

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA
of
TROUBLE
and
SPACIOUSNESS

REBECCA SOLNIT

RATTLESNAKE IN MAILBOX

Cults, Creeps, California in the 1970s

It's true what you heard about macramé. Partly some mutant version of a craft tradition and partly something for the fidgety hands and wandering minds of the drugged, macramé was also the means to create harnesses from which a million planters were hung from a million ceilings to create gratuitous clutter. You can think of macramé as some vernacular extension of 1960s soft sculptures by Bruce Conner, Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, and Claes Oldenburg, but its aesthetics had grown monstrously. There was something quintessentially 1970s about these pendulous burdens—obscuring views and dripping foliage—something that tied them to the fern bars of the era and to the overall aesthetics of horror vacui. This era of shag rugs and feather-bedecked roach-clip hair ties rivaled the Victorians when it came to clutter, ornament, jewelry, print, pattern, texture, flourish, tassels, fringes, tendrils, frizz, dangly bits, lace, laces, buttons, and other distractions for the eye.

Dangling, creeping plants were at the heart of 1978's definitive film, Phil Kaufman's horror movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, filmed in San Francisco. Donald Sutherland as the restaurant-inspector-turned-alien-detective walks into Brooke Adams's house and finds a clone of her growing in a lush, damp sort of greenhouse alcove full of plants; later Jeff Goldblum is cloned in a bathhouse, also full of houseplants. San Francisco's hills, trees, fog, and intricate Victorian gingerbread houses suit the film's sensibility. In one scene, a teacher out with some small children in a park near the Haight-Ashbury ominously encourages them to pick the pretty flowers and take them home. Eleven years earlier Los Angeles's Mamas and the Papas had sung "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair)," promising the city would be full of gentle people, a "love-in."

Now the flowers were monstrous and the emotions were null. Technically the threat in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is colonizing plants from a destroyed planet, but the film makes an allegory of the fuzzy thinking, fuzzy surfaces, spreading tendrils, and labyrinthine passages that were both the culture and the landscape of San Francisco during the late 1970s. In other words, the city—and by extension, the world—is being eaten by the counterculture; and being taken over by the pods turns people into affectless ambulatory vegetables.

Blank is the word that comes to mind for this condition, though *blank* also sounds like a refreshingly uncluttered surface in that context. Blankness calls up Richard Hell and the Voidoids's anti-anthem of the year before, "Blank Generation." Punk rock arrived like a machete in the jungle, hacking at all that stadium rock, chopping the tendrils, paring away everything unnecessary and slicing down to the rage, the indignation, the energy, and the essence. The jungle was the meandering, woolly, over-decorated excesses rock-and-roll had sunk into during the 1970s—the fourteen-minute tracks, the long instrumental solos, the excess of studio polish, the pointlessness of songs about bored decadence and sybaritic luxury, the stale formulas. The Eagles's 1977 hit "Hotel California" was a flawless piece of craftsmanship, but it was about upscale fatalism and gilded cages, about the hotel you can check into but never leave. It sounded as though Joan Didion had started writing lyrics. As Don Henley sang, "They stab it with their steely knives, / But they just can't kill the beast."

Punk rock could, and the beast was rock-and-roll itself. I was fifteen in 1977, the year punk hit California. When it arrived, most rock-and-roll sounded as though it was made to be listened to in a hot tub; the music had slowed down and sprawled out. The operative word was *mellow*. In *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the aliens clone you when you're sleeping and then turn you into ashes; relaxation is perilous. Punk came along as a fierce corrective to the excesses and errors of the 1960s, at least in the United States. British punks were perhaps more farseeing; their protest was against a mainstream that would grow more grotesque in the Thatcherist 1980s, while songs like the Dead Kennedys's "California Über Alles" (1979/80) seemed to imagine progressive and occasionally loopy Governor Jerry Brown as an enduring

oppression—insidious, like those tendrils and pods. By the time that song was released in June of 1979, former California governor Ronald Reagan was on his way to the presidency, and decades of Republican governors were on their way to Sacramento. (California wouldn't have a strong Democratic governor again until 2011, when a seventy-something Brown was reelected.)

“California Über Alles” seems to imagine that the counterculture won. Few foresaw that the right—which seemed in abeyance since Nixon had slithered back to San Clemente—was on the brink of resurgence. Nevertheless, punk rock would have plenty to say about Reagan and the right when the time came: San Francisco's MDC (Millions of Dead Cops, an important, less-remembered political punk band that eventually changed its name to Multi-Death Corporations) would release “John Wayne Was a Nazi” in 1981, and a host of hardcore bands like L.A.'s Wasted Youth would launch more vitriolic attacks. Even the generally apolitical Ramones would record “Bonzo Goes to Bitberg” in 1985, about Reagan's infamous laying of a wreath in a cemetery full of Nazi graves. It was possible to hate both possibilities—and dystopic punk was never very good at envisioning solutions and alternatives. It arose from an adolescent's sensibility of outrage and dissent—the antithesis of *visionary*—hostile to the Emperor and his embroidered new clothes.

The 1970s is a decade people would apparently rather not talk about and hardly seem to remember. Perhaps the best thing that can be said about the 1970s is that its experiments—the failed ones that people learned from and the successful that continued—laid the groundwork for movements to come during the 1980s and after. But in 1978, mostly the mistakes and excesses were on display.

1978: THE YEAR OF FORENSIC EVIDENCE

For San Francisco in particular and for California in general, 1978 was a terrible year in which the fiddler had to be paid for all the tunes to which the counterculture had danced. The sexual revolution had deteriorated into a sort of free-market, free-trade ideology, in which all should have access to sex and none should deny access. I grew up north of San Francisco in

an atmosphere where, once you were twelve or so, hippie dudes in their thirties started to offer you drugs and neck rubs that were clearly only the beginning—and it was immensely hard to refuse them. There were no grounds. Sex was good; everyone should have it all the time; anything could be construed as consent; and almost nothing meant no, including “no.” Those who remember feminists as being angrily anti-sex during the 1980s don't recall the huge task they undertook—and undertook successfully—of pointing out that, like everything else, sex involves power; power is distributed unequally; and unequal power not uncommonly deteriorates into exploitation.

It was the culture. Rock stars were open about their liaisons with underage groupies, and forty-something Woody Allen had cast underage Mariel Hemingway as his love interest in his film *Manhattan* (1977). In 1978, Louis Malle released *Pretty Baby*, in which a then-eleven-year-old and sometimes unclothed Brooke Shields played a prostitute. (Two years earlier, Playboy Press had published nude photographs by the aptly named Gary Gross of a painted, vamping Shields at the age of ten in a book titled *Sugar and Spice*. In 1978, British photographer David Hamilton published *Young Girl*, a collection of prettily prurient photographs of half-undressed pubescent girls; as Hamilton's stock-in-trade for years, these images were everywhere as posters and books. On February 1, 1978, forty-four-year-old film director Roman Polanski decided to skip bail and headed for France after being charged with raping a thirteen-year-old girl he had plied with champagne and Quaaludes. (His implied excuse was that everyone was doing it.) Some defended him on the grounds that the girl looked fourteen.

In 1978, former beauty queen and right-wing demagogue Anita Bryant was crusading against basic rights for gay men by portraying them as child molesters, among other things. In California, Bryant's campaign led to the Briggs Initiative on the state ballot on November 6, 1978, which would have banned queer people from working as teachers. Thanks to a groundswell of gay men coming out to their friends, family, and co-workers and great organizing work, the Briggs Initiative lost, a final victory for San Francisco supervisor and statewide organizer Harvey Milk in a year when people of

color, women, and gay men pressed hard for their rights. The first annual Take Back the Night march of feminists against pornography—pro- and anti-porn feminism was one of the debates of the times—took place the same month.

It was a violent time, and there were so many kinds of violence to choose from. On October 11, members of the Bay Area's Synanon cult nearly killed a lawyer helping some former members by putting a rattlesnake in his mailbox. On November 18, the mass murder-suicide in Jonestown, Guyana, of 918 members of the San Francisco cult, the Peoples Temple, constituted the largest single violent loss of American civilian lives before 9/11. And on November 27, a disgruntled and deranged former policeman assassinated San Francisco mayor George Moscone and Milk in the same City Hall where the cloned vegetal menaces of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* loaded trucks with proliferating alien pods. The horror movie would be released on December 20 that year.

• Another 1978 ballot included a much more famous proposition, known then as the Jarvis-Gann Act, now as Proposition 13 (the initiative that froze property taxes and required a supermajority to vote in tax increases; the measure began to starve California's educational system, libraries, and other county and city services). That one won on June 6, bringing on the beginning of the taxpayer revolts of the past three decades and the beginning of the end of a half-century of economic leveling. Proposition 13 was the narrow wedge of the economic violence that would weaken public institutions, undermine social safety nets, and bring back dire poverty on a grand scale over the next few decades. During the 1970s, the long movement toward economic democratization went into reverse so that, by 2010, the United States would return to the level of economic disparity of 1928: 23 percent of the nation's wealth would be concentrated in the hands of 1 percent of its population.

The same ruthlessness of capital brought about, after several years of resistance, the August 4, 1977, eviction of the elderly Asian residents of the International Hotel in downtown San Francisco, amid huge throngs, violence, ladders, mounted police, and dismay. The eviction was carried out by the police at the behest of a developer intent upon building some-

thing more lucrative on the site, a project that never came to fruition. The low-income residential I-Hotel had housed a gallery and some activist organizations, as well as those vulnerable seniors. It had been a key location for the Asian-American rights movements of the decade, which paralleled the indigenous rights movement launched at Alcatraz in 1969; the Chicano movement tied to Cesar Chavez's organization of farmworkers from the early 1960s onward; and, of course, the African-American insurgency that was the Black Panther Party, founded in Oakland in 1966. Financial district expansion had already devoured the rest of Manilatown, and urban renewal had gutted the neighborhoods of two other low-income communities just before—the African-American Western Addition/Fillmore in the 1960s and the South of Market area, full of retired waterfront workers during the 1970s. The space in which to be decently poor was drying up, and a few years hence, in the age of Reagan, the armies of the homeless would begin to march through the city streets.

Maybe 1978 was when the 1960s ended and the 1980s began. Maybe there were no 1970s. Even punk rock, arguably the decade's most original offering, died a little when the Sex Pistols broke up in January of 1978, after the Winterland hatefest that was their final concert. Winterland was around the corner from the Peoples Temple, the site of Jim Jones's cult before he led his devotees on a paranoid flight to Guyana that culminated, ten months later, in drinking all that cyanide-laced Kool-Aid. One of San Francisco's leading punk venues, the Mabuhay Gardens, was just around the corner from the International Hotel. It was all pretty tied together, like some kind of macramé of conspiracy, paranoia, and decline. Mostly it was a bleak landscape in which the dying experiments were easier to spot than the embryonic new forms that would matter immensely during the 1980s and after.

AVENGERS

Working all night as an extra, I carried a big green gherkin-like papier-mâché pod in the City Hall scene of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, though if I made it into the movie, it was only for a flickering second. Around the same time, I started hanging out at the Mabuhay Gardens—or Mab, as

it was sometimes called—though I didn't find out what the Tagalog word *mabuhay* meant until much later. I went to shows at the Peoples Temple when it turned into a punk venue after all its former parishioners were dead or scattered. I didn't get it about the International Hotel until long afterward, though I remember the hotel, the protests, and then the hole in the ground where it had been. I saw the Sex Pistols's last show on a rainy night when country music fans had been whipped up into a fury against punks and came to spit and hurl projectiles, back in that divisive, intolerant era when punks hated disco and country right back—but I didn't know what a historic and final moment it would be.

Punk wasn't defined yet. Or rather it was defined in opposition. It was anti-rock, for starters. It was exceedingly anti-hippie and anti-disco too. It wasn't yet cool. In 1977 no one knew what it meant to be a punk yet, though the short dyed hair, chains, safety pins, and shredded clothing were catching on. It was a moment that belonged to outsiders; but by the early 1980s when California punk had become hardcore, and hardcore was dominated by macho L.A. bands like Agent Orange and Black Flag, it was all about insiders, mostly male insiders. What began as the slam dancing of geeks and girls turned into the mosh pit that only the most rugged could safely venture into. "Different like everybody else," was my epithet for a lot of it, and I moved on. But there was a glorious moment when no one knew what was going on, and what was happening seemed utterly new. A revolution opens up possibilities and dismantles existing authority and is usually followed up by the assembling of new authority. Punk rock followed this mode. Maybe the 1960s did too, with the wave of authoritarian cults that followed.

Punk was in some ways a retro movement. We wore clothes from the 1950s—tight clothes, narrow-legged jeans, motorcycle jackets, slicked-back hair, eyeliner, spike heels (in contrast to the platform shoes that were everywhere then)—and went for an aesthetic of the lean, the sharp, the spare, the straight, the antithesis of all the fuzzy floral flowing abundance around us, as though we wanted to go back twenty years and then take the other fork in the road, the one that didn't lead to hippies and long drum solos and stadium rock and all the fuzzy, fake, feel-good sentiment of the

1970s. We wore a lot of black back when no one else did, unless you were an old Catholic widow or a Swedish film director. Death was everywhere: in high art, like Linda Montano's 1977 piece, *Mitchell's Death*, for her late husband; in pop culture, like Bruce Conner's photographs of De Detroit of UXA wrapped up like a mummy at the Mab, mourning the drug-overdose death of her boyfriend; and in the news of assassinations, murders, and massacres.

It was an era when cities themselves were dying (a famous *New York Post* headline of 1975 read, "Ford to NY: Drop Dead"), or rather, the old industrial cities and their blue-collar jobs were vanishing, crime was spiking, and a new kind of bland white-collar metropolis was being born in the ruins. Deindustrialization and the ruinous, partly abandoned cities were the landscape of punk.

Punks tried out wearing trash bags tailored with safety pins. And the hair—the aesthetic was with Huysmans and against nature. It was amusing in later years to see young punks try hard to be nonchalant while sporting twelve-inch-high mohawks in five different colors. They had dyed, shaved, and put powerful fixatives in their hair—some used actual glue—and then pretended they couldn't be bothered with their appearance. Against nature—nature had become the moral standard of the previous generation, which went back to the earth, went braless, went for all that Indian cotton and faded embroidered organic-looking stuff. We liked plastic. Or rather, plastic expressed us, and we didn't necessarily like it or ourselves. If the hippies had had insincere naturalness—all those neck rubs and ethnic appropriations—we had earnest artifice. Think of it as clippers shearing away all the luxuriant fringes and foliage, the occluding moss and dangling tendrils of the post-hippie aesthetic. Style was a statement of ideology as well as aesthetics; punk was profoundly reactive, and the failures and excesses of the post-hippie era gave us plenty to react against.

If the 1960s and early 1970s had been about the removal of barriers—around segregated institutions, around activities like sex, and around emotions—the late 1970s were the reckoning. What had been let loose was not all peace, love, and happiness (which, incidentally, became the charming name of a 1980s Bay Area punk band, better known as PLH).

A cascade of angst, fury, and violence had been let loose. "Ask not what you can do for your country," shouted Penelope Houston of the Avengers, one of San Francisco's first punk bands, "but what your country's been doing to you." Looking back thirty years later, I see how much punk was of its time as well as against it. After all, violence and negativity were all around us, and the task was to name it and then maybe tame it. And it did get tamed, one way and another. Some punk turned into hardcore; some punks turned into the activists that made the overlooked 1980s a radical decade to rival the 1960s (and improve upon it, a lot, when it came to internal politics).

DEVOLUTION

Punk rock was born in the ruins, the ruins of industrial America, but also the ruins of the utopian hubris of the 1960s, which was self-destructing pretty spectacularly then. Synanon, for example, had started in Southern California in the late 1950s as a drug rehabilitation program. Rather than cycle people through, however, it acquired members and kept them. Members played "the game," in which people confronted each other about their weaknesses and told each other harsh truths or just nasty opinions. Perhaps that was the origin of the counterculture notion that all truth was a gift, that to say even the ugliest thing was to be honest, a virtue aligned with naturalness and authenticity. (I just want to share with you that your body is really repulsive to me; I hope you're grateful I'm so honest.) By the 1970s, Synanon had become a cult.

In 1976, cult leader Chuck Dederich decided that all men in Synanon should have vasectomies; female members were, according to some reports, coerced to have abortions. In 1977 the vasectomies became mandatory for all men, except for Dederich, and hundreds underwent the procedure. Violence was already institutionalized there. For example, the minors the state sent them to reform were placed in "punk squads" and beaten for infractions. (The word *punk* originally meant either a sort of jailhouse concubine or a juvenile delinquent; Synanon was not reflecting the contemporary music scene.) An arsenal built up. Perhaps Synanon's most durable legacy is all the brutal boot camps for reforming or subduing teenagers around the

country, along with Dederich's slogan: "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." The leader of what had begun as a drug rehab program began drinking, and things got crazier.

Richard Nixon's paranoia was legendary, but it was everywhere in the 1970s. Dederich said:

Our religious posture is: Don't mess with us—you can get killed dead, literally dead. We will make the rules. I see nothing frightening about it. . . . I am quite willing to break some lawyer's legs and next break his wife's legs and threaten to cut their child's arm off. That is the end of that lawyer. That is a very satisfactory, humane way of transmitting information. . . . I really do want an ear in a glass of alcohol on my desk.

People who left the cult were sometimes beaten up. One came home to find his dog had been hung. Lawyer Paul Morantz had helped some members leave and get their children out, a task he knew was so dangerous he asked the state attorney general for protection. When he came home from that meeting, he reached into the mailbox attached to his front door and was bitten by a rattlesnake that had had its rattles removed. It took eighteen vials of antivenom to save his life.

