

We can redescribe P's predicament more generally as follows: As long as S^0 is unknown, no one will be able to identify the correct sequence successfully; for as long as S^0 is unknown, no one has the criterion by which to discriminate any one of the six possible sequences from the rest, and hence no one can decide which one corresponds to the secretary's modus operandi. (Even if someone chances upon the correct choice, we still have to say that he did not know what he is doing, for he cannot tell why or how he did it and could not guarantee to successfully repeat his feat.) To the extent that S^0 is *lost* and the dead do not talk, we are caught, just as P is, in the worst of all double binds: every choice we make is a blind choice, and every blind choice we make returns us to face the same challenge. In fact, every choice we make repeats the same failure for the same reason, if only because every selection we make renews a condition characterized by the same degree of uncertainty as that facing any subsequent selection. Although gazing intently at a set of pictures, we are nonetheless blind, (re)initiating with each move a predicament determined from the very beginning by probability, random distribution, or pure chance. This resembles the hopeless task designed by the gods to punish Sisyphus for disrespect. It is this Sisyphean loop, a fatal circle whose initial programming defines each act as futile repetition, that ensnares P and throws us blindly into the tragicomic drama staged by a certain lost original.

This tragicomedy of "eternal recurrences" says much about repetition and furthers our understanding of what Deleuze says about Monet. Whenever we try to repeat what *was already done*, don't we all find ourselves in P's quandary? Whenever we seek to re-present what *has already made* its presence, aren't we all trapped in the same predicament that

forces P to become a Nietzschean hero? Just as Monet studies the changing light, P examines the interchangeable copies. But Monet is in a different—though ultimately no better—situation than is P. P, confounded by six possibilities, can only by chance beat the overwhelming, though calculable, odds, whereas Monet is well prepared methodologically and looks directly at the origin of his challenge. Out in the sun, at the discretion of *the* source of light, he photo-graphs the luminous presence of things/scenes, turning what he sees, his impressions, into a series by using the series as the proper method of photo-graphy. The first break of the sun, causing/initiating the first brush stroke; the first water lily, leading to another, then a third . . . seriatim and discretely.

Monet repeats, painting discretely. As a result, water lilies are repeated, forming a series through steady reflections. Of water lilies on canvas, from the garden to the wall, one after another *in repetitio.* Are they different? How are they different? How do we know that they are different? How do we know that they form *a* series? How do we know which painting is the "first one" when they all repeat one another? Art historians may tell us that this work here was painted after that one over there; the curator may seriate the paintings in this or that order; the museum guide may point to this water lily as the first and that one as the second, and so on. Why should we believe them? How do we know that the descriptions in the exhibition catalogs are not inaccurate? What if we enter the museum through the back door, enter the exhibition room in reverse direction, and observe what is on display (Are the paintings apocryphal? Does it matter?) at random? How could we rely on historians when their evidence includes hearsay? Monet, like the secretary, is long dead. When the so-called experts say—on the basis of *historical* data and according to good sense (good according to whom?)—that this one is the first one or that one repeats this one, they are speaking from *their* point of view, and they are repeating what *they* see.[6] But they are not Monet. Monet's view cannot be their view; nor can theirs be his. The differences here are irreducible; for whereas their view is set *against* a surface recorded by Monet, Monet's view is not against theirs but is turned toward the sunlit scene. Between these two views, there is no reciprocity. Monet was not looking at anyone; he was looking at his brush and the changing light upon the scene, focusing on and managing the traffic between them. Each time, he was looking at "this piece" and "this piece" only—a singular instance of light upon things that, although written *momentarily*, was for all that *final.* From Monet's point of view, each piece in the series is the *same* as the others,

for each piece is the (same) repetition of the (same) runaway sun that lights the (same) luminous presence of things. From where he stands in the garden, all attempts to seriate what he paints simply reflect an *other* point of view. It is *against* this *other* point of view, or conversely, from Monet's *own* point of view, a view that only he had or knew but that is now lost, that Deleuze says: "Monet's first water lily . . . repeats all the rest." Monet's first is his own first; from *his* point of view, his first is *the* first. It is this first that Deleuze returns to Monet and through him to the event of painting.