That rattlesnake in the mailbox—is that what the 1960s had become? What had begun as one of a host of idealistic and innovative projects during the previous era had gone off the deep end. Nature, which was supposed to be the great touchstone ideal, had been turned into a particularly malicious weapon against a threat to the absolutist power of this tiny kingdom. Authoritarian leaders and strange cults proliferated. "Only the dregs of the counterculture movement—the hangers-on, the junkies, the derelicts, the freaks, and the weirdos—were anywhere in evidence," Patty Hearst said of Berkeley in the early 1970s, when she was a college student there, just before she was kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army.

The violent extremism and conspiracy theories that have been the property of the American right since the 1990s belonged to the left in that long-ago era.

Mark Rudd, in his memoir of being a member of the Weathermen and then a fugitive from 1970 to 1977, writes,

Seeking to emulate the revolutionaries we admired in Cuba, China, and especially Vietnam, we convinced ourselves that violence would be successful in this country. We saw the black-power movement, led by the Panthers, already fighting a revolutionary war from within the United States. In our heroic fantasy, eventually the military would disintegrate internally and the revolutionary army—led by us, of course—would be built from its defectors. But as I postured and gave speeches on the necessity for violence, I was terrified.

Synanon had the Game; the Weathermen adapted the Chinese Communist criticism/self-criticism model into collective attacks on individuals for being bourgeois or counterrevolutionary or a host of other sins: it was revolution as sibling rivalry and peer pressure. The Peoples Temple also included public interrogations and confessions that often ended, by the mid-1970s, with beatings and humiliation. Some of the Weather Underground supported the Symbionese Liberation Army; Rudd considered the SLA “true terrorists without any limits or any sense. They claimed they were acting for the liberation of black people, but actions such as the assassination of Marcus Foster, the first black Oakland school superintendent, or their spraying with bullets a bank lobby filled with customers could only be interpreted as terroristic.” These small groups were to real revolutions what air guitar is to music; they imitated some of the form and never got near the content. They had weapons, titles, rhetoric, and delusions, but not much else.

When the SLA kidnapped newspaper heiress Hearst, she was first of all an audience for their delusions of grandiosity—the flipside of paranoia. Donald DeFreeze, aka “General Field Marshal Cinque Mtume,” the ex-convict African-American leader of the cult, described to his captive a powerful nationwide army he headed. It was only months later that Hearst was told that the SLA was made up merely of the handful of delusionaries camped out with her in the same small fetid apartment. The SLA’s hostage gave them colossal media coverage, and they gloried in it. “I was their passport to fame and popularity,” Hearst noted in her memoir.

“Death to the fascist insect that preys upon the life of the people”

was the tagline in the SLA’s communiqués. The SLA used a communal toothbrush, because private property was bourgeois. While Hearst lived blindfolded in a closet, they fed her on mung beans and rice—the food of the poor, she was told—and peppermint tea, which was most certainly the drink of hippies. Once she joined, she was told that to meet each others’ sexual needs was “comradely,” and so a bunch of young women who thought of themselves as feminist made themselves available on demand to the men in the group. Hearst didn’t get much sympathy afterward.

On the A side of her first recording in 1974, underwritten by Robert Mapplethorpe’s patron/lover Sam Wagstaff, protopunk New Yorker Patti Smith remade the old standard “Hey Joe”—the one that goes “Hey Joe, where you goin’ with that gun in your hand.” In a spoken-word piece tagged on, she said, “Patty Hearst, you’re standing there in front of the Symbionese Liberation Army flag with your legs spread I was wondering will you get it every night from a black revolutionary man and his women.”

THE ARC OF JUSTICE

Even failure has interesting consequences. The first ransom demand the SLA had made was that the Hearsts feed the poor. Their original demands would have cost \$400 million, which was out of reach, even for a major newspaper magnate. The Black Panthers—despised by the SLA in that golden age of infighting—had run little-remembered, extremely effective programs to feed Oakland kids for a few years. The food program set up by the coerced Randolph Hearst was run out of the old Del Monte building in China Basin, in San Francisco’s industrial east.

Calvin Welch, who had already been a housing activist in San Francisco for a long time, writes of the far-reaching consequences of that program. Hearst’s father tried just dumping groceries: “It was a disorganized disaster. Scores of people were injured as panicked workers threw boxes of food off moving trucks as huge crowds of people unexpectedly showed up for the food. The size of the crowds shocked the media and so upset Gov. Ronald Reagan that he stated, ‘It’s just too bad we can’t have an epidemic of botulism.’”

The SLA responded by demanding that food distribution be managed

by a community organization named the Western Addition Project Area Committee. WAPAC had ties both to Jim Jones's Peoples Temple and to the Black Liberation Army. According to one biographer of Jones, one of the BLA/Peoples Temple leaders involved in WAPAC had helped torture to death a member of the Panthers—which is to say that it was all tangled up in the mess that was the 1970s. Nevertheless, the Western Addition group was heading back into useful community politics. The sheer modesty and practicality of WAPAC's endeavors forms an instructive contrast with the SLA. The course of action didn't lead to revolution as it was imagined then, but it did lay the groundwork for decades of radical change.

First they handed out more than 100,000 bags of groceries at sixteen locations in four Bay Area counties. The program ran efficiently, and the Community Coalition morphed into the Coalition to Register 100,000 Voters, and those voters elected progressive Mayor George Moscone and helped return the city to district elections (whereby neighborhoods would elect their own representatives rather than vote in citywide races for supervisors; this was the shift that made Harvey Milk's 1977 victory possible.) Welch writes of this organizing coalition:

Within two years, some had begun the creation of community-based non-profit housing development corporations, building affordable housing for many of the people in those long lines seeking free food. Others went on to transform the urban environmental movement in San Francisco, redirecting it toward limiting high-rise development and demanding developer payments for child care and public transit. The "neighborhood movement" that dominated the political agenda of San Francisco through the early 1990s was born during those two insane months in 1974.

"The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice," Martin Luther King had said in 1963, and what began as the madness of the SLA ended with the civil, public, inclusive campaign of Harvey Milk (who was opposed by some in the Castro District as a compromiser, as one who would turn the queer sexual revolution into mere reform). Milk was both a visionary and a moderate, one who defended small businesses and cared about city policy, and who saw that what seemed like an outrageous

agenda—the acceptance of gays and lesbians within the mainstream—would open the door for their ordinariness. The tape he made to be played in case of his assassination was the opposite of paranoid: it was practical, naming his preferred successors, asking that there be no violence, and ending with "You gotta give 'em hope."

NO MORE HEROES

A few other things that mattered began the year Milk was elected. The Abalone Alliance, whose name was inspired by New England's antinuclear Clamshell Alliance, began protesting Diablo Canyon Power Plant on the central California coast. At the August 7, 1977, demonstration against the poorly designed nuclear reactor, 1,500 people showed up; a year later 5,000 people showed up. By 1981, there was a large and effective antinuclear movement—focused then on the dangers of nuclear power (confirmed by another 1970s disaster, the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant near-meltdown in 1979).

This movement was organized by anarchist means—without hierarchy or authority—with consensus-based decision-making. Radicals were learning to self-govern without charismatic leaders or coercion, in a shift initiated in large part by feminists. Anarchy became the politics of punk, and punk became the gateway through which a generation decided to embrace anarchism. Abalone Alliance and the activism that came after was committed to nonviolence and worked openly, which undid much of the paranoia of the 1970s. This non-authoritarian and largely nonviolent means of organizing is still central to radical movements everywhere—including Britain, Eastern Europe, India, and Argentina—that have done much to change the world in the last few decades, picking up from the 1960s civil rights movement, the half of that decade that actually worked well.

Those smitten with the conventional notion of revolution had hung onto the notion of vanguards. They believed in the idea that the few would lead the many; thus a lot of college students without a clue of how to get along with the proletariat fantasized that they would bring it into armed revolt. The idea of vanguards—or avant-gardes—had been important in the art world too. A military term presuming linear narra-

tive, the phrase suggests humanity as an army of sorts that someone was leading forward.

If the 1970s accomplished anything, it was the realization that we actually wanted to go in a lot of different directions, not one. We never had been anything as neatly assembled and homogenized as an army, and we shouldn't trust leaders. This meant, for art and for revolution, no more avant-gardes, though there might be prophetic and influential elements in both culture and politics. In 1977, the Stranglers released what might be the most anthemic of punk songs, "No More Heroes." Heroes were leaders; leaders begot followers; following was demonstrated to be literally fatal and otherwise troublesome in that era in which so many followed their leaders down strange and malevolent paths.

To go to or stay in California had always meant to choose to be outside the mainstream, the orthodoxy, to choose other influences and a less Eurocentric point of view. This could mean cults, but it more often meant a little useful distance, literally and otherwise, from the status quo at the center of cultural power. You were further from the culture police—that's why a painter like David Park could drive all his abstract expressionist paintings to the dump in 1949 and begin to paint in the style that would be called Bay Area Figurative. Artists such as Bruce Conner and Jess made a conscious choice to stay outside the market and the mainstream by settling in California and abandoning the reigning aesthetics.

In the 1970s, the art world would go "pluralist," which means only that New York abandoned its dominant narrative of an avant-garde and admitted to the variety of artists and directions that had always been there. While race was talked about by the New York-based national media as though it were a black/white division well into the 1990s, Californians had, since the Gold Rush, inhabited a region where indigenous, Asian, and Latino presences mattered. To be in California was to braid together various possibilities and to unravel the main thread. Further away from Europe and the notion of an elite white lineage, those under the big black sun of the Golden State were closer to all sorts of fecund things—Asian, Latin, and indigenous traditions; esoteric subcultures and the burgeoning countercultures of Buddhists, bikers, communes, foodies, druggies, Dig-

gers, and more—as well as to the vastness of deserts and mountains, the untamed landscape.

More of what began as 1960s revolution became part of everyday life. Communes mostly failed, but organic farming, food co-ops, and attention to food as politics, health, and pleasure spread. Arenas like health care were democratized (a comment that only makes sense to those who know that before feminists took on the medical establishment in the 1970s, doctors were autocratic figures who made decisions for you, including whether you should know your diagnosis and prognosis). Queer people advanced astonishingly in both legal standing and cultural acceptance. The conservative movement has made its own inroads, particularly in the economic organization of the country, but the genies of reproductive rights, women's rights, queer rights, and the rights of people of color are not going back into any bottle. The SLA's food program failed; Milk was assassinated; many visible projects failed; many subterranean forces moved onward; everything changed. In the 1970s, many things blew up spectacularly (and sometimes literally), but a lot of seeds were quietly planted.

"You can go your own way," sang L.A.-based British émigré band Fleetwood Mac in 1977, the year that the Avengers sang an ironic "We Are the One." Music was unraveling into several strands that year when hip-hop was being born in the Bronx. In his 1977 hit "Disco Heat," San Francisco queer black disco king Sylvester sang, "Dancing's total freedom / Be yourself and choose your feeling." The 1970s were as generative as they were terrible.

CONCRETE IN PARADISE

Some Pictures of Coastal California

Et in Arcadia Ego, says the famous inscription on the tomb in Nicolas Poussin's paintings of that title. Even in Paradise there am I. He twice painted a group of shepherds and a woman who looks like a goddess standing around a tomb in a pastoral setting, as though he were wrestling with the meanings himself. The phrase was sometimes thought to be spoken by death itself: even in Arcadia death is present. Other interpretations suggest that it is instead spoken by the dead shepherd whose tomb is being inspected. Whether the text refers to death itself or to one dead friend, the tomb is two kinds of intrusion into the landscape.

One, often remarked on, is mortality in a beautiful landscape. But *growing* is always also dying, even in Arcadia, even in springtime, where the new grass pushes through the old, where the trees and flowers feed on the soil made out of life and digested deaths, where mortality itself, of lambs and shepherds alike, gives it the poignancy that heaven lacks. And Poussin's Arcadia is a little rough and rustic, not tender shoots, but lean trees and, in the distance, sharp crags. What isn't remarked on often is the architectural intrusion of the big, heavy, rectilinear stone monument in the landscape, a trace of industry, of a labor far harder than herding, of altering the material world, of making stone itself work for men and their intentions, and of making something permanent in a landscape of change.

We have our own tombs throughout the coastal San Francisco Bay Area, each of which could readily be inscribed *et in Arcadia ego*. Even in the paradises I have hiked so often, there is, along with the smell of coastal sage and the sea shining silver or green or gray to the horizon or not shining at all on foggy days, death, in the form of deer carcasses, the pellets of coyote, and fox spoor in which the fur of mice and rabbits is compressed,

squashed salamanders, and countless vultures soaring and swinging around the hills on the lookout for carrion. And every spring's green grass turns gold and then gray. The ordinary realm of natural death is present one way or another in every landscape. But there is also the violent death of war, in thought if not in deed, commemorated in the seventy or so bunker complexes whose blunt concrete forms are an apt modern echo of that shepherd's tomb.

There they are, along the beaches, roads, and the trails of this superlatively beautiful landscape, to be stumbled upon by hikers and day-trippers, who will stop for a moment like Poussin's shepherds to contemplate monuments and death. The bunkers were becoming outdated as they were being built, and so they were becoming monuments to a particular imagination of danger and fear even as they were erected. And in a way, they are honorable monuments to the idea that wars would involve direct confrontation and that the United States would face the dangers it imposed on other nations. Soldiers sat in them waiting for ships to appear on the horizon and waiting to receive orders to fire on those ships and to be fired upon. It has not turned out that way, however.

"We are here because wars are now fought in outer space," said Headlands Center for the Arts director Jennifer Dowley in the 1980s, when the center was still a fresh arrival in what was a fairly new national park, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), and the Star Wars missile defense system was being actively pursued not far away, at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. The park is unusual because it's a large amount of open space—almost 75,000 acres—in one of the major metropolitan areas in the country. It's also unusual because its focus is neither historical nor natural but an uneasy melding of the two. The history is rarely examined, though its evidence is everywhere in the chunks of concrete embedded throughout the landscape of the park. These are the dozens of bunkers and related structures, crumbling souvenirs of the wars that never were, or that were elsewhere. And yet, war is here in a thousand ways. Even in the headlands there is war.

Dowley spoke in Building 944, a spacious military barracks built in 1907, when the Headlands was an extension of the Pacific headquarters of

the U.S. Army across the Golden Gate at San Francisco's Presidio and Fort Mason. From those headquarters U.S. military action was directed, from the Indian Wars to the Korean and Vietnam Wars; during the Second World War alone, more than a million soldiers were said to have embarked from Fort Mason for the Pacific theater of war. The barracks and the other handsome buildings arrayed in a horseshoe tucked into a valley in the Headlands were used for housing and training soldiers who'd be deployed elsewhere. The Bay Area has always been militarized, always involved with wars, though the actual wars have been, since the 1860s, fought elsewhere.

If you walk down Building 944's worn, handsome wooden staircase and out the big doors and head west, past the old bowling alley and chapel, the eucalyptuses and the Monterey cypresses, you come to the Nike missile launch site tucked into a depression that the road curves around. It was designed to fire nuclear-tipped weapons at incoming missiles, but by that time the targets were imagined as incoming intercontinental ballistic missiles fired from overseas. In the 1950s the threat was thought to be Russia, but by the late 1960s the nuclear war fantasies that generated the preventative architecture and weapons included China, and the idea that a missile could take out a missile was itself something of a fantasy. There was no particular reason to situate missile depots directly on the coast. The Marin County Planning Department put together a staff report in 1969 (probably written by my father) that wondered "whether the probable risk of accident isn't greater than the probable risk from the kind of attack these missiles are supposed to defend against." Fortunately, neither accident nor attack ever came before the warheads were taken away. What remains are industrial structures surrounded by cyclone fencing.

50 | So ignore the Nike facility and keep walking. You can take the narrow, uneven trail that takes you through tall green banks of willows, coyote bush, brambles, and poison oak, on past the lagoon that the pelicans, ducks, seagulls and other birds frequent, to the sand of Rodeo Beach, the cove beyond the lagoon, and between two high shoulders of coastline. If you go left, or south, you'll come to the bunkers. If you go north, you'll pass the many buildings of Fort Cronkhite and arrive at the old road that leads to more bunkers. They are embedded in the landscape like shrapnel

or buckshot in a body, the ruins of old fears and old versions of war, the architecture of a violence that was first of all a violence against the earth, with concrete poured dozens of feet deep into slopes that were also home to rare species and prone to erosion when disrupted.

These welts of concrete have shifted, cracked, crumbled, and in some cases slid down eroded hillsides into the surf, but the majority of them are still in place. If you imagine them as an assault on the earth, then the earth has fought back, with foliage that has half-hidden and choked some of them, with the forces of water and temperature that forced cracks in the massive structures, with erosion that has dislodged and tilted some at crazy angles. But they have a harsh beauty of their own, in the simple geometry of the domes and semicircular walls and cylindrical pits of the gun emplacements, in the steps that take you up to the roofs of some of the structures, and particularly in the long tunnels that frame views of land, sea, and sky.

They have the shapes of art-school exercises in drawing cubes, spheres, cones, and cylinders with shading, and they are the color of old pencil sketches. Poussin with his passion for simple monumental form would have loved them, though he would have inscribed them all "et in Arcadia ego" lest the hasty hiker miss the point. And they have the seduction of all ruins, the seduction of the past, of lost history, of irrecoverable time, of the sense that something happened here and then ceased. In Poussin's landscape it's the tomb, not the trees, that invites contemplation. It's only when you imagine the dreary discomfort of soldiers stationed in them, the actual big guns that pointed toward the bay, and what a war might have looked like on these shores, whether like the bombardment of Fort Sumner at the beginning of the Civil War or the Normandy Invasion toward the end of the Second World War, that the romance diminishes. Or does it?

As Dowley put it, wars are now fought in outer space. A nation under attack is usually attacked inside its national borders. Troops may surge across a border, as they did at the outset of both of the Bush wars on Iraq—across their border, not ours—but both of those were accompanied by the aerial bombardment that goes far inside the country. And aerial bombardment is often directed at civilians. Thus war from Mussolini's bombing

of North Africa and the Fascist bombing of Guernica became profoundly asymmetrical. The old idea of a confrontation between two sides is blown away; in its place is an attacker who cannot be attacked directly, though the blows can be parried.

Missiles and more monstrous new inventions like pilotless drones are even directed from afar, often from within the attacking nation. Afghanistan cannot fire missiles back at the headquarters of the drone operators near Las Vegas, Nevada, though in the all-out nuclear wars imagined during the Cold War era, both the United States and the USSR would send nuclear bombs to strategic targets, military and civilian, within the other nation's boundaries while trying to intercept the incoming missiles. The heroic idea of combat, of bodily skill and equal engagement, of Achilles or Roland or even Wellington and Grant facing risk with physical courage, has some relevance to the ground troops in some places, but nothing to do with the death rained from the skies by these men whose daily lives more resemble those of video gamers. The bunkers are, among other things, an old daydream of an enemy you would face, one who could only hurt you by confronting you, by showing up.

They were built to defend us from wars that never quite arrived on these shores. Central California has been attacked by foreigners a few times, starting with invading Spanish and Mexican attacks on the Native peoples, which consisted largely of skirmishes and one-sided brutalities. (The big campaigns against the Native Californians were elsewhere and later, run by Yankees in events such as the Modoc War and the Bloody Island Massacre.) The indigenous peoples responded, with attacks on the Missions, raids on ranchos, and other acts of self-defense and survival, including an incursion on Mission San Rafael. Events resembling European war with all its pageantry and weaponry came later, when the Spanish-speaking nominal citizens of Mexico had become part of the population to be invaded and displaced.

52 | Commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones's fleet arrived in Monterey—then the capital of the Mexican province—on October 19, 1842. He demanded surrender and got it without firing a shot. Perhaps the fearsome arsenal of the five ships with a total of 116 big guns convinced the small

Californiano population that resistance would be unpleasant. The next day 150 Marines marched up the hill to the fort, while the bands played "Yankee Doodle." The invasion was premature and based on rumors of British competition for the northernmost portion of Mexico. A couple of days later, Jones withdrew his proclamation and acknowledged Mexican sovereignty before the soldiers dispatched from Los Angeles could make much progress up the coast.

Less than four years later, on June 16, 1846, the Bear Flag Revolt began inland with the attack on Sonoma and the raising of a primitive version of what would become the California state flag. A few weeks into the skirmishes by invading Yankees against resident Mexicans, Army Captain John C. Frémont—one of the few government men involved in the revolt—took twelve men with him on an American ship, the *Moscow*, that sailed south in the Bay to the Presidio of San Francisco. It had been abandoned, and there was no conflict, though there were some squabbles when they marched onward to the hamlet of Yerba Buena and took a few captives. There were larger battles further south as the revolt merged with the war on Mexico, but the Bay Area remained unscathed by major conflict. The newly American region was prepared for defense against coastal attack in the 1850s and 1860s, but the Civil War led to no violence—beyond duels such as the Broderick-Terry duel of 1859—in the locale. The fortifications then and a century later were built for conflicts that never arrived. They are the architecture of grim anticipation, of imagination of things to come that never came.

During the Second World War, there were some grounds to fear Japanese attack. In the wake of the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, seven enemy submarines patrolled the Pacific Coast, but Japan decided against a mainland attack for fear of reprisals. A false alert the following May caused the USS *Colorado* and the USS *Maryland* to sail out from the Golden Gate to defend the coast from attacks that never came. Late in the war, a Japanese fire balloon—a kind of incendiary device that floated across the Pacific—was shot down by a Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighter plane near Santa Rosa with no major damage reported. (Others landed in various places in the American West, and a few inflicted actual damage

and a total of six deaths—of a pregnant woman with her five children, out on a picnic: *et in arcadia*.) War was in the skies, and coastal fortifications were anachronistic.

But the Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighter was made by Lockheed when it was based in Burbank on the fringes of Los Angeles, back when Los Angeles was producing the airplanes to fight the war and the Bay Area was turning out a warship a day in its furiously productive shipyards. If we think of war as combat and casualties, then it has with small exceptions, such as the Ohlone and Miwok resistance to the missions and the land grabs, been fought elsewhere. But if we think of it as a mind-set, an economy, a way of life—a lot of things that add up to a system—then two things become as evident as a thirty-foot-thick chunk of concrete embedded amid the sticky monkey flower and coast sage of the Headlands.

One is that the Bay Area is entrenched in and crucial to this system, with UC Berkeley running the nation's nuclear weapons programs since their inception, with defense contractors such as Lockheed Martin (makers, once upon a time, of the Nike missile) clustered in Silicon Valley, with the ring of old bases around the Bay—Mare Island, Hunter's Point, Alameda, Treasure Island, Hamilton, and the Presidio. The other is that this system is mad. Its madness was perhaps most perfectly manifested in the soldiers or national guardsmen in camouflage who patrolled the Golden Gate Bridge at one phase of the GWOT, the Global War on Terror, a war that in its very name declared hostility not to a group or a nation but to an emotion while seeking—with, for example, heavily armed men in civilian spaces such as Penn Station or the Golden Gate Bridge—to induce that very emotion in the public. That their desert camouflage only made them stand out and that the threats to the bridge were sketchy and remote, while the men with semiautomatic weapons were evident and unnerving, articulates something about war as a state of being. The enemy may be remote, invisible, or even conceptual, but we ourselves as a society devoted to war see ourselves in a thousand mirrors, of which the bunkers are one.

The bunkers were both prophylactics against physical damage by an alien military and part of the damage that is the mind-set of war, the mind-set

that induces fear and suspicion, that countenances sacrifices, destructions, and the willingness to engage in acts of violence, that damages a society before the enemy ever touches it. The military left radioactive waste behind at Hunter's Point Naval Shipyards; dozens of rusting, leaking warships in the Mothball Fleet near Benicia; PCBs at 100,000 times the acceptable level, along with dioxins and other chemicals on Treasure Island; and more. The Headlands and much of the rest of the GGNRA got off lightly, larded only with cement and rust, not with chemicals and radiation. What all these areas have in common is their status as monuments to public expenditure by those in charge of protecting us. There is, for example, the *Sea Shadow*, a stealth ship built at extraordinary expense in the 1980s and then abandoned without ever being used or even useful. The prototype is in the Mothball Fleet. It is a corollary to the lack of money for libraries and schools in towns like Richmond, whose African-American population mostly arrived in World War II for shipyard jobs and stayed even when the economy withered, despite the growth of the Chevron refineries there that have been refining Iraqi crude since early in the war there. Chevron, whose board member Condoleezza Rice became our secretary of state and led us into that war, Rice, who is back at Stanford, Stanford that helped generate Silicon Valley, Silicon Valley that has done so much to develop the new technologies of war. War is everywhere for those who have eyes to see, but in some places it's hard to miss.

It is good that the bunkers are in the beautiful open space of the coast and good that one of the region's native sons, Alex Fradkin, has photographed them so eloquently. They should be there; we should pause amid the myriad pleasures that this Mediterranean climate and protected landscape afford to contemplate the presence of death and our own implication in the business. Until something profound changes in the United States, war will never be far away, and even on the most paradisaical meander we do well to pause and remember this.

CLIMATE CHANGE IS VIOLENCE

If you're poor, the only way you're likely to injure someone is the old traditional way: artisanal violence, we could call it—by hands, by knife, by club, or maybe modern hands-on violence, by gun or by car.

But if you're tremendously wealthy, you can practice industrial-scale violence without any manual labor on your own part. You can, say, build a sweatshop factory that will collapse in Bangladesh and kill more people than any hands-on mass murderer ever did, or you can calculate risk and benefit about putting poisons or unsafe machines into the world, as manufacturers do every day. If you're the leader of a country, you can declare war and kill by the hundreds of thousands or millions. And the nuclear superpowers—the United States and Russia—still hold the option of destroying quite a lot of life on Earth.

So do the carbon barons. But when we talk about violence, we almost always talk about violence from below, not above.

Or so I thought when I received a press release from a climate group announcing that “scientists say there is a direct link between changing climate and an increase in violence.” What the scientists actually said, in a not-so-newsworthy article in *Nature* a few years ago, is that there is higher conflict in the tropics in El Niño years and that perhaps this will scale up to make our age of climate change also an era of civil and international conflict.

The message is that ordinary people will behave badly in an era of intensified climate change. All this makes sense, unless you go back to the premise and note that climate change is itself violence. Extreme, horrific, long-term, widespread violence.

Climate change is anthropogenic—caused by human beings, some

much more than others. We know the consequences of that change: the acidification of oceans and decline of many species in them, the slow disappearance of island nations such as the Maldives, increased flooding, drought, crop failure leading to food-price increases and famine, increasingly turbulent weather. (Think Hurricane Sandy and the recent typhoon in the Philippines and heat waves that kill elderly people by the tens of thousands.)

Climate change is violence.

So if we want to talk about violence and climate change, then let's talk about climate change as violence. Rather than worrying about whether ordinary human beings will react turbulently to the destruction of the very means of their survival, let's worry about that destruction—and their survival. Of course, water failure, crop failure, flooding, and more will lead to mass migration and climate refugees—they already have—and this will lead to conflict. Those conflicts are being set in motion now.

You can regard the Arab Spring, in part, as a climate conflict: the increase in wheat prices was one of the triggers for that series of revolts that changed the face of northernmost Africa and the Middle East. On the one hand, you can say, how nice if those people had not been hungry in the first place. On the other, how can you not say, how great is it that those people stood up against being deprived of sustenance and hope? And then you have to look at the systems that created that hunger—the enormous economic inequalities in places such as Egypt and the brutality used to keep down the people at the lower levels of the social system, as well as the weather.

People revolt when their lives are unbearable. Sometimes material reality creates that unbearableness: droughts, plagues, storms, floods. But food and medical care, health and well-being, access to housing and education—these things are also governed by economic means and government policy. That's what the revolt called Occupy Wall Street was against.

Climate change will increase hunger as food prices rise and food production falters, but we already have widespread hunger on Earth, and much of it is due not to the failures of nature and farmers, but to systems of distribution. Almost 16 million children in the United States now live with

hunger, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and that is not because the vast, agriculturally rich United States cannot produce enough to feed all of us. We are a country whose distribution system is itself a kind of violence.

Climate change is not suddenly bringing about an era of equitable distribution. I suspect people will be revolting in the coming future against what they revolted against in the past: the injustices of the system. They should revolt, and we should be glad they do, if not so glad that they need to. (Though one can hope they'll recognize that violence is not necessarily where their power lies.) One of the events prompting the French Revolution was the failure of the 1788 wheat crop, which made bread prices skyrocket and the poor go hungry. The insurance against such events is often thought to be more authoritarianism and more threats against the poor, but that's only an attempt to keep a lid on what's boiling over; the other way to go is to turn down the heat.

The same week during which I received that ill-thought-out press release about climate and violence, Exxon Mobil Corporation issued a policy report. It makes for boring reading, unless you can make the dry language of business into pictures of the consequences of those acts undertaken for profit. Exxon says, "We are confident that none of our hydrocarbon reserves are now or will become 'stranded.' We believe producing these assets is essential to meeting growing energy demand worldwide."

Stranded assets that mean carbon assets—coal, oil, gas still underground—would become worthless if we decided they could not be extracted and burned in the near future. Because scientists say that we need to leave most of the world's known carbon reserves in the ground if we are to go for the milder rather than the more extreme versions of climate change. Under the milder version, countless more people, species, and places will survive. In the best-case scenario, we damage the Earth less. We are currently wrangling about how much to devastate the Earth.

58 | In every arena, we need to look at industrial-scale and systemic violence, not just the hands-on violence of the less powerful. When it comes to climate change, this is particularly true. Exxon has decided to bet that we can't make the corporation keep its reserves in the ground, and the

company is reassuring its investors that it will continue to profit off the rapid, violent, and intentional destruction of the Earth.

That's a tired phrase, the destruction of the Earth, but translate it into the face of a starving child and a barren field—and then multiply that a few million times. Or just picture the tiny bivalves: scallops, oysters, Arctic sea snails that can't form shells in acidifying oceans right now. Or another superstorm tearing apart another city. Climate change is global-scale violence against places and species, as well as against human beings. Once we call it by name, we can start having a real conversation about our priorities and values. Because the revolt against brutality begins with a revolt against the language that hides that brutality.

2014

DRY LANDS

The Colorado River and Hydrological Madness of the West

The supply of stories has perhaps been the American West's only reliable bounty. The difficult thing has been finding people to notice them, let alone tell them well. The Indian wars, still unfinished as tribes continue to struggle for rights, territory, and cultural survival; the resource rushes, the Gold Rush in particular, which turned San Francisco into a cosmopolitan city standing alone in the wilderness; the once astonishingly abundant salmon runs that sustained soil and trees, as well as birds, bears, and humans; the timber wars; the rangeland wars; the radical labor and environmental movements; the attitudes people adopted toward a harsh, unfamiliar, often-sublime landscape; the evolution of European cultures in a non-European terrain; and the arrival of Asian and Latin American immigrants to shape a hybrid culture: all these have had their occasional historians, though most Americans were raised to believe that history happened somewhere else. The San Francisco Public Library has an overflowing case of books on the East's Civil War, but only a handful on the war that transferred a million square miles or so of Mexico to the United States, including California and most of what we now call the West.

The central thread in this story of the West is the story of the Colorado River and the attempts to determine what dreams it licenses and which must be left unwatered as it snakes through much of the major nonfiction of the West. The river begins in Colorado with tributaries reaching up into Wyoming, and they gather force and volume as they rush through the magnificent canyons they carved in Utah and Arizona, through Nevada's southern tip and down California's backside to—well, thanks to Yankee rapacity, the river doesn't usually reach the Gulf of California or water much of Mexico anymore. It's the story of the intermountain West: could

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it be domesticated for agriculture and settlement, or would its inhabitants become feral, nomadic peoples scattered lightly in a belt of un-European terrain that would divide the West Coast from the sedentary, verdant East? It's the story of the Hoover Dam and the rise of the extraordinary hydraulic engineering that since the 1920s has come to alter the world from Iceland to India, largely for the worse. Of the rise of industrial tourism as the Grand Canyon became part of the railroad-based restaurant and hotel empire of Fred Harvey. Of the rise of the modern environmental movement: the evolution of ideas about landscape, aesthetics, the public good, and the battles between a boomtown, resource-rush mentality and a minority more interested in long-term planning.

And it's the story of the rise of the big cities of the Southwest, notably Phoenix and Las Vegas, whose optimism is inscribed in their names (the immortal bird whose name will surely become ironic during the course of this century and the *vegas*, or meadows, watered by an aquifer that Vegas sucked dry early in its short history). And of the City of Angels, whose situation is not quite as precarious as that of the desert towns, but whose thirst has long outstripped its regional resources and reached the Colorado River, far to its east.

T. S. Eliot's Mississippi was a "strong brown god." The Colorado River is more like a ruddy writhing serpent. Or was, since the snake has now been chopped into segments by dams, notably by Glen Canyon Dam above the Grand Canyon and Hoover Dam south of Vegas, each with a gigantic reservoir backed up behind it. Even its red color, its *colorado*, has changed; the sandstone sediment settles behind Glen Canyon Dam, and what was once a hot red river emerges as a cool green one, too cool for many of its species of endangered fish. Occasionally a thunderstorm over a tributary sends down enough sediment to turn it red again for a day or two. Along the way, the river is grabbed and squeezed for water to make the cities explode in the dry lands and to allow the endless arid-land agriculture to produce iceberg lettuces and rice and alfalfa and cotton fields, though in some of those places there is hardly enough rainfall to raise an agave plant.

The water is heavily subsidized so that farmers—mostly large-scale agribusiness enterprises, not Jeffersonian yeomen—can also collect subsi-

dies to grow stuff that would grow better in lush places elsewhere. Eighty percent of the Colorado River's water goes to agriculture. Twenty percent of California's agricultural water goes to grow low-value alfalfa. The river, in its climate change-driven decline, will strangle all these projects and make a mockery of the two great dams and the reservoirs that were once signs of triumph over it and over nature. The reservoirs and dams are failing now, long on silt, short on water, products of the shortsightedness that has made the West a place littered with projects that seemed like a good idea at the time.

No one holds a monopoly, but Americans have proved very good at junk science. It's a specialty field, in which the claims about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, aluminum "centrifuge" tubes and the like, are only the most widely noted. The Panglossian "rain follows the plow" was the motto used to dispatch hapless would-be farmers to the arid lands of the American West, where rainfall is inadequate to raise crops, and irrigation started as a corruption racket and ended up as an environmental disaster. Its agenda is short-term convenience. Its methodology is lies. An atmospheric scientist once told me that he had checked Edward Teller's projections of the amount of fallout that would reach Americans during the years of above-ground nuclear testing in southern Nevada. The great genius had somehow left off some zeros, reducing the impact a hundred- or a thousandfold, while other scientists created arbitrary standards of exposure safety and schoolchildren were taught to duck and cover to protect themselves from atomic blasts. Scientific facts about the environment—water flow, radioactive half-lives, principles of containment, et cetera—were juggled until they could be used to justify the dumping of nuclear waste near the atomic test site.