That the same repetition may be repeated differently, depending on the point of view taken, is the crux of both the similarity and the difference between P and Monet. Although P may eventually come to realize that his futile travail results from that fact that S^0 is lost and lost forever, Monet's series attests to his wise recognition that the first light is for his eyes only. To the art historian, the light is out. To our tragic hero P, the original is lost. To them, as to us, there is only the lost origin, and this lost origin comes to us as an original loss. This originless origin cannot be discovered, and, as we see in what happens by the pond and in the copy-machine room, this failure of discovery causes and compels repetitions to proliferate ad infinitum. There are only repetitions, compelling repetitions that, in spite of themselves, *initiate.* This is the truth of repetition; this is the principle of photo-graphy: what is lost cannot be retrieved; we can only discover its loss. But every act of discovery repeats the discovery of loss. What is lost cannot be repeated, but the discovery of loss causes/compels one to repeat. Deleuze speaks again through Monet, through the famed water lily series, on behalf of the lost origin: "Repetition repeats the unrepeatable."

ZERO RETURNS: REPETITION AND THE ABSENT CAUSE

> Of cause, so. And in effect, as?
>
> —JAMES JOYCE

To repeat, repetition repeats itself; it affirms itself by itself, by its own acts. Yet, in repeating itself, it also confirms its own failure by not being able to stop, by repeating itself endlessly. This failure of repetition to terminate thus doubles back upon itself as a windfall, an indirect success that trades

on its own incompletion by improvising its provisional act repetitively. That being the case, "repetition as a conduct and as a point of view" would not come to pass if there were not already in it a genetic defect (e.g., S^0), an "irreplaceable" instance that, working as a cause in absentia, constitutes the very form of what it brings forth as its effects.[7]

In fact, as can be easily observed from the preceding discussion, what justifies the conclusion that S^1 repeats S^2 and S^3 is the (absent) existence of an original S^0, a *dis-stanced* "this" that exists prior to—and outside of—its own serial representations. As that which is repeated by its own reproductions, this lost original anchors the whole series by giving its elements an underlying, re-markable motif, namely, their perceived sameness across discrete registers in time. At the same time, however, because it will have to repeat itself *as* itself throughout the series, this S^0 must somehow keep itself *outside* the series, standing from start to finish *apart from* the scene of its own repetitions; that is to say, to the extent that it will have to (re)appear as the same, this S^0 must *except* (take out) itself from ever coming on the scene, *ex-sisting* as an excluded other that, precisely by being excluded, makes possible inclusion by creating a division between inside and outside. E pluribus unum: one *out of* many. It is this self-subtraction of one out of many—Deleuze's formula of structural unification: n - 1—that opens the space in which the many can be aligned and realigned. In contrast to the positions taken, respectively, by S^1, S^2, and S^3 in the series, the position of S^0, if it can still be called a position, is necessarily an *ex*-position, a position *ex*-posed to those of S^1, S^2, and S^3, each of which can stand in for S^0 and for one another despite the discrete locations of S^1, S^2, and S^3 in the series. In other words, as the absent cause of S^1, S^2, and S^3, S^0 is (presup)posed, its status as a lost cause being that of the necessary element of *inconsistency*, a structural *brisure*, indispensable to maintaining the phenomenal *consistency* of the series S.[8]

Using a more digestible analogy from simple mathematics, we can say that S^0 occupies the place of the number 0, a (non)number constituted ex post facto as taking the *place* before 1, before the actual beginning of the natural numbers. Rephrasing the idea in the language of formal semiotics, we can say that 0 designates the *necessary utopia* of the natural number universe, functioning as a metasign "whose meaning as a name lies in the way it indicates the absence of the names, 1, 2, . . . 9," without which one would not be able to, for instance, distinguish 96 from 906 or 12 from 120 (Rotman 12). In fact, it is this *ex*-positionality of S^0, an "intimate exteriority" of S^0 to its own others, that "engenders a secondary for-