Junk science might be too generous a label for the way conclusions have been reached about the water of the Colorado River—how much there is and how much and how securely it can change the arid landscape around it. The water has transformed that landscape. Without it, Arizona and southern Nevada would still be barely populated, and a lot of the agriculture in the Southwest wouldn't exist. But the supply was always precarious and overcommitted, and it is already running out. Water limitations were

noticed from the beginning, when Major John Wesley Powell and his crew became the first white men to float down the Colorado. Powell's 1875 *Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons*, an expansion of his magazine reports, is still in print. It is a gorgeous book about adventure, geology, anthropology, and hydrology, with illustrations carrying captions like "The Great Unconformity at the Head of the Grand Canyon" and chapters such as "From Flaming Gorge to the Gate of Lodore." But it was the sobering *A Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States, with a More Detailed Account of the Lands of Utah* of 1878 that makes Powell matter even today. A Civil War veteran and government explorer, he saw that there wasn't enough water to irrigate people's visions of a big agricultural society and that the limits on water would ultimately be the limit on everything else. Ignoring Powell has been the basis of almost everything that has come since, except the literature on the river, which Powell presides over as a kind of god.

James Lawrence Powell's *Dead Pool: Lake Powell, Global Warming, and the Future of Water in the West* tells the story of the Colorado well and moves it forward to speculate on what the era of climate change will bring. He isn't optimistic—in his account, climate change is just one more factor that the engineers and hydrologists who are responsible for plotting the river's fate refuse to face. He begins with two crises at Glen Canyon Dam—one of a sudden abundance of water that nearly destroyed the dam in the 1980s, and another in 2005, when the water level fell lower than the official scientists had calculated it would ever go. (A disaster for water managers, it was a miracle for explorers, who got to see canyons and cliff faces that were thought to have been lost forever.) *Dead Pool* then doubles back to begin the story at the beginning, with Major Powell and his warnings on the finitude of the Southwest's water:

To a man of Powell's principles and background, that his nation encouraged thousands of poor farmers to move to lands so dry that the settlers were bound to fail was a tragedy. He would spend most of the rest of his career trying to save them from that fate. . . . By March 1888 one of Powell's scientific facts was undeniable: the West had too little water to irrigate all

the land. To collect and best use what water did exist would require a system of dams and reservoirs.

Building those dams and reservoirs would, in theory, be a cooperative enterprise; in practice, it was a big-government project for the benefit of Westerners who for the most part considered themselves individualists and independents. This delusion of self-sufficiency, along with the fantasy that enough water could be found to supply the region, launched the eco-tragedy now unfolding.

Toward the end of his book, Powell points out that the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has decided not to take climate change into account when planning water management and allocation for the twenty-first century. Instead, it has been basing its projections on what we now know was the unusually wet twentieth century. No shortage, no problems to plan for. The author points out that climate change is not something that *may happen* to the American West or that is now happening only in the Arctic. It is here, now. And at the end of *Dead Pool* he describes what a post-climate change Southwest might look like—the book's title, incidentally, is the term used to describe a reservoir when its water level drops too low to feed the intake valves for hydropower generators.

“Mistakes were made” is the locution politicians like to use, and it could be used for a lot of the plans for the Southwest, which have left follies in their wake. The Salton Sea, for example, a little west of the tail end of the Colorado, became the biggest lake in California when it was accidentally created around the time the Tulare Lake was drained into nonexistence. It was the result of an attempt early in the last century to divert a little irrigation water. The whole river raged into the new canal, ripped it into a broad channel, and for two years emptied itself into the low point that in another climatological era had been a lake and now became one again, full of the salts of the desert. Only one force in the West was mighty enough to do battle with the river: the Southern Pacific Railroad (SP), the monster corporation that dominated California politics and land for decades. It took the SP two years to stuff enough rubbish into the gap to send the river back into its usual bed. The Salton Sea is recharged by farm runoff

and other filthy waters; it has become a major bird sanctuary because their old wetland habitat, the delta where the Colorado runs into the sea, has largely dried up. Most of the attempts to develop resorts around the lake have turned into ruins; the most famous site there is Salvation Mountain, a folksy one-man religious complex made of concrete poured a few bags at a time and painted with discarded house paint.

The Salton Sea is already a conundrum, a toxic bird sanctuary in a place where water doesn't belong, and the reservoir-dam systems will go the same way. But not all the strange phenomena that have arisen from the long wrestling match with the Colorado are situated near it. Take the San Francisco-based, family-owned Bechtel Corporation, which is to the United States what the Bin Laden construction firm is to Saudi Arabia—a colossus itself and a maker of colossi. Bechtel emerged from the building of the Hoover Dam to become a major force in reshaping the West and then the world: it is responsible for nuclear power plants and infrastructure for mining in hitherto roadless jungle and for triggering Bolivia's water war earlier this decade when its attempts to privatize Cochabamba's water backfired. And it was one of the more visibly problematic contractors in Bush's Iraq. (The bin Laden family was earlier this decade a “substantial investor,” with \$10 million in a private equity fund owned by Bechtel, but that's another story.)

No one opposed the Hoover Dam, built at the height of the Depression and the height of hope in technology, but Glen Canyon Dam, built thirty years later, was controversial from the outset. Furious about the development, the Sierra Club transformed from a genteel regional mountaineering society into the most powerful environmental group in the country. The canyon that would be dammed was one of the most beautiful places in the Southwest. Although the Sierra Club knew this, it originally signed off on it as a replacement for a dam upstream. But then the club changed its course and began to fight—in vain, ultimately—to save the canyon and the river ecology downstream. Yet the struggle produced soul-searching and rabble-rousing, out of which came the modern environmental movement.

The logic for the dam was hard to find, but the junk science was not: basic errors were made concerning the rate of evaporation (creating a big

lake in a desert entails giving a lot of the water to the sky); cost figures were squirrely; the estimates for how much water the river collects annually were off. In his book, James Lawrence Powell concludes that the dam and Lake Powell exist because a powerful Colorado representative wanted them and because the Bureau of Reclamation “needed new dams to burnish its reputation and justify its funding and staff levels.”

The battle over the damming of Glen Canyon is one of the great epics of twentieth-century America, and out of it came two classics. One was Eliot Porter’s elegiac photographic book, *The Place No One Knew: Glen Canyon on the Colorado*, a book that helped create the genre of color nature photography. The other was by John McPhee, the *New Yorker’s* science writer. *Encounters with the Archdruid* recounts what transpired when McPhee managed to get the dam’s chief advocate, Floyd Dominy, and its bitterest opponent, Porter’s publisher and the Sierra Club’s executive director, David Brower, to float together down the Grand Canyon below the dam, arguing all the way. Neither of them imagined the fate the dam now faces. But others hoped. Two classics, or maybe three. In his 1975 novel, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, the insurrectionary environmental writer Edward Abbey coined the verb “monkey-wrenching” for a certain kind of ecological sabotage: its four central characters plot to float a houseboat full of explosives to the dam. The book helped prompt the formation of the radical environmental group Earth First!, which announced its arrival on the scene in 1981, when some of its founders unfurled a vast line of black plastic resembling a crack down the 700-foot-high face of Glen Canyon Dam. “Surely no man-made structure in modern American history has been so hated for so long by so many with such good reason,” said Abbey, speaking to a crowd in a parking lot with a good view of the dam and the prank. It was Earth First! that came up with the optimistic bumper sticker about all this: “Nature Bats Last.” But Bechtel keeps the profits.

66 | The docks and ramps at both reservoirs have had to be relocated and rebuilt in pursuit of the fleeing waterline, and one dock simply closed. One ramp at Lake Powell grew to 1,300 feet long, another to more than 1,500 feet, new additions to the collection of landscape follies across the American West. Phoenix and Vegas seem fated, the book argues, to become dusty ruins, for the water to sustain them is already vanishing (though

Vegas has a murderous scheme to drain much of the rest of Nevada for its golf courses and casino fountains, to the detriment of rural communities and wildlife). If the lack of water doesn’t get them, climate change might: the author predicts that summer temperatures in the 120s (above 48°C) will be routine in Phoenix. Aridity, he proposes, could well kill off much of the agriculture and two of the biggest cities of the Southwest by the middle of this century. (In California, my local paper reports that a severe drought, now into its third year, is forcing state and federal water agencies to cut water deliveries to farmers in the Central Valley, perhaps the world’s single richest agricultural region, by “85 to 100 percent.” A 100 percent cut would be a death sentence in this Mediterranean climate without rain between May and October.)

“When all the rivers are used, when all the creeks in the ravines, when all the brooks, when all the springs are used, when all the reservoirs along the streams are used, when all the canyon waters are taken up, when all the artesian waters are taken up, when all the wells are sunk or dug that can be dug in all this arid region, there is still not sufficient water to irrigate all this arid region,” Major Powell told an audience gathered in support of large-scale irrigation in Los Angeles in 1893. Booed and shouted down, the major retorted: “I tell you, gentlemen, you are piling up a heritage of conflict and litigation over water rights, for there is not sufficient water to supply these lands.” The day he spoke, Las Vegas did not yet exist; Los Angeles had 50,000 residents, and Phoenix, a tenth of that. The other Powell, the author of *Dead Pool*, confirms that the Earth First! bumper sticker is correct.

The waters that are insufficient for this desert civilization will continue to flow anyway. The river that carved a canyon a mile deep will eventually remove all the concrete in its way and scour out the massive piles of silt built up behind both megadams. The process will be catastrophic at some point, but in geological time, it will mean restoration of the live, continuous river. Long before then, Phoenix will be like Jericho or Ur of the Chaldees, with the shriveled relics of golf courses and the dusty hulls of swimming pools added on. The snake may break up into dead pools in this century, but unlike Phoenix, it will rise again.

By Gary Snyder

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Turtle Island

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Left Out in the Rain

No Nature

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Gary Snyder

COUNTERPOINT
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THE ETIQUETTE OF FREEDOM

The Compact

One June afternoon in the early seventies I walked through the crackly gold grasses to a neat but unpainted cabin at the back end of a ranch near the drainage of the South Yuba in northern California. It had no glass in the windows, no door. It was shaded by a huge Black Oak. The house looked abandoned and my friend, a student of native California literature and languages, walked right in. Off to the side, at a bare wooden table, with a mug of coffee, sat a solid old gray-haired Indian man. He acknowledged us, greeted my friend, and gravely offered us instant coffee and canned milk. He was fine, he said, but he would never go back to a VA hospital again. From now on if he got sick he would stay where he was. He liked being home. We spoke for some time of people and places along the western slope of the northern Sierra Nevada, the territories of Concow and Nisenan people. Finally my friend broke his good news: "Louie, I have found another person who speaks Nisenan." There were perhaps no more than three people alive speaking Nisenan at that time, and Louie was one of them. "Who?" Louie asked. He told her name. "She lives back of

Oroville. I can bring her here, and you two can speak.” “I know her from way back,” Louie said. “She wouldn’t want to come over here. I don’t think I should see her. Besides, her family and mine never did get along.”

That took my breath away. Here was a man who would not let the mere threat of cultural extinction stand in the way of his (and her) values. To well-meaning sympathetic white people this response is almost incomprehensible. In the world of his people, never over-populated, rich in acorn, deer, salmon, and flicker feathers, to cleave to such purity, to be perfectionists about matters of family or clan, were affordable luxuries. Louie and his fellow Nisenan had more important business with each other than conversations. I think he saw it as a matter of keeping their dignity, their pride, and their own ways—regardless of what straits they had fallen upon—until the end.

Coyote and Ground Squirrel do not break the compact they have with each other that one must play predator and the other play game. In the wild a baby Black-tailed Hare gets maybe one free chance to run across a meadow without looking up. There won’t be a second. The sharper the knife, the cleaner the line of the carving. We can appreciate the elegance of the forces that shape life and the world, that have shaped every line of our bodies—teeth and nails, nipples and eyebrows. We also see that we must try to live without causing unnecessary harm, not just to fellow humans but to all beings. We must try not to be stingy, or to exploit others. There will be enough pain in the world as it is.

Such are the lessons of the wild. The school where these lessons can be learned, the realms of caribou and elk, elephant and rhinoceros, orca and walrus, are shrinking day by day. Creatures who have traveled with us through the ages are now apparently doomed,

as their habitat—and the old, old habitat of humans—falls before the slow-motion explosion of expanding world economies. If the lad or lass is among us who knows where the secret heart of this Growth-Monster is hidden, let them please tell us where to shoot the arrow that will slow it down. And if the secret heart stays secret and our work is made no easier, I for one will keep working for wildness day by day.

“Wild and free.” An American dream-phrase loosing images: a long-maned stallion racing across the grasslands, a V of Canada Geese high and honking, a squirrel chattering and leaping limb to limb overhead in an oak. It also sounds like an ad for a Harley-Davidson. Both words, profoundly political and sensitive as they are, have become consumer baubles. I hope to investigate the meaning of *wild* and how it connects with *free* and what one would want to do with these meanings. To be truly free one must take on the basic conditions as they are—painful, impermanent, open, imperfect—and then be grateful for impermanence and the freedom it grants us. For in a fixed universe there would be no freedom. With that freedom we improve the campsite, teach children, oust tyrants. The world is nature, and in the long run inevitably wild, because the wild, as the process and essence of nature, is also an ordering of impermanence.

Although *nature* is a term that is not of itself threatening, the idea of the “wild” in civilized societies—both European and Asian—is often associated with unruliness, disorder, and violence. The Chinese word for nature, *zi-ran* (Japanese *shizen*) means “self-thus.” It is a bland and general word. The word for wild in Chinese, *ye* (Japanese *ya*), which basically means “open country,” has a wide set of meanings: in various combinations the term becomes illicit connection, desert country, an illegitimate child (open-

country child), prostitute (open-country flower), and such. In an interesting case, *ye-man zi-yu* ("open-country southern-tribal-person-freedom") means "wild license." In another context "open-country story" becomes "fiction and fictitious romance." Other associations are usually with the rustic and uncouth. In a way *ye* is taken to mean "nature at its worst." Although the Chinese and Japanese have long given lip service to nature, only the early Daoists might have thought that wisdom could come of wildness.

Thoreau says "give me a wildness no civilization can endure." That's clearly not difficult to find. It is harder to imagine a civilization that wildness can endure, yet this is just what we must try to do. Wildness is not just the "preservation of the world," it *is* the world. Civilizations east and west have long been on a collision course with wild nature, and now the developed nations in particular have the witless power to destroy not only individual creatures but whole species, whole processes, of the earth. We need a civilization that can live fully and creatively together with wildness. We must start growing it right here, in the New World.

When we think of wilderness in America today, we think of remote and perhaps designated regions that are commonly alpine, desert, or swamp. Just a few centuries ago, when virtually *all* was wild in North America, wilderness was not something exceptionally severe. Pronghorn and bison trailed through the grasslands, creeks ran full of salmon, there were acres of clams, and grizzlies, cougar, and bighorn sheep were common in the lowlands. There were human beings, too: North America was *all populated*. One might say yes, but thinly — which raises the question of according to whom. The fact is, people were everywhere. When the Spanish foot soldier Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and his two companions (one of whom was African) were wrecked on the beach of what is now Galveston, and walked to the Rio Grande valley and then

south back into Mexico between 1528 and 1536, there were few times in the whole eight years that they were not staying at a native settlement or camp. They were always on trails.

It has always been part of basic human experience to live in a culture of wilderness. There has been no wilderness without some kind of human presence for several hundred thousand years. Nature is not a place to visit, it is *home* — and within that home territory there are more familiar and less familiar places. Often there are areas that are difficult and remote, but all are *known* and even named. One August I was at a pass in the Brooks Range of northern Alaska at the headwaters of the Koyukuk River, a green three-thousand-foot tundra pass between the broad ranges, open and gentle, dividing the waters that flow to the Arctic Sea from the Yukon. It is as remote a place as you could be in North America, no roads, and the trails are those made by migrating caribou. Yet this pass has been steadily used by Inupiaq people of the north slope and Athapaskan people of the Yukon as a regular north-south trade route for at least seven thousand years.

All of the hills and lakes of Alaska have been named in one or another of the dozen or so languages spoken by the native people, as the researches of Jim Kari (1982; 1985) and others have shown. Euro-American mapmakers name these places after transient exploiters, or their own girlfriends, or home towns in the Lower 48. The point is: it's all in the native story, yet only the tiniest trace of human presence through all that time shows. The place-based stories the people tell, and the naming they've done, is their archaeology, architecture, and *title* to the land. Talk about living lightly.

Cultures of wilderness live by the life and death lessons of subsistence economies. But what can we now mean by the words *wild* and for that matter *nature*? Languages meander like great rivers

leaving oxbow traces over forgotten beds, to be seen only from the air or by scholars. Language is like some kind of infinitely infertile family of species spreading or mysteriously declining over time, shamelessly and endlessly hybridizing, changing its own rules as it goes. Words are used as signs, as stand-ins, arbitrary and temporary, even as language reflects (and informs) the shifting values of the peoples whose minds it inhabits and glides through. We have faith in “meaning” the way we might believe in wolverines—putting trust in the occasional reports of others or on the authority of once seeing a pelt. But it is sometimes worth tracking these tricksters back.