mation of itself" and, in so doing, makes possible S^1, S^2, and S^3 as multiple returns of the selfsame S^0 (ibid., 280). And it is S^0's expropriating character of "having already taken place" in relation to S^1, S^2, and S^3 that opens the possibility of the return of S^0's very own doubles as repetitive occurrence(s) of itself. Apropos of Jacques Lacan, one can say, "there's One (y'a de l'Un)": consistent rational order or structure must be anchored in an "irrational" (i.e., "unjustifiable" and "unobjectifiable" within the order) exception of One that, in its very capacity as exception, guarantees the structure's consistency, its seriality as such (Zizek 1996, 77). Following the same principle, and keeping in mind the all-powerful function that Lacan attributes to the empty set {0}, which transforms nothing into something by *marking* or *representing* it, one can go so far as to say that any system of meaning begins with the naming of the *void* that it (pre)supposes and to which all signifiers ultimately refer. In a parallel fashion, apropos of Deleuze, one can state that it is the pseudopoint of non-sense within the field of sense that distributes and regulates the series of sense atop the surface of sense-event. After all, repetition can become a predicate (i.e., S^0 is being repeated) only if what is being repeated, S^0, is already (self-) split, a self-becoming-other whose truth is a deliverance-to-come: it will become what it always already was.

This *dis-placed* S^0, or, more exactly, the very nonplace (*non-lieu*) that the virtual S^0 occupies (Roman Jakobson's zero phoneme, Filippo Brunelleschi's vanishing point, Marcel Mauss's *mana*, Claude Lévi-Strauss's floating signifier, Sigmund Freud's primal father, Jacques Lacan's fantasy object *a*, the *xeno*money in financial capitalism, etc.), thus functions as a curious negativity within a structure, a productive void that organizes and regulates the whole from a center that, being displaced, can only be located beyond the limit.[9] In marked contrast to a normal body, which can act only where it is, S^0 acts where it is not, performing effectively only in disappearance, absence, or self-exile. "This," to use Kojin Karatani's illustrative example,

> is exactly like the empty space in a puzzle of shifting numbers or letters that allows the pieces to be shifted around into some kind of order. What drives the movement of the game is not the differential system of signifiers, the 1, 2, 3, but the empty lot itself. While a player may think that she or he is relocating numbers, from another point of view it is the empty lot that is floating around and that enables this movement. (43)

On this game board, what is repeated by the players' moves is the movement of the empty lot itself, for each move made by the players depends on the lot's movability. In other words, with each move, the movement of the empty lot is repeated, and with each repetition of the empty lot's movement, the game as such is being played. Moreover, because one cannot remove the empty lot without destroying the game, the empty lot designates the only (irre)movable position—a constant "place value" that *belongs without belonging to* the game and that thus enables the game precisely because of its mobility. In this game, only the movement of the empty lot is truly repeatable.

The ex-posed S^0 is thus what S^1, S^2, and S^3 appear to have in common but do not possess. Operating like a missing link in a chain, it embodies a point of radical eccentricity that, by failing to come out and hence having no place, gives birth to a community as a multiplicity-in-unity. In other words, what is repeated by S^1, S^2, and S^3 is the absolutely lonely S^0, an "indivisible remainder," the Lacanian out-standing, ex-timate One, that, although authoring multiple representatives, nevertheless maintains its unrepeat*ability* by remaining unyieldingly hetero- or a-topic. To the extent that S^0 is *not* any of its fungible representatives but is nevertheless responsible for their coming out as they appear to be, this S^0, as a lost cause sui generis, designates the source of a difference that makes all the difference in the serial representation. It signifies "pure articulation" in the protostructuralist sense, a silent copula as an effective but self-effacing hinge or joint (*brisure*) that relates the different (e.g., S^1) to the different (e.g., S^2) without any mediation by the identical or the similar, the analogue, or the opposite.

Relating the different to the different, "pure difference" conceals its immediacy in mediacy, withdrawing itself behind the contrasts it sustains: "Difference is *behind* everything," Deleuze puts it emphatically, "but behind difference there is nothing" (1995, 80). What must not be overlooked here is that this simple statement carries a force that is easily refracted by its compound syntax. In fact, the first part of the sentence, "Difference is *behind* everything," in light of the second can be seen to mean something almost antithetical to what it suggested at first; for, if there is *nothing* behind difference, difference cannot be said to assume a dimension of its own—there is nothing to constitute a *background* for it. If difference occupies no *site* of its own, it can only exist parasitically—existing, that is, as a *para-site* on the same plane as do things whose distinction

or identity it marks. Instead of being *behind* anything, difference is purely syncategorematic or connective, pulsating not so much *behind* things as *between* or *in* them.