The Words Nature, Wild, and Wilderness

Take *nature* first. The word *nature* is from Latin *natura*, “birth, constitution, character, course of things”—ultimately from *nasci*, to be born. So we have *nation*, *natal*, *native*, *pregnant*. The probable Indo-European root (via Greek *gna*—hence cognate, agnate) is *gen* (Sanskrit *jan*), which provides *generate* and *genus*, as well as *kin* and *kind*.

The word gets two slightly different meanings. One is “the outdoors”—the physical world, including all living things. Nature by this definition is a norm of the world that is apart from the features or products of civilization and human will. The machine, the artifact, the devised, or the extraordinary (like a two-headed calf) is spoken of as “unnatural.” The other meaning, which is broader, is “the material world or its collective objects and phenomena,” including the products of human action and intention. As an agency nature is defined as “the creative and regulative physical power which is conceived of as operating in the material world and

as the immediate cause of all its phenomena.” Science and some sorts of mysticism rightly propose that *everything* is natural. By these lights there is nothing unnatural about New York City, or toxic wastes, or atomic energy, and nothing—by definition—that we do or experience in life is “unnatural.”

(The “supernatural”? One way to deal with it is to say that “the supernatural” is a name for phenomena which are reported by so few people as to leave their reality in doubt. Nonetheless these events—ghosts, gods, magical transformations, and such—are described often enough to make them continue to be intriguing and, for some, credible.)

The physical universe and all its properties—I would prefer to use the word *nature* in this sense. But it will come up meaning “the outdoors” or “other-than-human” sometimes even here.

The word *wild* is like a gray fox trotting off through the forest, ducking behind bushes, going in and out of sight. Up close, first glance, it is “wild”—then farther into the woods next glance it’s “wyld” and it recedes via Old Norse *villr* and Old Teutonic *wilthijaz* into a faint pre-Teutonic *gbweltijos* which means, still, wild and maybe wooded (*wald*) and lurks back there with possible connections to *will*, to Latin *silva* (forest, savage), and to the Indo-European root *gbwer*, base of Latin *ferus* (feral, fierce), which swings us around to Thoreau’s “awful ferity” shared by virtuous people and lovers. The Oxford English Dictionary has it this way:

Of animals— not tame, undomesticated, unruly.

Of plants— not cultivated.

Of land— uninhabited, uncultivated.

Of foodcrops— produced or yielded without cultivation.

Of societies—uncivilized, rude, resisting constituted government.

Of individuals—unrestrained, insubordinate, licentious, dissolute, loose. “Wild and wanton widows”—1614.

Of behavior—violent, destructive, cruel, unruly.

Of behavior—artless, free, spontaneous. “Warble his native wood-notes wild”—John Milton.

Wild is largely defined in our dictionaries by what—from a human standpoint—it is not. It cannot be seen by this approach for what it is. Turn it the other way:

Of animals—free agents, each with its own endowments, living within natural systems.

Of plants—self-propagating, self-maintaining, flourishing in accord with innate qualities.

Of land—a place where the original and potential vegetation and fauna are intact and in full interaction and the landforms are entirely the result of nonhuman forces. Pristine.

Of foodcrops—food supplies made available and sustainable by the natural excess and exuberance of wild plants in their growth and in the production of quantities of fruit or seeds.

Of societies—societies whose order has grown from within and is maintained by the force of consensus and custom rather than explicit legislation. Primary cultures, which consider themselves the original and eternal inhabitants of their territory. Societies which resist economic and political domination by civilization. Societies whose economic system is in a close and sustainable relation to the local ecosystem.

Of individuals—following local custom, style, and etiquette without concern for the standards of the metropolis or nearest

trading post. Unintimidated, self-reliant, independent. “Proud and free.”

Of behavior—fiercely resisting any oppression, confinement, or exploitation. Far-out, outrageous, “bad,” admirable.

Of behavior—artless, free, spontaneous, unconditioned. Expressive, physical, openly sexual, ecstatic.

Most of the senses in this second set of definitions come very close to being how the Chinese define the term *Dao*, the *way* of Great Nature: eluding analysis, beyond categories, self-organizing, self-informing, playful, surprising, impermanent, insubstantial, independent, complete, orderly, unmediated, freely manifesting, self-authenticating, self-willed, complex, quite simple. Both empty and real at the same time. In some cases we might call it sacred. It is not far from the Buddhist term *Dharma* with its original senses of forming and firming.

The word *wilderness*, earlier *wylderness*, Old English *wildeornes*, possibly from “wild-deer-ness” (*deor*, deer and other forest animals) but more likely “wildern-ness,” has the meanings:

A large area of wild land, with original vegetation and wildlife, ranging from dense jungle or rainforest to arctic or alpine “white wilderness.”

A wasteland, as an area unused or useless for agriculture or pasture.

A space of sea or air, as in Shakespeare, “I stand as one upon a Rock, environ’d with a Wilderness of Sea” (*Titus Andronicus*). The oceans.

A place of danger and difficulty: where you take your own chances, depend on your own skills, and do not count on rescue.

This world as contrasted with heaven. "I walked through the wilderness of this world" (*Pilgrim's Progress*).

A place of abundance, as in John Milton, "a wilderness of sweets."

Milton's usage of wilderness catches the very real condition of energy and richness that is so often found in wild systems. "A wilderness of sweets" is like the billions of herring or mackerel babies in the ocean, the cubic miles of krill, wild prairie grass seed (leading to the bread of this day, made from the germs of grasses) — all the incredible fecundity of small animals and plants, feeding the web. But from another side, wilderness has implied chaos, eros, the unknown, realms of taboo, the habitat of both the ecstatic and the demonic. In both senses it is a place of archetypal power, teaching, and challenge.

Wildness

So we can say that New York City and Tokyo are "natural" but not "wild." They do not deviate from the laws of nature, but they are habitat so exclusive in the matter of who and what they give shelter to, and so intolerant of other creatures, as to be truly odd. Wilderness is a *place* where the wild potential is fully expressed, a diversity of living and nonliving beings flourishing according to their own sorts of order. In ecology we speak of "wild systems." When an ecosystem is fully functioning, all the members are present at the assembly. To speak of wilderness is to speak of wholeness. Human beings came out of that wholeness, and to consider the possibility of reactivating membership in the Assembly of All Beings is in no way regressive.

By the sixteenth century the lands of the Occident, the coun-

tries of Asia, and all the civilizations and cities from the Indian subcontinent to the coast of North Africa were becoming ecologically impoverished. The people were rapidly becoming nature-illiterate. Much of the original vegetation had been destroyed by the expansion of grazing or agriculture, and the remaining land was of no great human economic use, "waste," mountain regions and deserts. The lingering larger animals — big cats, desert sheep, serows, and such — managed to survive by retreating to the harsher habitats. The leaders of these civilizations grew up with less and less personal knowledge of animal behavior and were no longer taught the intimate wide-ranging plant knowledge that had once been universal. By way of trade-off they learned "human management," administration, rhetorical skills. Only the most marginal of the *paysan*, people of the land, kept up practical plant and animal lore and memories of the old ways. People who grew up in towns or cities, or on large estates, had less chance to learn how wild systems work. Then major blocks of citified mythology (Medieval Christianity and then the "Rise of Science") denied first soul, then consciousness, and finally even sentience to the natural world. Huge numbers of Europeans, in the climate of a nature-denying mechanistic ideology, were losing the opportunity for direct experience of nature.

A new sort of nature-traveler came into existence: men who went out as resource scouts, financed by companies or aristocratic families, penetrating the lightly populated lands of people who lived in and with the wilderness. Conquistadores and priests. Europe had killed off the wolves and bears, deforested vast areas, and overgrazed the hills. The search for slaves, fish, sugar, and precious metals ran over the edge of the horizon and into Asia, Africa, and the New World. These overrefined and warlike states once more came up against wild nature and natural societies: people

who lived without Church or State. In return for gold or raw sugar, the white men had to give up something of themselves: they had to look into their own sense of what it meant to be a human being, wonder about the nature of hierarchy, ask if life was worth the honor of a king, or worth gold. (A lost and starving man stands and examines the nicked edge of his sword and his frayed Spanish cape in a Florida swamp.)

Some, like Nuño de Guzmán, became crazed and sadistic. "When he began to govern this province, it contained 25,000 Indians, subjugated and peaceful. Of these he has sold 10,000 as slaves, and the others, fearing the same fate, have abandoned their villages" (Todorov, 1985, 134). Cortés, the conqueror of Mexico, ended up a beaten, depressed beggar-to-the-throne. Alvar Núñez, who for eight years walked naked across Texas and New Mexico, came out transformed into a person of the New World. He had rejoined the old ways and was never the same again. He gained a compassionate heart, a taste for self-sufficiency and simplicity, and a knack for healing. The types of both Guzmán and Núñez are still among us. Another person has also walked onto the Noh stage of Turtle Island history to hold hands with Alvar Núñez at the far end of the process—Ishi the Yahi, who walked into civilization with as much desperation as Núñez walked out of it. Núñez was the first European to encounter North America and its native myth-mind, and Ishi was the last Native American to fully know that mind—and he had to leave it behind. What lies between those two brackets is not dead and gone. It is perennially within us, dormant as a hard-shelled seed, awaiting the fire or flood that awakes it again.

In those intervening centuries, tens of millions of North and South American Indians died early and violent deaths (as did countless Europeans), the world's largest mammal herd was extinguished (the bison), and fifteen million Pronghorn disappeared.

The grasslands and their soils are largely gone, and only remnants survive from the original old-growth eastern hardwood and western conifer forests. We all know more items for this list.

It is often said that the frontier gave a special turn to American history. A frontier is a burning edge, a frazzle, a strange market zone between two utterly different worlds. It is a strip where there are pelts and tongues and tits for the taking. There is an almost visible line that a person of the invading culture could walk across: out of history and into a perpetual present, a way of life attuned to the slower and steadier processes of nature. The possibility of passage into that myth-time world had been all but forgotten in Europe. Its rediscovery—the unsettling vision of a natural self—has haunted the Euro-American peoples as they continually cleared and roaded the many wild corners of the North American continent.

Wilderness is now—for much of North America—places that are formally set aside on public lands—Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management holdings or state and federal parks. Some tiny but critical tracts are held by private nonprofit groups like The Nature Conservancy or the Trust for Public Land. These are the shrines saved from all the land that was once known and lived on by the original people, the little bits left as they were, the last little places where intrinsic nature totally wails, blooms, nests, glints away. They make up only 2 percent of the land of the United States.

But wildness is not limited to the 2 percent formal wilderness areas. Shifting scales, it is everywhere: ineradicable populations of fungi, moss, mold, yeasts, and such that surround and inhabit us. Deer mice on the back porch, deer bounding across the freeway, pigeons in the park, spiders in the corners. There were crickets in

the paint locker of the *Sappa Creek* oil tanker, as I worked as a wiper in the engine room out in mid-Pacific, cleaning brushes. Exquisite complex beings in their energy webs inhabiting the fertile corners of the urban world in accord with the rules of wild systems, the visible hardy stalks and stems of vacant lots and railroads, the persistent raccoon squads, bacteria in the loam and in our yogurt. The term *culture*, in its meaning of “a deliberately maintained aesthetic and intellectual life” and in its other meaning of “the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns,” is never far from a biological root meaning as in “yogurt culture”—a nourishing habitat. Civilization is permeable, and could be as inhabited as the wild is.

Wilderness may temporarily dwindle, but wildness won't go away. A ghost wilderness hovers around the entire planet: the millions of tiny seeds of the original vegetation are hiding in the mud on the foot of an arctic tern, in the dry desert sands, or in the wind. These seeds are each uniquely adapted to a specific soil or circumstance, each with its own little form and fluff, ready to float, freeze, or be swallowed, always preserving the germ. Wilderness will inevitably return, but it will not be as fine a world as the one that was glistening in the early morning of the Holocene. Much life will be lost in the wake of human agency on earth, that of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Much is already lost—the soils and waters unravel:

“What's that dark thing in the water?
Is it not an oil-soaked otter?”

Where do we start to resolve the dichotomy of the civilized and the wild?

Do you really believe you are an animal? We are now taught this in school. It is a wonderful piece of information: I have been

enjoying it all my life and I come back to it over and over again, as something to investigate and test. I grew up on a small farm with cows and chickens, and with a second-growth forest right at the back fence, so I had the good fortune of seeing the human and animal as in the same realm. But many people who have been hearing this since childhood have not absorbed the implications of it, perhaps feel remote from the nonhuman world, are not *sure* they are animals. They would like to feel they might be something better than animals. That's understandable: other animals might feel they are something different than “just animals” too. But we must contemplate the shared ground of our common biological being before emphasizing the differences.

Our bodies are wild. The involuntary quick turn of the head at a shout, the vertigo at looking off a precipice, the heart-in-the-throat in a moment of danger, the catch of the breath, the quiet moments relaxing, staring, reflecting—all universal responses of this mammal body. They can be seen throughout the class. The body does not require the intercession of some conscious intellect to make it breathe, to keep the heart beating. It is to a great extent self-regulating, it is a life of its own. Sensation and perception do not exactly come from outside, and the unremitting thought and image-flow are not exactly inside. The world is our consciousness, and it surrounds us. There are more things in mind, in the imagination, than “you” can keep track of—thoughts, memories, images, angers, delights, rise unbidden. The depths of mind, the unconscious, are our inner wilderness areas, and that is where a bobcat is *right now*. I do not mean personal bobcats in personal psyches, but the bobcat that roams from dream to dream. The conscious agenda-planning ego occupies a very tiny territory, a little cubicle somewhere near the gate, keeping track of some of what goes in and out (and sometimes making expansionistic plots),

and the rest takes care of itself. The body is, so to speak, in the mind. They are both wild.

Some will say, so far so good. "We are mammal primates. But we have language, and the animals don't." By some definitions perhaps they don't. But they do communicate extensively, and by call systems we are just beginning to grasp.

It would be a mistake to think that human beings got "smarter" at some point and invented first language and then society. Language and culture emerge from our biological-social natural existence, animals that we were/are. Language is a mind-body system that coevolved with our needs and nerves. Like imagination and the body, language rises unbidden. It is of a complexity that eludes our rational intellectual capacities. All attempts at scientific description of natural languages have fallen short of completeness, as the descriptive linguists readily confess, yet the child learns the mother tongue early and has virtually mastered it by six.

Language is learned in the house and in the fields, not at school. Without having ever been taught formal grammar we utter syntactically correct sentences, one after another, for all the waking hours of the years of our life. Without conscious device we constantly reach into the vast word-hoards in the depths of the wild unconscious. We cannot as individuals or even as a species take credit for this power. It came from someplace else: from the way clouds divide and mingle (and the arms of energy that coil first back and then forward), from the way the many flowerlets of a composite blossom divide and redivide, from the gleaming calligraphy of the ancient riverbeds under present riverbeds of the Yukon River streaming out the Yukon flats, from the wind in the pine needles, from the chuckles of grouse in the ceanothus bushes.

Language teaching in schools is a matter of corralling off a little of the language-behavior territory and cultivating a few favorite

features—culturally defined elite forms that will help you apply for a job or give you social credibility at a party. One might even learn how to produce the byzantine artifact known as the professional paper. There are many excellent reasons to master these things, but the power, the *virtu*, remains on the side of the wild.

Social order is found throughout nature—long before the age of books and legal codes. It is inherently part of what we are, and its patterns follow the same foldings, checks and balances, as flesh or stone. What we call social organization and order in government is a set of forms that have been appropriated by the calculating mind from the operating principles in nature.

The World Is Watching

The world is as sharp as the edge of a knife—a Northwest Coast saying. Now how does it look from the standpoint of peoples for whom there is no great dichotomy between their culture and nature, those who live in societies whose economies draw on uncultivated systems? The pathless world of wild nature is a surpassing school and those who have lived through her can be tough and funny teachers. Out here one is in constant engagement with countless plants and animals. To be well educated is to have learned the songs, proverbs, stories, sayings, myths (and technologies) that come with this experiencing of the nonhuman members of the local ecological community. Practice in the field, "open country," is foremost. Walking is the great adventure, the first meditation, a practice of heartiness and soul primary to humankind. Walking is the exact balance of spirit and humility. Out walking, one notices where there is food. And there are firsthand true stories of "Your ass is somebody else's meal"—a blunt way of saying interdependence, interconnection, "ecology," on the level where it counts, also

a teaching of mindfulness and preparedness. There is an extraordinary teaching of specific plants and animals and their uses, empirical and impeccable, that never reduces them to objects and commodities.

It seems that a short way back in the history of occidental ideas there was a fork in the trail. The line of thought that is signified by the names of Descartes, Newton, and Hobbes (saying that life in a primary society is “nasty, brutish, and short”—all of them city-dwellers) was a profound rejection of the organic world. For a reproductive universe they substituted a model of sterile mechanism and an economy of “production.” These thinkers were as hysterical about “chaos” as their predecessors, the witch-hunt prosecutors of only a century before, were about “witches.” They not only didn’t enjoy the possibility that the world is as sharp as the edge of a knife, they wanted to take that edge away from nature. Instead of making the world safer for humankind, the foolish tinkering with the powers of life and death by the occidental scientist-engineer-ruler puts the whole planet on the brink of degradation. Most of humanity—foragers, peasants, or artisans—has always taken the other fork. That is to say, they have understood the play of the real world, with all its suffering, not in simple terms of “nature red in tooth and claw” but through the celebration of the gift-exchange quality of our give-and-take. “What a big potlatch we are all members of!” To acknowledge that each of us at the table will eventually be part of the meal is not just being “realistic.” It is allowing the sacred to enter and accepting the sacramental aspect of our shaky temporary personal being.

The world is watching: one cannot walk through a meadow or forest without a ripple of report spreading out from one’s passage. The thrush darts back, the jay squalls, a beetle scuttles under the grasses, and the signal is passed along. Every creature knows when

a hawk is cruising or a human strolling. The information passed through the system is intelligence.

In Hindu and Buddhist iconography an animal trace is registered on the images of the Deities or Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Manjusri the Bodhisattva of Discriminating Wisdom rides a lion, Samantabhadra the Bodhisattva of Kindness rides an elephant, Sarasvati the Goddess of Music and Learning rides a peacock, Shiva relaxes in the company of a snake and a bull. Some wear tiny animals in their crowns or hair. In this ecumenical spiritual ecology it is suggested that the other animals occupy spiritual as well as “thermodynamic” niches. Whether or not their consciousness is identical with that of the humans is a moot point. Why should the peculiarities of human consciousness be the narrow standard by which other creatures are judged? “Whoever told people that ‘Mind’ means thoughts, opinions, ideas, and concepts? Mind means trees, fence posts, tiles, and grasses,” says Dōgen (the philosopher and founder of the Sōtō school of Japanese Zen) in his funny cryptic way.

We are all capable of extraordinary transformations. In myth and story these changes are animal-to-human, human-to-animal, animal-to-animal, or even farther leaps. The essential nature remains clear and steady through these changes. So the animal icons of the Inupiaq people (“Eskimos”) of the Bering Sea (here’s the reverse!) have a tiny human face sewn into the fur, or under the feathers, or carved on the back or breast or even inside the eye, peeping out. This is the *inua*, which is often called “spirit” but could just as well be termed the “essential nature” of that creature. It remains the same face regardless of the playful temporary changes. Just as Buddhism has chosen to represent our condition by presenting an image of a steady, solid, gentle, meditating human figure seated in the midst of the world of phenomena, the Inupiaq

would present a panoply of different creatures, each with a little hidden human face. This is not the same as anthropocentrism or human arrogance. It is a way of saying that each creature is a spirit with an intelligence as brilliant as our own. The Buddhist iconographers hide a little animal face in the hair of the human to remind us that we see with archetypal wilderness eyes as well.

The world is not only watching, it is listening too. A rude and thoughtless comment about a Ground Squirrel or a Flicker or a Porcupine will not go unnoticed. Other beings (the instructors from the old ways tell us) do not mind being killed and eaten as food, but they expect us to say please, and thank you, and they hate to see themselves wasted. The precept against needlessly taking life is inevitably the first and most difficult of commandments. In their practice of killing and eating with gentleness and thanks, the primary peoples are our teachers: the attitude toward animals, and their treatment, in twentieth-century American industrial meat production is literally sickening, unethical, and a source of boundless bad luck for this society.

An ethical life is one that is mindful, mannerly, and has style. Of all moral failings and flaws of character, the worst is stinginess of thought, which includes meanness in all its forms. Rudeness in thought or deed toward others, toward nature, reduces the chances of conviviality and interspecies communication, which are essential to physical and spiritual survival. Richard Nelson, a student of Indian ways, has said that an Athapaskan mother might tell her little girl, "Don't point at the mountain! It's rude!" One must not waste, or be careless, with the bodies or the parts of any creature one has hunted or gathered. One must not boast, or show much pride in accomplishment, and one must not take one's skill for granted. Wastefulness and carelessness are caused by stinginess of

spirit, an ungracious unwillingness to complete the gift-exchange transaction. (These rules are also particularly true for healers, artists, and gamblers.)

Perhaps one should not talk (or write) too much about the wild world: it may be that it embarrasses other animals to have attention called to them. A sensibility of this sort might help explain why there is so little "landscape poetry" from the cultures of the old ways. Nature description is a kind of writing that comes with civilization and its habits of collection and classification. Chinese landscape poetry begins around the fifth century A.D. with the work of Xie Lingyun. There were fifteen hundred years of Chinese song and poetry before him (allowing as the *Sbi-jing*—China's first collection of poems and songs, "The Book of Songs"—might register some five centuries of folksong prior to the writing down) and there is much nature, but no broad landscapes: it is about mulberry trees, wild edible greens, threshing, the forager and farmer's world up close. By Hsieh's time the Chinese had become removed enough from their own mountains and rivers to aestheticize them. This doesn't mean that people of the old ways don't appreciate the view, but they have a different point of view.

The same kind of cautions apply to the stories or songs one might tell about oneself. Malcolm Margolin, publisher of *News from Native California*, points out that the original people of California did not easily recount an "autobiography." The details of their individual lives, they said, were unexceptional: the only events that bore recounting were descriptions of a few of their outstanding dreams and their moments of encounter with the spirit world and its transformations. The telling of their life stories, then, was very brief. They told of dream, insight, and healing.

Back Home

The etiquette of the wild world requires not only generosity but a good-humored toughness that cheerfully tolerates discomfort, an appreciation of everyone's fragility, and a certain modesty. Good quick blueberry picking, the knack of tracking, getting to where the fishing's good ("an angry man cannot catch a fish"), reading the surface of the sea or sky—these are achievements not to be gained by mere effort. Mountaineering has the same quality. These moves take practice, which calls for a certain amount of self-abnegation, and intuition, which takes emptying of yourself. Great insights have come to some people only after they reached the point where they had nothing left. Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca became unaccountably deepened after losing his way and spending several winter nights sleeping naked in a pit in the Texas desert under a north wind. He truly had reached the point where he had nothing. ("To have nothing, you must *have nothing!*" Lord Buckley says of this moment.) After that he found himself able to heal sick native people he met on his way westward. His fame spread ahead of him. Once he had made his way back to Mexico and was again a civilized Spaniard he found he had lost his power of healing—not just the ability to heal, but the *will* to heal, which is the will to be whole: for as he said, there were "real doctors" in the city, and he began to doubt his powers. To resolve the dichotomy of the civilized and the wild, we must first resolve to be whole.

One may reach such a place as Alvar Núñez by literally losing everything. Painful and dangerous experiences often transform the people who survive them. Human beings are audacious. They set out to have adventures and try to do more than perhaps they should. So by practicing yogic austerities or monastic disciplines,

some people make a structured attempt at having nothing. Some of us have learned much from traveling day after day on foot over snowfields, rockslides, passes, torrents, and valley floor forests, by "putting ourselves out there." Another—and most sophisticated—way is that of Vimalakirti, the legendary Buddhist layman, who taught that by directly intuiting our condition in the actually existing world we realize that we have had nothing from the beginning. A Tibetan saying has it: "The experience of emptiness engenders compassion."

For those who would seek directly, by entering the primary temple, the wilderness can be a ferocious teacher, rapidly stripping down the inexperienced or the careless. It is easy to make the mistakes that will bring one to an extremity. Practically speaking, a life that is vowed to simplicity, appropriate boldness, good humor, gratitude, unstinting work and play, and lots of walking brings us close to the actually existing world and its wholeness.

People of wilderness cultures rarely seek out adventures. If they deliberately risk themselves, it is for spiritual rather than economic reasons. Ultimately all such journeys are done for the sake of the whole, not as some private quest. The quiet dignity that characterizes so many so-called primitives is a reflection of that. Florence Edenshaw, a contemporary Haida elder who has lived a long life of work and family, was asked by the young woman anthropologist who interviewed her and was impressed by her coherence, presence, and dignity, "What can I do for self-respect?" Mrs. Edenshaw said, "Dress up and stay home." The "home," of course, is as large as you make it.

The lessons we learn from the wild become the etiquette of freedom. We can enjoy our humanity with its flashy brains and sexual buzz, its social cravings and stubborn tantrums, and take ourselves

as no more and no less than another being in the Big Watershed. We can accept each other all as barefoot equals sleeping on the same ground. We can give up hoping to be eternal and quit fighting dirt. We can chase off mosquitoes and fence out varmints without hating them. No expectations, alert and sufficient, grateful and careful, generous and direct. A calm and clarity attend us in the moment we are wiping the grease off our hands between tasks and glancing up at the passing clouds. Another joy is finally sitting down to have coffee with a friend. The wild requires that we learn the terrain, nod to all the plants and animals and birds, ford the streams and cross the ridges, and tell a good story when we get back home.

And when the children are safe in bed, at one of the great holidays like the Fourth of July, New Year's, or Halloween, we can bring out some spirits and turn on the music, and the men and the women who are still among the living can get loose and really wild. So that's the final meaning of "wild"—the esoteric meaning, the deepest and most scary. Those who are ready for it will come to it. Please do not repeat this to the uninitiated.

T HE PLACE, THE REGION, AND THE COMMONS

"When you find your place where you are,
practice occurs." DŌGEN

The World Is Places

We experience slums, prairies, and wetlands all equally as "places." Like a mirror, a place can hold anything, on any scale. I want to talk about place as an experience and propose a model of what it meant to "live in place" for most of human time, presenting it initially in terms of the steps that a child takes growing into a natural community. (We have the terms *enculturation* and *acculturation*, but nothing to describe the process of becoming placed or re-placed.) In doing so we might get one more angle on what a "civilization of wildness" might require.

For most Americans, to reflect on "home place" would be an unfamiliar exercise. Few today can announce themselves as someone *from* somewhere. Almost nobody spends a lifetime in the same valley, working alongside the people they knew as children. Native people everywhere (the very term means "someone born there") and Old World farmers and city people share this experience of living in place. Still—and this is very important to remember—being inhabitory, being place-based, has never meant that one didn't

CHAOS, TERRITORY, ART

Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth

Elizabeth Grosz



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3

SENSATION. THE EARTH, A PEOPLE, ART

Art reminds us of states of animal vigor; it is on the one hand an excess and overflow of blooming physicality into the world of images and desires; on the other, an excitation of the animal functions through the images and desires of an intensified life—an enhancement of the feeling of life, a stimulant to it.

—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE,
THE WILL TO POWER

ART AND THE ANIMAL

Art is of the animal. It comes, not from reason, recognition, intelligence, not from a uniquely human sensibility, or from any of man's higher accomplishments, but from something excessive, unpredictable, lowly. What is most artistic in us is that which is the most bestial. Art comes from the excess, in the world, in objects, in living things, that enables them to be more than they are, to give more than themselves, their material properties and qualities, their possible uses, than is self-evident. Art is the consequence of that excess, that energy or force, that puts life at risk for the sake of intensification, for the sake of sensation itself—not simply for pleasure or for sexuality, as psychoanalysis suggests—but for what can be magnified, intensified, for what is more, through which creation, risk, innovation are undertaken for their own sake, for how and what they may intensify.

Psychoanalysis has the relations between art and sexuality at least half-right. Art is connected to sexual energies and impulses, to a common impulse for more. But, for Freudian psychoanaly-

sis, sexuality transforms or converts itself into art only through representation, through the transformation of an organ-oriented libido into the energy of creative material production: art is the expression of a sublimated sexual impulse, an impulse that must be renounced if it is to gain some partial satisfaction.¹ This capacity for displacement, for transferring sexual intensity or libido into desexualized or sublimated creative activities is, for Freud, a uniquely human capacity, the result of the untethering of the drive from a seasonally regulated sexuality, that is, the drive's capacity, through vicissitudes, to transform itself into something nonsexual.² It is only the sexual drive, not sexual instincts, that can be deflected into nonsexual aims.³ It will my claim here that it is not exactly true that art is a consequence of the excesses that sexuality or the sexual drive poses, for it may be that sexuality itself needs to function artistically to be adequately sexual, adequately creative, that sexuality (as neither drive nor instinct but rather the alignment of bodies and practices with other bodies or with parts of one's own

1. I have outlined Freud's account of art and the special relation he posits between repressed homosexuality and creative sublimation in Grosz 2001a.

2. For Freud, sublimation is the capacity for exchanging a sexual for a desexualized aim that "consists in the sexual trend abandoning its aim of obtaining a component or a reproductive pleasure and taking on another which is related genetically to the abandoned one but is itself no longer sexual and must be described as social. We call this process 'sublimation,' in accordance with the general estimate that places social aims higher than sexual ones, which are at bottom self-interested. Sublimation is, incidentally, only a special case in which sexual trends are attached to other, non-sexual ones" (Freud 1917:345).

3. "The sexual instinct . . . is probably more strongly developed in man than in most of the higher animals; it is certainly more constant, since it has almost entirely overcome the periodicity to which it is tied in animals. It places extraordinarily large amounts of force at the disposal of civilized activity, and it does this in virtue of its especially marked characteristic of being able to displace its aim without materially diminishing in intensity. This capacity to exchange its originally sexual aim for another one, which is no longer sexual but which is psychically related to the first aim, is called the capacity for *sublimation*. In contrast to this displaceability, in which its value for civilization lies, the sexual instinct may also exhibit a particularly obstinate fixation which renders it unserviceable and which sometimes causes it to degenerate into what are described as abnormalities" (Freud 1908:187).

body) needs to harness excessiveness and invention to function at all.

There is an involuted and oblique relation between the energies of sexual selection (rather than, as for Freud, sexual satisfaction or orgasmic release), the attraction to and possible attainment of sexual (though not necessarily copulative) partners⁴—human and otherwise—and the forces and energies of artistic production and consumption. Art is of the animal to the extent that creation, the attainment of new goals not directly defined through the useful, is at its core. It will be my task to elaborate a genealogy of the visual and plastic arts that refuses to reduce art to the forces and effects of natural selection but links them instead to the excessive expenditures involved in sexual selection.

For Darwin himself, as opposed to his Spencerian and neo-Darwinian successors,⁵ the living being is “artistic” to the extent that its body or products have within them something that attracts or entices not only members of the opposite sex but also members of the same sex and members of different species. For Darwin, this

4. For Darwin it is quite clear that not all members of any species need to reproduce. There is a high biological tolerance for a percentage of each group not reproducing, with no particular detriment to that group and indeed some major advantages: “Selection has been applied to the family, and not to the individual, for the sake of gaining serviceable ends. Hence we may conclude that slight modification of structure or of instinct, correlated with the sterile condition of certain members of the community, have proved advantageous: consequently the fertile males and females have flourished, and transmitted to their fertile offspring a tendency to produce sterile members with the same modification” (Darwin 1996:354). Although Darwin, of course, has no specific discussion of homosexuality, it seems clear that his discussion of sterile or noncopulative members of animal communities could provide an account of the productive rather than counterproductive role of homosexuality, which in sociobiological circles has tended to be regarded as a disadvantage unless it can be somehow tied to social altruism or the handing of genetic advantages to one’s near relatives rather than one’s offspring. Homosexuality is one of the many variations within species that enable them to be fit and/or attractive to others in ways that are unpredictable in advance. In other words, it is not clear that the homophobia that infects much of sociobiology can justify itself through Darwin’s own writings.

5. I have in mind here the works of some of the most well-known neo-Darwinists, among them Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, and E. O. Wilson.

attraction is largely but not exclusively heterosexual, usually directed to members of the opposite sex, though it invariably entails some bodily intensification or magnification of sexually specific characteristics. Sexual differences are morphological or bodily differences, differences that can be discerned and used systematically to differentiate between one type of body and another. Sexual selection magnifies and highlights these morphological differences and transformations—those differences that attract or appeal are more likely to be selected and incorporated into successive generations, which are more likely to differ further from each other—that enhance the body's sexual appeal. This calling to attention, this making of one's own body into a spectacle, this highly elaborate display of attractors, involves intensification. Not only are organs on display engorged, intensified, puffed up, but the organs that perceive them—ears, eyes, nose—are also filled with intensity, resonating with colors, sounds, smells, shapes, rhythms.⁶

This may be why Darwin claims some species of salmon, trout, perch, and stickleback change their color during the breeding season, transforming from drab to iridescent and back seasonally, de-

6. Lingis has spent considerable effort discussing the powerful effects of “organs to be looked at,” which function well beyond the logic of natural selection: the most spectacular fish often live at depths where either they or their predators are blind or operate through other senses than vision. This makes it clear that there is an excess, left over from or in addition to the needs of survival, a morphological capacity for intensifying bodies and functions that does not operate only or primarily in terms of an external (predatory?) observer: “The color-blind *octopus vulgaris* controls with twenty nervous systems the two to three million chromatophores, iridophores and leucophores fitted in its skin; only fifteen of these have been correlated with camouflage or emotional states. At rest in its lair, its skin invents continuous light shows. The sparkled and streaked coral fish school and scatter as a surge of life dominated by a compulsion for exhibition, spectacle, parade. . . . The most artful blended pigments the deep has to show are inside the shells of abelones [*sic*], inside the bones of parrotfish, on the backs of living cones, where the very abelones [*sic*] and parrotfish and cones themselves shall never see them. The most ornate skins are on the nudibrachia, blind sea slugs. In the marine abysses, five or six miles below the last blue rays of the light, the fish and the crabs, almost all of them blind, illuminate their lustrous colors with their own bioluminescence, for no witness” (Lingis 1984:8–9).

pending on their sex.⁷ This is not simply a functional coloring that acts as camouflage, protecting fish from predation. Konrad Lorenz has suggested that this spectacular coloring may act as a form of aggression, the vivid and unambiguous marking of territory. In other words, for Lorenz and other neo-Darwinists, this excess is not really excessive: it is the bodily expression of something like a territorial imperative, a key element in the struggle for survival, that is, in natural selection. These beautifully striking and provocative colors, shapes, organs, act, for Lorenz, as territorial posters or placards of possession, markers that function to scare rivals and defend territory. In being rendered functional, however, all excess and redundancy are eliminated; sexual selection is reduced to natural selection. Lorenz argues that the four great biological drives—hunger, sex, fear, and aggression—must each be understood in terms of natural selection alone. Like other neo-Darwinians, he reduces sexual selection to natural selection, thereby simplifying and rendering evolution monodirectional, regulated only by the selection of randomly acquired characteristics and not by the unpredictable vagaries of taste and pleasure that sexual selection entails.