Because it exists only *in* and *between* things, that is, because it comes to the fore only under the guise of what it is not, difference as such cannot be properly reflected except *en abîme*. For this reason, it eludes objectification and totalization, hiding itself as a "mark" (*marque*) along a chain that simultaneously erases and preserves itself in a process of "re-marking." At the same time, however, to be what it is, to keep itself "differently different," the difference of a series must make a difference in the series in which it exists. This necessity of making a difference, of keeping itself operative in the series, makes it impossible for the difference to remain indifferent. "One trope too many is thus added to the series," writes Rodolphe Gasché in reference to the concept of "re-mark":

> In the form of a proxy . . . it represents what does not really belong to the series . . . the nonmeaning against which the full marks stand out. If that trope is substracted from the series to be totalized by the concept (of the mark), however, this totalization leaves at least one mark unaccounted for. Thus re-marked by the space of inscription that demarcates all marks, no concept or theme of the mark could hope to coincide with what it aims to embrace. The re-mark is an essential limit to all coinciding reflection or mirroring, a doubling of the mark that makes all self-reflective adequation impossible. For structural reasons, there is always more than totality; the extra valence added by the delegate of the asemic space of diacritical differentiation of the totality of semes always—infinitely—remains to be accounted. (221)

Gasché's point is straightforward: the totality of a chain of marks is always re-marked by an additional, nontotalizable mark that, by marking what demarcates the marks, namely, the empty space between them, constitutes their ground by holding together their place of inscription—that is, their very differentiality, the difference between marks as such. "In any series of marks," as Zizek puts it, "there is always at least one which functions as 'empty' . . . which re-marks the differential space of the inscription of marks. It is only through the gesture of re-marking that a mark becomes mark, since it is only the re-mark which opens and sustains the place of its inscription" (1992, 75). That being the case, and as already betrayed by our use of the words *in* or *between* to characterize it, difference

must be understood as "excessive lack," designating a blank- or surplus-element within a whole, thanks to which the whole becomes structured and can be accounted for.

As an empty space of other-inscriptions, difference as such remains void, its content being void itself and hence contentless, its form being difference itself and hence formless. It is this self-withdrawing character of difference as "re-mark," of difference as "excessive lack" serializing itself incognito, that repetition continuously affirms: "In its essence, difference is the *object* of affirmation, affirmation itself" (Deleuze 1995, 74). Re-marking itself through repetition, or rather, "lying between two repetitions," difference invites affirmation—an affirmation of a transevental disjunction or discord, expressible as either not-all (*pas-tout*) or as more *and* less, and only discernible through the angle of a "fourth person singular" (Deleuze 1990, 102–3). Understood in this way, repetition cannot but stand in opposition to "exchange":

> For exchange implies only resemblance, even if the resemblance is extreme. Exactness is its criterion, along with the equivalence of exchanged products. This is the false repetition and causes our illness. True repetition, on the other hand, appears as a singular behavior that we display in relation to that which cannot be exchanged, replaced, or substituted—like a poem that is repeated on the condition that no word may be changed. It is no longer a matter of an equivalence between similar things, it is not even a matter of identity of the Same. True repetition addresses something singular, unchangeable, and different, without "identity." Instead of exchanging the similar and identifying the Same, *it authenticates the different.* (Ibid., 287–88)10

Authenticating the different—that is, authoring the different *as* different—true repetition works *unconsciously*, speaking only *as* and *through* an other. Inassimilable by any host, unequal to any gift, it "surges forth as the highest power of the unexchangeable," surging forth, in effect, as a "division" that "reunites" (ibid., 288). "It functions," writes Deleuze, "as the differenciation of difference, an in-itself which is like a *differentiator*, a *Sich-unterscheidende*, by virtue of which the different is gathered all at once rather than represented on condition of a prior resemblance, identity, analogy or opposition" (Deleuze 1995, 117). Simply put, it is "the in-itself of difference [that] hides itself in giving rise to what covers it" (154).[11]

The ex-posed S^0 never appears as such, and what does appear is

nothing but the envoi of what never fails to disappear. Seen in this way, Monet's failure takes on a new light: It does not simply mean that even the most faithful recording of the full lumination of things inevitably falls short of the things illuminated. Nor does it mean that representation, serial or not, loses the represented along the way, or that between representation and presentation there lingers the irreducible phenomenological inadequation. Instead, Monet's failure should be seen as the very manner in which serial painting proceeds, revealing a mode of expression unique to painting as photo-graphy, a mode of expression that, through its unavoidable double exposure, does not and cannot silence the productive fiction of painting as verisimilar.