7. Darwin discusses in extensive detail the transformations in coloring in various species, ranging from birds to reptiles and fish, which undergo seasonal color changes that intensify their appeal for the opposite sex. In the case of the stickleback, for example, a fish that can be described as “beautiful beyond description,” Darwin quotes Warington: “The back and eyes of the female are simply brown, and the belly white. The eyes of the male, on the other hand, are “of the most splendid green, having a metallic lustre like the green feathers of some humming-birds. The throat and belly are of a bright crimson, the back of an ashy-green, and the whole fish appears as though it were somewhat translucent and glowed with an internal incandescence. And after the breeding-season these colours all change, the throat and belly become of a pale red, the back more green, and the glowing tints subside. That with fishes there exists some close relation between their colours and their sexual functions we can clearly see;—firstly, from the adult males of certain species being differently coloured from the females, and often much more brilliantly;—secondly, from these same males, whilst immature, resembling the mature females;—and lastly, from the males, even of those species which at all other times of the year are identical in colour with the females, often acquiring brilliant tints during the spawning-season” (Darwin 1981, book 2:14–15).

For Darwin himself, however, these markings, which he acknowledges may serve aggressive functions, are *not* the conditions of territoriality but the raw materials of sexual selection, excesses that are produced and explored for no reason other than their possibilities for intensification, their appeal.⁸

Many battles between rivalrous males fought apparently over territory are in fact undertaken, in Darwin's opinion, primarily to attract the attention of females who may otherwise remain indifferent to male display. In the case of battling birds, many territorial struggles are primarily theatrical, staged, a performance of the body at its most splendid and appealing, rather than a real battle with its attendant risks and dangers: in the case of the *Tetrao umbellus*, more commonly known as the ruffed grouse, the battles between males "are all a sham, performed to show themselves to the greatest advantage before the admiring females who assemble around; for I have never been able to find a maimed hero, and seldom more than a broken feather" (1981, book 2:50). Ornamental display occurs in the most successful and aggressive males, yet even those males who are most successful at fending off predators and rivals are not always guaranteed to attract the attention of a possible partner. It is not clear that the skills the male displays are those that attract females, even if they are successful in various battling spectacles.

Although beauty of all kinds is displayed, this beauty puts the creature in some kind of potential danger, it has a cost, even if it is not the cost of real battle but of becoming more visible or audible, more noticeable to predators as well as suitors: "Even well-armed males, who, it might have been thought, would have altogether depended for success on the law of battle, are in most cases highly

8. Darwin argues that although it is possible that the brilliant coloring of fish may serve to protect them from predators, as Lorenz (and Huxley) claim, it is more likely that it makes them more vulnerable to predators, which tends to affirm their function as sexual lures more than as aggressive placards or banners: "It is possible that certain fishes may have been rendered conspicuous in order to warn birds and beasts of prey (as explained when treating of caterpillars) that they were unpalatable; but it is not, I believe, known that any fish, at least any fresh-water fish, is rejected from being distasteful to fish-devouring animals" (Darwin 1981, book 2:17-18).

ornamented; and their ornaments have been acquired at the expense of some loss of power. In other cases, ornaments have been acquired at the cost of increased risk from birds and beasts of prey" (Darwin 1981, book 2:123). Nor can the defense of territory be identified with sexual success, which operates according to different criteria. Sexual selection, as Darwin has made clear, imperils as much—and perhaps to the same degrees—as it attracts. As we shall see, however, territoriality is indeed bound up with the production of intensities, that is, with sexual and artistic production, the creation of rhythmical or vibrational qualities, but not as precondition; rather, territory functions as an effect of erotic intensification.⁹ Territory is produced, made possible, when something, some property or quality, can be detached from its place within a regime of natural selection and made to have a life of its own, to resonate, just for itself. Territory is artistic, the consequence of love not war, of seduction not defense, of sexual selection not natural selection.

Are animals artistic? Certainly, if by that we understand that they intensify sensation (including the sensations of their human observ-

9. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, it is not the mark that is formed to protect a preexisting territory, as Lorenz implies, but rather it is the mark that creates territory, for territory itself presumes art! "[In Lorenz's account] a territorial animal would direct its aggression, starting at the point where that instinct became intraspecific, was turned against the animal's own kind. A territorial animal would direct its aggressiveness against members of its own species; the species would gain the selective advantage of distributing its members throughout a space where each would have its own place. This ambiguous thesis, which has dangerous political overtones, seems to us to have little foundation. It is obvious that the function of aggression changes when it becomes intraspecific. But this reorganization of the function, rather than explaining territory, presuppose it. There are numerous reorganizations within the territory, which also affects sexuality, hunting, etc. . . . The T factor, the territorializing factor, must be sought elsewhere; precisely in the becoming-expressive of rhythm or melody, in other words, in the emergence of proper qualities (color, odor, sound, silhouette . . .). Can this becoming, this emergence, be called Art? That would make territory a result of art. The artist: the first person to set out a boundary stone, or to make a mark. Property, collective or individual, is derived from that, even when it is in the service of war and oppression. Property is fundamentally artistic because art is fundamentally *poster, placard*" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:316).

ers), that they enjoy this intensification, and that it entails a provisional stability such as the constitution of a territory implies. This animal-intensification is artistic even if it is not yet composed, not yet art (it is refrainlike): and, further, it provides the marks, the emblems, the very qualities by which a composed art becomes possible. Art is of the animal precisely to the degree that sexuality is artistic.

SENSATION AND THE PLANE OF COMPOSITION

Painting raises a series of questions that are unique, specific to its own history and materials. Like each of the arts, painting addresses problems about the relations between the body and the earth, between corporeal and terrestrial forces, but each does so in its own way, with its own materials, its own techniques, forms, and qualities, and each does so in light of the contributions of all the earlier forms of that art (and of all other arts). This field, the condition of actuality for the production and reception of artwork, we might understand, following Deleuze and Guattari, as the plane of composition. The plane of composition is the field, the plane, of all artworks, all genres, all types of art, the totality of all the various forms of artistic production in no particular order or organization, that which is indirectly addressed and transformed through each work of art.

Deleuze and Guattari affirm the plane of composition as the collective condition of art making: it contains all works of art, not specifically historically laid out, but all the events in the history of art, all the transformations, “styles,” norms, ideals, techniques, and upheavals, insofar as they influence and express each other. The plane of composition is not a literal plane (otherwise it itself would have to be composed) but a decentered spatiotemporal “organization,” a loose network of works, techniques, and qualities, within which all particular works of art must be located in order for them to constitute art. These works do not require recognition as such; they do not require any form of judgment to assess their quality or relative value: they simply need to exist as art objects. It is this common location, the common (yet incorporeal) context all art-

works share, that enables art to be assessed in whatever ways it is and allows art objects to refer to, incorporate, digest, contest, and transform each other. There is no common quality artworks must have, not even within any particular art form: but the capacity that all artworks have to be located within a milieu of other artworks—even as upheaval and innovation—means that they are constituted not through intentionality but through the work itself, through its capacity to be connected to, or severed from, other works.

All works of art share something in common, whatever else may distinguish different forms, genres, and techniques from each other: they are all composed of blocks materiality becoming-sensation.¹⁰ Art is what intensifies, produces sensations, and uses them to intensify bodies. Whatever materials compose them, works of art monumentalize neither events nor persons, materials nor forms, only sensations: “The work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else” (1994:164). Does this mean that works of art exist only to the extent that they are sensed, perceived? Are such works reliant on external observers to sense them? Not at all: the sensations produced are not the sensations of a subject, but sensation in itself, sensation as eternal, as monument. Sensation is that which is transmitted from the force of an event to the nervous system of a living being and from the actions of this being back onto the world itself.

Deleuze draws on and transforms the writings of Erwin Straus and Henri Maldiney regarding the role of sensation in the visual arts. Although Straus, for example, develops a largely phenomenological understanding of sensation—sensation as that which the sensing subject shares in common with a sensed object, sensation as a two-sided phenomenon in which one side faces the world of objects and the other side faces the world of lived experience. Straus’s argument, in brief, is that the primary world given by the senses is what preexists the formation of the subject and its sharp separation from the object and what the subject shares in common with animal life, a being-with-the-world in which sensation is aligned with the body’s capacity for movement.

10. Colebrook provides an illuminating analysis of the status of sensation in Deleuze’s work (2006:94ff).

Before space and time are oriented by coordinates, abstract positions, measurements, they coexist with and are defined by the body's here and now. Sensation thus includes not only the perceiving body but also the *Umwelt* in which the body moves through an ever changing horizon. Sensation is neither in the world nor in the subject but is the relation of unfolding of the one for the other through a body created at their interface (see Straus 202). Perception is thus, for Straus (as for Bergson), linked to the establishment of coordinates and abstract regularities, while sensation is that which cannot be mapped or completed, always in the process of becoming something else.

Straus illustrates the distinction between perception and sensation in terms of the opposition between geography and landscape. Geography is the space of the map, that which is regulated by measurable abstract coordinates, what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as striated or sedentary space, a space whose location or region is abstracted from its lived qualities.¹¹ Landscape, by contrast is that space revealed by sensation, which has no fixed coordinates but transforms and moves as a body passes through it. Landscape art has, for Straus, the peculiar possibility of making visible that which sensation senses of the invisible: "Landscape painting does not depict what we see, i.e., what we notice when looking at a place, but—the paradox is unavoidable—it makes visible the invisible, although it be something far removed. Great landscapes all have a visionary character. Such vision is of the invisible becoming visible" (Straus 322).

Deleuze rapidly "materializes" Straus's concept. He differs from Straus's more directly phenomenological reading by insisting that the subject side or face of sensation cannot be identified with the phenomenological subject of lived experience, but must be understood in terms of the neurological and physiological subject of action and passion, and the object side or face is not a pure thing-in-itself but a complex event with its own forms of singularity or individuality, however impersonal. Sensation is that which is transmitted from the

11. See plateau 14, "1440: The Smooth and the Striated" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

force of an event to the nervous system of a living being and from the actions of this being back onto events.¹²

Sensation is the zone of indeterminacy between subject and object, the bloc that erupts from the encounter of the one with the other. Sensation impacts the body, not through the brain, not through representations, signs, images, or fantasies, but directly, on the body's own internal forces, on cells, organs, the nervous system. Sensation requires no mediation or translation. It is not representation, sign, symbol, but force, energy, rhythm, resonance.¹³ Sensation lives, not in the body of perceivers, subjects, but in the body of the artwork. Art is how the body senses most directly, with, ironically, the least representational mediation, for art is of the body, for it is only art that draws the body into sensations never experienced before, perhaps not capable of being experienced in any other way, the sunflower-sensations that only Van Gogh's work conjures, the "appleyness of the apple" in Cézanne,¹⁴ the "Rembrandt-universe" (177) of affects or the meat-sensations that underlies flesh in Bacon. Sensation draws us, living beings of all kinds, into the artwork in a strange becoming in which the living being empties itself of its interior to be filled with the sensation of that work alone.

Just as we perceive objects where they are, in space, and we re-

12. "Sensation is the opposite of the facile and the ready-made, the cliché, but also of the 'sensational,' the spontaneous, etc. Sensation has one face turned toward the subject (the nervous system, vital movement, 'instinct,' 'temperament'—a whole vocabulary common to both Naturalism and Cézanne), and one face turned toward the object (the 'fact,' the place, the event). Or rather, it has no faces at all, it is both things indissolubly, it is Being-in-the-world as the phenomenologists say: at one and the same time I *become* in the sensation and something *happens* through the sensation, one through the other, one in the other. And at the limit, it is the same body that, being both subject and object, gives and receives the sensation. As a spectator, I experience the sensation only by entering the painting, by reaching the unity of the sensing and the sensed" (Deleuze 2003:31).

13. Simon O'Sullivan's recent (2006) text insists on the anti and nonrepresentational status of Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the arts, an emphasis that seems to me perfectly appropriate in understanding their unique contributions to art history and interpretation.

14. In D. H. Lawrence's words, quoted in Deleuze 2003:23.

member events where they are, in the past, that is, just as space and time are not *in* us, as Bergson reminds us,¹⁵ so sensation is not in us either. We are in it whenever we sense, and it brings us to where sensation occurs, in the artwork itself. Sensation draws us, living beings of all kinds, into the artwork in a strange becoming in which the living being empties itself of its interior to be filled with the sensation of that work alone: “Color is in the body, sensation is what is painted. What is painted on the canvas is the body, not insofar as it is represented as an object, but insofar as it is experienced as sustaining *this* sensation” (Deleuze 2003:32).

The artwork is a compound of sensation. It is not a single or found sensation (even if the object is a ready-made, as in Duchamp), for then it would remain what it is, a changing, transforming, useful, or insignificant object. The artwork is a compound of sensations, composed sensations, sensations composed through materials in their particularity. Sensations are not colored, shaped, formed in the artwork, but through the artwork are coloring, shaping, and forming forces (of both subject and object). The artwork arrests, freezes forever, a look, a moment, a gesture, an activity, from the transitory and ever different chaos of temporal change, in the transitions between one percept and affect and the next that marks the life of a living being. Art arrests this endless becoming into a becoming of its own: the art object now becomes sensation, not eternal in the sense that the sensation is continually experienced in one and the same way through the passage of time, but in the sense that sensation is now forever tied to this smile, this yellow, this flower in its absolute singularity. Only at the point at which material becomes expressive, takes on a life of sensation as well as its own qualities, can art begin.

Sensation can only emit its effects to the extent that its materials, materiality itself, become expressive, passing into sensation, transforming themselves, giving themselves a new quality. This is not a signifying relation, in which the material plane is understood as a chain of signifiers and the aesthetic plane is the field of the signi-

15. In Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1988:57).

fied: rather, it is a relation of eruption or emergence. There can be no art without the materials of art, but the artistic is an eruption, a leap out of materiality, the kick of virtuality now put into and extracted from matter to make it function unpredictably. Sensations, artworks, do not signify or represent (“no art and no sensation have ever been representational”; 1994:193): they assemble, they make, they do, they produce.

Art is the becoming-sensation of materiality, the transformation of matter into sensation, the becoming-more of the artistic subjects and objects that is bound up with the subject’s cross-fertilization with the art object. Art is that which brings sensations into being when before it there are only subjects, objects, and the relations of immersion that bind the one to the other. Art allows the difference, the incommensurability of subject and object to be celebrated, opened up, elaborated. The arts, each in its own way, are not just the construction of pure and simple sensations but the synthesis of other, prior sensations into new ones, the coagulation, recirculation, and transformation of other sensations summoned up from the plane of composition—indeed becoming itself may be understood as the coming together of at least two sensations, the movement of transformation that each elicits in the other.¹⁶ Art is this processes of compounding or composing, not a pure creation from nothing, but the act of extracting from the materiality of forces, sensations, or powers of affecting life, that is, becomings, that have not existed before and may summon up and generate future sensations, new becomings.

BECOMING-OTHER

Sensations are always composite, which is also to say that they are composed. They are primarily made up of percepts and affects, ex-

16. “It is the nature of sensation to envelop a constitutive difference of level, a plurality of constituting domains. Every sensation . . . is already an ‘accumulated’ or ‘coagulated’ sensation, as in a limestone figure. Hence the irreducibly synthetic character of sensation” (Deleuze 2003:33).

tracted from the energetic forces generated between subjects and objects that are arrested, as it were, in flight, where they live as pure movement or transition. Sensations are mobile and mobilizing forces, not quite subjective or experiential (this is Deleuze's disagreement with phenomenology) and yet not fully objective or measurable in a way that material objects are. Sensations are subjective objectivities or equally objective subjectivities, midway between subjects and objects, the point at which the one can convert into the other. This is why art, the composition of material elements that are always more than material, is the major—perhaps the only—way in which living beings deal with and enjoy the intensities that are not contained within but are extracted from the natural world, chaos. Art is where intensity is most at home, where matter is most attenuated without being nullified: perhaps we can understand matter in art as matter at its most dilated, matter as it most closely approximates mind, diastole, or proliferation rather than systole and compression and where becoming is most directly in force. Art is where life most readily transforms itself, the zone of indetermination through which all becomings must pass. In this sense art is not the antithesis of politics, but politics continued by other means.¹⁷

Sensation has two dimensions, two types of energy: it is composed of affects and percepts. Sensation aims to extract affects from affections and percepts from perception, which is to say that it disembodyes and desubjectifies affection and perception.¹⁸ Just as sensation exists in a kind of eternity that is distinct from the finitude of its materiality, an incorporeal event on the surface of things, so

17. Deleuze suggests as much in his provocative and rather strange discussion of the work of Gérard Fromanger, that art is politics with affirmation and joy: "[Fromanger's art] is strange, the way a revolutionary acts because of what he loves in the very world he wishes to destroy. There are no revolutionaries but the joyful, and no politically and aesthetically revolutionary painting without delight" (Deleuze, in Deleuze and Foucault 1999:76–77).