Much like the uttering of "this," a verbal act that becomes effective only in the moment of its illocutionary resolution, the painting of "this"—in fact, the light-sensitive inscription of subjective impressions in general—remains beneath the threshold of photo-graphic veracity until it actively forgets the ephemerality of lighted beings that breaks Being's promise of full exposure. Similarly, the claim that "Monet's first water lily . . . repeats all the others" also takes on a more precise meaning: it no longer suggests the eristic, counterintuitive proposition that an earlier act repeats later ones; far more radically, it states an architectural rule of timing: the so-called first impression, the first scene seen, the first stroke, in short, the very constitution of firstness as such, is already a repeated occurrence. As the Lacanian-Deleuzian refrains suggest, an event always take place twice before it really happens, or, as I dare to rephrase it, an event must take place *virtually* before it occurs *effectively*. It is this *twice-over* of an event that consolidates the event's phenomenal integrity, and it is its *virtual occurrence before the fact* that restores to the event its truth as retroactive happening, the aftermath of a "sombre precursor," that delivers what comes henceforth always in the form of *déjà pas encore*.

"To repeat is to behave," as Deleuze states time and again, "but in relation to something unique and singular that has no likeness or equivalent" (1995, 7). It is not that there is no universality of repetition; rather, the universal aspect of repetition is the universal of a structure, not of events; of a type, not of tokens; of a form, not of content; and finally, of a lost cause-in-remembrance, not of a marked antecedent. Instead of announcing anything positive, repetition exemplifies an exceptional falling: To repeat is to fall under the burden of retroactive secondarity, to fall by succumbing to the untimely othering of beings—or, as Emmanuel

Levinas has it, to have fallen "into that of which seeing, already assuming a plastic form, is but forgetfulness and re-presentation" (115).

THE COMING/SUFFERING OF BEING

> In every now, being begins.
>
> —FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

The inaugural is (the) absent. The true initial does not show up. And initiation is a game of failure that nevertheless manages to go on and on. These are the reasons why nothing should be accorded the status of *archē* simply because of its inaugural value. To repeat it in another way, the *archē* does not really deserve the values attributed to it insofar as it is attributed with the inaugural value. Because the inaugural appears to inaugurate but does not really initiate, it can only be a repeated event, an event that affirms itself through repetition. Such self-repetition compromises what the inaugural seeks to affirm, complicating its effects from the very beginning; for, through each repeated event, repetition comes back to its own emptiness in excess; it abandons itself by gathering others, infinitizing itself *in* others and, in so doing, returning to its own abandonment in full measure. Abandoning itself at birth, repetition adds nothing to what is repeated; conversely, what is repeated, to the extent that it stands in for the abandoned and hence is left with nothing to keep hold of, adds nothing and does nothing to the repetition that constitutes the immanent genesis of the phenomenality of things. In either case, repetition, as Nancy sagaciously observes, "obstructs or forsakes the very *position*, the initial position, of being, that empty position whose truth of nothingness, immediately turned back on and against being, mediates the becoming, the inexhaustible advent of being, its resurrection and the parousia of its absolute unity, truth, and goodness, arousing and pouring back into it the foam of its own infinity" (1995, 37).

Drowning itself in "the foam of its own infinity," repetition-in-(self)-abandonment prevents itself from ever becoming anything *substantial*; instead, it signifies the very *tension* (Deleuze's preferred word is *intensity*) of events and between events, a pure differential that *itself is not being* (*nicht selbst seende*) but that mediates between two aggregates of being, a having-been (past) and the yet-to-come (future), aggregates that are themselves differentially marked by the respective tensions that link and

delink their own adjoining aggregates. It is here that one finds the true empirical (not empiricist) support for Nietzsche's "eternal return" in Deleuze, the "real genesis" of becoming: a no-nonsense view that does not treat beings as creations by a transcendental "ground" or any other self-aggrandizing instance but, instead, approaches them by way of the dif-ference (*Unter-Schied*), a "traumatic cut" as pain (*Schmerz*), that explicates recurrences as pure semblances effected by the internal contraction and expansion between unity and difference, between the one and the many, between the finite and the infinite, between the transcendental and the empirical.[12]

Repetition abandons itself in that it repeats itself; repetition repeats itself because it abandons itself. And because repetition abandons itself, repetition repeats the unrepeatable that it itself is on account of self-abandonment. To be abandoned is to be left with nothing to take hold of; to abandon oneself means to let go of oneself, completely and without calculation. But in neither case does "abandonment" mean "disappearance" or "death." Properly understood, "to abandon" means "to suffer." To suffer (*sub-ferre*), however, does not simply mean "to undergo." It means *to go under.* Suffering (*le subissement,* not *la souffrance*), says Maurice Blanchot, means "not so much what we undergo, as that which goes under" (3).[13] In the strict sense, to suffer is to surrender to what drags one down, to be affected passively and immeasurably by the weighty reality of an Other. Thus suffering is always associated with images of heaviness or falling, with the difficulty of standing up or of moving in any direction. In this light, to say that repetition abandons itself is to say that it sinks under its own weight.

Sinking under its own weight, repetition necessarily keeps itself and keeps to itself; it keeps (to) itself by perpetually (re)appropriating itself through self-suffering. In this sense, repetition properly characterizes the postal eco-nomy of presence as becoming-present, an Odyssean voyage in which going away is the same as coming back, in which the point of departure is the same as that of return, and in which sending is indistinguishable from receiving. Inasmuch as it is governed by the structure of return, repetition necessarily becomes itself because it always returns to itself; and by returning to itself, it remains itself. As a result, repetition is what remains; it remains in becoming qua becoming. Repetition *is becoming* proper.

What goes under is what remains, but "what *remains* is also what *resists* the most" (Nancy 1996, 81). This remaining resistance, a kind of

resistance that keeps itself by going under, causes and is capable of causing what goes under to return.[14] In fact, repetition as what remains will not come to pass without its own resistance, which it then overcomes. This is how repetition maintains its own "infinite identity," by traversing what goes under as self-overcoming. And it is in this that we must awake to the singular message of *becoming*-present as "the *inexhaustible* advent of Being"—a barely audible message that speaks of Being as "inexhaustible" by speaking for resistance as such. What this inexhaustible resistance means, before it means anything else, is simply this: Being is not stationary; rather, it is constantly going under. Being *is* because it goes under, because it suffers for its own sake. In so doing, it remains what it always is, its self-overcoming immediately overcome by itself as repetition of the same, by its own undividedness. For this reason, Being is as inexhaustible as it is singular. Returning to itself, Being remains; "it remains without remains," that is, by overcoming its own resistance *repetitively* (Blanchot 33). Thus, instead of saying that Being is abstract, unknowable, or anything else, one should say that Being is weighty, too weighty to be apprehended by thought, too heavy to be measured by any means. By going under, it ex-sists as what it *already* is; at the same time, by going under again, it also ex-sists as what it *not yet* is. Already but not yet, Being's moment is always untimely, already out of joint. Already but not yet, Being's destiny is to return to itself via its resistant Other, traversing/repeating its own traces that bear witness to its radical becoming. When all is said and done, what remains is only the becoming. There is only becoming; there is *already but not yet* becoming—a becoming that comes up by going under, that goes forward by circling back. A carrier of such an unbearable weight, Being *is* already-but-not-yet, a No-thing into which we are thrown, a suffering to which we are subjected all along, in the future tense of a past and/or in the past tense of a future.

If, as Nietzsche says, with every now Being begins, then Being's beginning ends with every now, with its ever-renewed and ever-renewable beginnings. And this can only mean that Being as such never comes, simply because perennial coming guarantees no arrival or delivery but only affirms the repetition of a coming. Understood in this way, Being's presence can be taken to mean *prohibition* as such, provided that one understands prohibition in the precise sense that the supposed object of prohibition is the *prohibition* itself, that the prohibited object *coincides with* the principle or force that prevents its very attainment. Phrased a little differently, it is not that Being's presence is *withdrawn* by some unknown cause,

but rather, that presence *is* withdrawal itself, its own retraction.

Being comes forth by going under; Being unveils itself but only as "Nothing," as Heidegger says. To continue with Heidegger's language, one can say that "ontological difference" blocks the communication between Being and beings, staking out a region of "clearing" that remains nevertheless opaque to mortal vision; that is to say, the message of Being collapses completely and immediately into the passage of its sending, thus becoming silent: no message. In this silent sending, only the promise remains. And the promise, as one now realizes, is quite disappointing: Being comes, but *it comes only in the repetition of its coming.* Being returns, but it returns always blank or half-empty, for what actually comes back in this return is *either* the promise of returning, rather than Being as such, *or* the hedging avowal that it *will have come.* Consequently, one can only speak of a becoming that misses, coming either too early or too late, and thus excluding itself, its presence, its possibility of identity. There is only Being in its coming, a radical coming of Being that never arrives. Becoming becomes; Being does not come; Being *is not.*

The unbearable heaviness of Being causes everything to go down, to repeat, to suffer; suffering is *in* everything, and it never ceases to repeat. Look at the white spot on the canvas. Read the blank space between morphemes. Listen to the silence between words. Hiccups; stammerings; elisions; a stain . . . Where does one begin and where does another end? Where is the closure, the opening, or the space in between? When terminus subrogates telos, how does one "save the text from its book misfortune?" (Blanchot 101). One simply stops speaking, painting, writing . . . in order to begin.[15]

NOTES

1. Many almost identical expressions can be found in Deleuze's texts. For example: "True repetition . . . appears as a singular behavior that we display in relation to that which cannot be exchanged, replaced, or substituted—like a poem that is repeated on the condition that no word may be changed" (1990, 287).

2. For a discussion on the themes of loss, memory, and absence, see Derrida, *Mémoires for Paul de Man.*

3. By "anecdotal" I mean to suggest the referential sense emphasized by Meaghan Morris: "I take anecdotes, or yarns, to be primarily referential. They are oriented futuristically toward the construction of a precise, local, and *social* discur-

sive context, of which the anecdote then functions as a *mise en [abîme].* That is to say, anecdotes for me are not expressions of personal experience but allegorical expressions of a model of the way the world can be said to be working" (14–15).

4. Bennington makes the same point succintly when, speaking of Derrida's "trace," he writes: "It is not simply that proper names and diectics do not manage properly to name or indicate something that escapes language while anchoring it somewhere, but that 'reality' thus improperly designated is present nowhere else" (1994, 114).

5. As Nancy writes: "One cannot dip one's pen in last night's water. Ink is always fresh. [Strokes] leave no trace or deposit in it. Everything must be started over; one can never begin to get it over with, unless it be by getting it over with before starting. And for that, as you see, it's already too late" (1995, 342).

6. The problem of "point of view" is crucial in this connection. And this explains why Deleuze emphasized it in the beginning passage of *Difference and Repetition* quoted earlier: "Repetition as a conduct and as a *point of view* concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities" (emphasis added).

7. Clearly, the conclusion that S^1 repeats S^2 and S^3 appears paradoxical. Common sense and proper use of the word *repeat* tell us that what takes place earlier, S^1, cannot possibly repeat what occurs later, S^2 and S^3. Although the argument certainly does not refute common sense and sensible English, it nevertheless demonstrates one point crucial to the critical grasp of "repetition" as the structuring principle of a series: "repeated events (*événements*/tokens) are not necessarily instances that reproduce the universal rule" (Frank 376); that is to say, there is simply no guarantee that a reiterated word or a repeated gesture manifests one and the same universal. To rephrase the point positively: rather than submitting themselves to a governing principle of universal equivalence, a principle that rewrites similar phenomena as mere reflections of a "type" anchored in an untouchable instance of "essence," repeated events as *events* are irreclaimable singularities that, in the act of application, simultaneously transgress and incalculably alter the universal category under which they come forward; for, to continue with our example, although an observer, having looked at S^1, S^2, and S^3, may decide that they form a repetitive sequence, he is not justified in concluding that they share any underlying transphenomenal characteristics if only because the impression he forms of S^1, S^2, and S^3 as members of a repetitive sequence may result from their "family resemblances" and not from some essential S-ness that defines the identity of the series as a unifying and unified whole—a fact known to post-Scholastic nominalists long before it was rearticulated by Wittgenstein. Moreover, it must be recognized that S^1 and S^2, or any pair of entities, can be judged to have a common feature only if one first has available some objective criterion, a "third term," that functions as what philosophers call the "ground of relation" and singly determines whether S^1 and S^2 are either identical or different. Such a criterion, to the extent that it is summoned forth ex hypothesi to serve as a disinterested differentiator, is, strictly speaking, a *postulation.* And, as a postulated term, this first criterion would require the postulation of yet another criterion, another "third term," invoked by necessity as a second differentiator to mark its own identity. This act of postulating a differentiator in the very making of identity and differ-

ence would go on, leading straightaway to an infinite regress that undermines the possibility of any final discovery of an "essence" capable of assembling disparate individuals under the ruling of a general type or concept.

8. For a discussion of the absent cause as a structural principle, see Zizek 1994, 29–53.

9. For a helpful discussion on the development of formalism and the homology between "number," "money," and "pictorial representation," see Rotman. It should be noted that the existence of a "productive void" within a system results from a simple logical requirement: an element of a system is logically preceded by the place it occupies within that system. Thus, the number 0, for example, does not denote a boundless, contextless emptiness; instead, it should be seen as having been invented to designate the absence resulting from the removal of previously existing items, that is, for example, to designate the answer to the question, How many apples are left on the table after one has taken them all away?

10. Following this line of reasoning, one can also understand why Deleuze claims that "being neither the identity of the same nor the equivalence of the similar, repetition is found in the intensity of the Different" (1990, 288–89). Gilles Deleuze is Gilles Deleuze himself; there is only one Gilles, defined by a singular soul that he himself is. There are no two men who can both be taken to be Gilles. Yet the Gilles thirty years ago is not the same Gilles two years from now. But one cannot say that there are two beings in Gilles, two creatures inside the same individual. Thus, he is both the same as himself and different from himself. It is in this sense that Deleuze designates an "intensity" in himself: he composes a difference *in* himself, an internal inequality, which returns or repeats to make him the same individual across time. It is in this sense, too, that "repetition does not presuppose the Same or the Similar—these are not its prerequisites. It is repetition, on the contrary, which produces the only 'same' of that which differs, and the only resemblance of the different" (289).

11. According to Deleuze's conception, "difference" is best understood in topological terms, as a curvature that works as a "relative point of indifference" between adjacent curvatures. This explains why he insists on the distinction between difference and diversity. "Diversity" refers to the phenomenal distinction between individuals or between individuals belonging to two distinct species. "Diversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse. Difference is not phenomenon, but the noumenon closest to the phenomenon" (1995, 222). The expression "closest to" is important, for, unlike the Kantian noumenon, which is distinguished by its postulated character as a final support for the Transcendental Object, *X*, the difference as noumenon in Deleuze, being closest to phenomenon, is not heterotopic to phenomenon.

12. Here one also finds the reason why in Deleuze Being's "condition of possibility" is at the same time its "condition of impossibility," why "the transcendental" is undecidably the same as "the empirical," why the "infinite" necessarily collapses into the "finite," and vice versa—conclusions that Deleuze shares with Derrida, though through different routes. This also explains how Deleuze reads Spinoza and Leibniz as reflecting the two facades of the Baroque decentered uni-

verse, Spinoza's constructed through the logic of explosion and Leibniz's through that of implosion.

13. In this connection, Freud's word *unterdrückt*, which Lacan translates as *chû en dessous*, comes to mind.

14. It might be interjected here that the usual interpretations of the claim that "individuals become (or rather, are constituted as) subjects" amount to no more than worn-out, quasi-sociological platitudes, in that they miss the radical meaning of becoming-in-repetition. Individuals do not become subjects, or anything else for that matter, because of influences exerted by forces "not of their own making" (such as ideology, race, gender, history, culture). According to Deleuze's materialism, individuals recognize themselves as subjects by returning to or becoming again what they always already are. Here the meaning of radical becoming, of the temporal structuration of "already but not yet," must be confronted honestly. Individuals are always already subjects, and their histories, seen from the present point of view, reflect the temporal expressions by which they will become again what they always already were. This also explains why Lacan emphasizes the "future anterior" dimension of the *sujet en procès*. Without this emphasis, one will not be able to answer the many difficult questions that arise in association with Lacan's notion that ego formation takes place during the stage of "the imaginary": for example, the simple question of how a child can recognize that the image he or she sees in the mirror is his or her own image if he or she does not know that it is his or her own image to begin with. This simple question shows, inter alia, how limited the "reflection model" is when it is used to explain the emergence of self-consciousness.

15. Like many ideas developed by postmodernist thinkers, Deleuze's singular reworking of the concept of repetition has far-reaching implications for cultural analysis. Readers interested in pursuing the questions of how Deleuze might be situated within the broader discussions of French poststructuralist thought can see Hardt, Patton.

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