18. "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" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:167).

sensation exists independent of the perceptions and affections that mark a living being's relations with its objects or its Umwelt. Sensation, like the plane of composition itself, is an incorporeal threshold of emergence,¹⁹ an unpredictable and uncontainable overflowing of forces that exist hitherto only beyond and before the plane of composition, on its other side, that of chaos. In this sense art is the way in which shreds of chaos can return in sensation: it is how art returns us to the unlivable from which we came and gives us a premonition of the unlivable power to come. Percepts and affects are the inhuman forces from which the human borrows that may serve in its self-transformation and overcoming. Percepts and affects summon up a "people to come," not a public, an audience,²⁰ but something inhuman.

Affects are the ways in which the human overcomes itself: they are the "non-human becomings of man," the virtual conditions by which man surpasses himself and celebrates this surpassing (as only the overman can, with only joyful affects) by making himself a work of art, by his own self-conversion into a being of sensation. Affects are man's becoming-other, the creation of zones of proximity between the human and those animal and microscopic/cosmic becomings the human can pass through.²¹ Affects signal that border between the human and the animal from which it has come.

19. See Deleuze 1990:6–8 for a further discussion of the event as an incorporeal that is located at the surface of states of affairs.

20. As Rajchman makes clear: "As a presupposition of a 'becoming-art,' that is not yet there is not to be confused with 'the public'—on the contrary, it helps show why art (and thought) is never a matter of 'communication,' why for [Deleuze and Guattari] there is always too much 'communication'" (2000:122). Colebrook (2006:94) makes a similar point: "Percepts and affects are *not* continuous with life and are not effects of a synthetic activity of consciousness. Affects and percepts stand alone and bear an autonomy that undoes any supposed independence of a self-constituting consciousness." See also O'Sullivan: "Art is ontologically difficult. It is not made for an already constituted audience but in fact calls its audience into being" (2006:68).

21. "Becoming is the extreme contiguity within a coupling of two sensations without resemblance or, on the contrary, in the distance of a light that captures both of them in a single reflection" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:173).

If affects characterize a subject's relation to nonhuman becomings, percepts, those "nonhuman landscapes of nature," (1994:169) are the transformation of the evolutionary relations of perception that have attuned the living creature to its world through natural selection (as Bergson has shown)²² into the resources for something else, something more, for invention, experiment, or art. Perceptions and affections, forces lived in everyday life, can only be wrenched from this (evolutionary) context to the extent that the natural and the lived are themselves transformed, the virtual in them explored, and strange connections—connections that have no clear point or value—elaborated with considerable effort and risk to the normalized narratives of the everyday and the assimilable. The materials of perception—the bodily relations between states of things and subjects—become the resources of the unlivable percept; the materials of affection—our sufferings, joys, horrors, our becomings, the events we undertake—become the expressions of our possibilities for inhuman transformations. Perceptions become enshrouded with affect: popes, or disembodied mouths come to embody the scream in Bacon's works, Van Gogh's head becomes captured in a web of becoming-sunflower. And affections are embedded in percepts, as in Cézanne's mountains and landscapes or Georgia O'Keefe's Southwest.

Art is not a self-contained activity in the sense that it is disconnected from the ways in which the natural and social worlds function. Art, however, is not a window onto these worlds, nor a mode of their representation or exploration: it does not take the place of social or political analysis or philosophical speculation. Rather, it is where intensities proliferate, where forces are expressed for their own sake, where sensation lives and experiments, where the

22. In his discussion of perception, on which Deleuze relies, Bergson sees perception as the honing of a synthetic, skeletalizing ability: perception is what schematizes and simplifies nature so that the living being can function there with what is perceptually predictable through its regulation by habit. Perception attunes the being to its world, and the relevant objects in that world to the living being—a mode of accommodation. See Bergson 1988:93–94.

future is affectively and perceptually anticipated. Art is where properties and qualities—sounds, rhythms, harmonies in music, colors, forms, relations of surface and depth or visibility and invisibility in painting, planes, volumes, surfaces, and voids in sculpture and architecture and so on—take on the task of representing the future, of preceding and summoning up sensations to come, a people to come, worlds or universes to come. Art is intensely political not in the sense that it is a collective or community activity (which it may be but usually is not) but in the sense that it elaborates the possibilities of new, more, different sensations than those we know. Art is where the becomings of the earth couple with the becomings of life to produce intensities and sensations that in themselves summon up a new kind of life:

This is, precisely, the task of all art and, from colors and sounds, both music and painting similarly extract new harmonies, new plastic or melodic landscapes, and new rhythmic characters that raise them to the height of the earth's song and the cry of humanity: that which constitutes the tone, the health, becoming, a visual and sonorous bloc. A monument does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event.

(1994:176)

Sensation sets out not only the possible becomings of a subject-in-process but also the possible becomings of peoples and universes to come. It is the possibility (as opposed to virtuality)²³ of the creation of new worlds and new peoples to live and experience them. Artworks are not so much to be read, interpreted, deciphered as responded to, touched, engaged, intensified. Artworks don't signify (or, if they signify, they signify only themselves); instead, they make sensation real: "The monument does not actualize the virtual event

23. "The universes [to come] are neither virtual nor actual; they are possibles, the possible as aesthetic category . . . the existence of the possible, whereas events are the reality of the virtual" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:177).

but incorporates or embodies it: it gives it a body, a life, a universe” (1994:177).

What gives sensation this power or force of directly affecting bodies? Deleuze suggests that sensation is not irreducible, a pure given, but is itself the consequence of a particular capacity sensation has to contract vibration. Sensation is excitation, extracted from objects but animated by quality, intensity only to the extent that it is transmitted to and consequently directly affects life. Sensation is vibratory excitation that preserves itself and the vibratory force of its materials to the extent it continues to generate corporeal effects, that is, continuing shocks to the nervous system.²⁴ Sensation contracts what composes it, vibrations that are colors, forms, planes, and voids, so that they become expressed and affective, so that they signal a world to come in the present and impact that world as much as possible on the presently living nervous system.²⁵ Unlike politics, sensation does not promise or enact a future different than the present, it en-forces, impacts, a premonition of what might be directly on the body’s nerves, organs, muscles. The body is opened up now to other forces and becomings that it might also affirm in and as the future.

Sensation, as the contraction of vibrations, is that which mediates between the forces of the cosmos—unknowable and uncontainable forces that we experience as chaos—and the (virtual) forces of bodies, including their potential to be otherwise. Sensation fills the living body with the resonance of (part of) the universe itself, a vibratory wave that opens up the body to these unrepresented and unknowable forces, the forces of becoming-other. The body does

24. Deleuze says it explicitly: “Sensation is vibration” (2003:39).

25. “Sensation is excitation itself, not insofar as it is gradually prolonged and passes into the reaction but insofar as it is preserved or preserves its vibrations. Sensation contracts the vibrations of the stimulant on a nervous surface or in a cerebral volume: what comes before has not yet disappeared but when what follows appears. This is its way of responding to chaos. Sensation itself vibrates because it contracts vibrations. It preserves itself because it preserves vibrations: it is Monument. It resonates because it makes its harmonics resonate. Sensation is the contracted vibration that has become quality, variety” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:211).

not contain these forces but rather is touched by them and opened up to some of the possibilities of being otherwise, which the universe contains through them.²⁶

PAINTING SENSATIONS

Painting aims to visualize invisible forces, as music aims to sound forces that otherwise would remain inaudible. Each art aims to represent what is unrepresentable, to conjure up in words, paint, stone, steel, and melody, invisible and soundless forces, what is incapable of being represented otherwise or what, if represented otherwise, would bring into existence a different kind of sensation. Each of the arts, as highly particular in historical and regional specificity as it might be, aims to capture something equally accessible to all the other arts, a kind of foundation or unity, the unity in difference of the universe itself, of materiality, and of universal forces that impinge on all forms of life, each affected in their different ways. This is why each of the arts brings with it fragments and residues of all the others. When Bacon wrenches a scream from the screaming popes, he brings with it not only all the visible forces that a scream enacts, not just the force and intensity of prior pope representations, but the scream-sensation in all its multisensory richness. When he has managed to “paint the scream more than the horror” (Bacon quoted in Deleuze 2003: 34), the scream only functions as sensation to the extent that we can feel and hear it, that it vibrates as a scream, that is, as visual, it nevertheless functions as an auditory cry, resonating or vibrating through us as a scream.

26. “Sensation is excitation itself, not insofar as it is gradually prolonged and passes into the reaction but insofar as it is preserved or preserves its vibrations. Sensation contracts the vibrations of the stimulant on a nervous surface or in a cerebral volume: what comes before has not yet disappeared when what follows appears. This is its way of responding to chaos. Sensation itself vibrates because it contracts vibrations. It preserves itself because it preserves vibrations: it is Monument. It resonates because it makes its harmonics resonate. Sensation is the contracted vibration that has become quality, variety” (ibid., 211)

Painting aims to make every sense function through the eye, as music makes all sensation and the whole body, compress itself into an ear. But, equally, painting aims to enable us to see sound, as music aims to make us hear colors, shapes, forms. Each of the arts is concerned with a transmutation of bodily organs as much as it is with the creation of new objects, new forms: each art resonates through the whole of the sensing body, capturing elements in a co-composition that carries within the vibrations and resonances, the underlying rhythms, of the other arts and the residual effects of each of the senses. Painting makes the eye mobile, it places it throughout the body, it renders the visible tangible and audible as well as visible.²⁷

Sensation can only be generated to the extent that each art brings into being something that the other arts could also access, each in its own way, something they all share, the forces that make each possible and connect each to both the (invisible, inaudible, intangible) forces of the universe and the sensitive mass of nerves and organs that make up a living body. It is because each of the senses—for each art orients itself to the intensification of at least one of the senses (there are, after all, arts for all the body's perceptual organs)—lays claim to forces of the universe that all the others are drawn to as well.²⁸

Deleuze suggests that this is because there is indeed a common

27. "Painting . . . invests the eye through color and line. But it *does not treat the eye as a fixed organ*. . . . Painting gives us eyes all over: in the ear, in the stomach, in the lungs (the painting breathes . . .). This is the double definition of painting: subjectively, it invests the eye, which ceases to be organic in order to become a polyvalent and transitory organ objectively, it brings before us the reality of a body, of lines and colors freed from the organic representation. And each is produced by the other: the pure presence of the body comes visible as the same time that the eye becomes the destined organ of this presence" (Deleuze 2003:45).

28. "Between a color, a taste, a touch, a smell, a noise, a weight, there would be an existential communication that would constitute the 'pathic' (non-representational) moment of *the* sensation. In Bacon's bullfights, for example, we hear the noise of the beast's hooves; . . . and each time meat is represented, we touch it, smell it, eat it, weigh it, as in Soutine's work. . . . The painter would thus *make visible* a kind of original unity of the senses, and would make a multisensible Figure finally appear" (ibid., 37).

force shared by all the arts and the living bodies that generate sensations out of material forms that derives from the universe itself. This is a precisely vibratory force—perhaps the vibratory structure of subatomic particles themselves?—that constructs sensations as neural reactions to inhuman forces. Perhaps it is the consequence of vibration and its resonating effects that generates a universe in which living beings are impelled to become, to change from within, to seek sensations, affects, and percepts that intensify and extend them to further transformations. And perhaps such resonance creates the very means by which the arts undertake their compositional activity: to create rhythm, the ordering and structuring of resonance, the meeting of different vibratory forces.²⁹

As “more profound” than vision or hearing, rhythm (which we must understand, along with vibration, as another name for difference) is what runs from objects to organs, from organs to the objects that captivate them, and from their relations to the art objects that carry sensations. It is rhythm that is transmitted directly from universe to artwork to body and back; it is rhythm that intensifies and complicates itself the more it circulates. Deleuze is influenced by the writings of Maldiney, who, following on from, elaborating, and modifying Straus and Merleau-Ponty, understands sensation, and indeed the appearance of the artwork, as a kind of autopoiesis, the eruption of self-sustaining form (1973:155–157). Rhythm is that which inheres in and generates, without ever ending or resolving this form-generation: “This sense of form in formation, in perpetual transformation in the return of the same, is properly the sense of rhythm” (1973:157).

29. “[The porousness of the arts to each other] is possible only if the sensation of a particular domain (here, the visual sensation) is in direct contact with a vital power that exceeds every domain and traverses them all. This power is Rhythm, which is more profound than vision, hearing, etc. Rhythm appears as music when it invests the auditory level, and as painting when it invests the visual level. This is a ‘logic of the senses,’ as Cézanne said, which is neither rational nor cerebral. What is ultimate is thus the relation between sensation and rhythm, which places in each sensation the levels and domains through which it passes. This rhythm runs though a painting just as it runs through a piece of music” (ibid., 37).

For Maldiney, form is always in the process of becoming and never given or finalized. It is generated or generates itself through a three-fold movement that Deleuze also utilizes to explain his own conception of sensation. First, there is the existential disclosure, an animal-disclosure, of the chaos of being for the living entity, the perpetual becoming of a world life does not control but that it must occupy and live through without being able to adequately position itself, the whirling chaos of sensations that are as yet unstructured and unformed, life resources and what life finds potentially excessive, overwhelming, breathtaking. Cézanne refers to this as an “iridescent chaos,” an “abyss” or “catastrophe,” an opening up to as well as a kind of merger with the landscape he contemplates as he prepares to paint (Maldiney 150; Deleuze 2003:83). It is a kind of collapse of visual coordinates, of orientation, of the separate positioning of the subject at a distance from the object. The second movement is a systolic compression or dilation of chaotic forces now condensed into forms, shapes, patterns, the extraction of rhythm from buzzing vibration, and a growingly discernible subject and object. For Cézanne, this is the moment at which a “stubborn geometry,” “geological strata,” appear as separate from the subject, as weighty objects to be observed (Maldiney 150). In the third movement there is a diastolic expansion that transforms and dissolves these forms and entities, blurring them back into the resonances of sensation. For Cézanne, this is when “an aerial, colored logic suddenly replaces the stubborn geometry. The geological strata, the preparatory labor, the moment of design collapse, crumble as in a catastrophe” (Maldiney: 185). The relation between systole and diastole is precisely definable in terms of rhythm, not as measurable or mathematically definable external and finalized form but as duration, uncountable, always in process, open-ended. Rhythm is the force of differentiation of the different calibers of vibration that constitute chaos, the body and sensation, and their interlinkage.

Maldiney’s representation of the growing immersion and deformations of art refers as readily to Bacon’s work as it does to Cézanne’s. For Deleuze, Bacon’s greatness lies in his ability to capture, as no one else has, three sorts of forces: the systolic forces of

isolation (those forces Bacon makes visible in his washed-out fields of color, in the ways in which these fields or platforms, geometrical figures isolate and bound a figure); the diastolic forces of deformation (those forces that press the body to earth, to crumple or slide over itself, where the body is in the process of becoming something else, a bird-umbrella, a piece of meat); and the forces of dissipation (those forces in which the figure fades to leave only the smile, only the scream), all of them invisible forces that separate, press down on, and fade back into the abyss or chaos from which they were extracted. Art here is the production of meat-sensations as the expression of forces of isolation, deformation, and dissipation.

This movement is nothing other than the movement of intuition, so elaborated by Bergson, in which a philosophical subject must place him or herself in the midst of things in the world without preconceived patterns or expectations and, through this immersion, to discern, gradually and with effort, through learning, the natural articulations between things, the places in things and events where differences most directly emerge.³⁰ From such a discernment, in separating those things that are qualitatively different from each other from those that are linked, the philosophical subject comes to learn that these differences in kind are in fact versions of differences of degree and find their place in a universe that can be understood as an open-ended whole.³¹ This too is a tripartite movement from chaos to the infinite through the immersion of life in the absolutely particular or the singular. Intuition is the way, for Bergson, that

30. See, in particular, *The Creative Mind* (Bergson 1946).

31. "Instead of a discontinuity of moments replacing one another in an infinitely divided time, [knowledge] will perceive the continuous fluidity of real time which flows along, indivisible. Instead of surface states covering successively some neutral stuff and maintaining with it a mysterious relationship of phenomenon to substance, it will seize upon one identical change which keeps ever lengthening as in a melody where everything is becoming, being itself substantial, has no need of support. No more inert states, no more dead things; nothing but the mobility of which the stability of life is made. A vision of this kind, where reality appears as continuous and indivisible, is on the road which leads to philosophical intuition" ("Philosophical Intuition," Bergson 1946:150-151).

the new is capable of being understood outside of or beyond ready-made concepts, opinions, or what Deleuze reviles as the cliché.³² Perhaps Bergson's discerning subject finds its culmination, not in the theoretical speculations of the philosopher, whose orientation tends to the abstract, but in the work of the artist, writer, or musician, whose field of creation is primarily durational.

The common ground for all the arts is the rhythmic, irreducibly durational universe of invisible, inaudible forces whose order isn't experientially discernible and is thus experienced or lived, at best, as chaotic. These inartistic chaotic forces, forces that do not reveal themselves to lived bodies except through processes of composition that lay them out for visual or auditory consumption, *cannot* be lived: they are fundamentally inhuman. Sensation lives a nonorganic life, the life of an "unlivable power." We cannot live these forces, although they act through and on us; what we can do is extract something of these forces, nothing that resembles them, for they cannot present themselves, but something that partakes of them. Bacon extracts a kind of gravitational force, the force that, in the long run, convulses and contorts bodies, not through torture but through everyday positions that have collapsed upon themselves, until flesh descends from bone into meat. Bacon generates meat-sensations from capturing the force of an invisible, unheard gravitational pull. The arts each address themselves to how to present these elementary forces, forces that impinge on us as living beings, forces like "pressure, inertia, weight, attraction, gravitation, germination" (2003:48).

If there is a common "foundation" or a unity of forces that all the arts share with each other (along with science and philosophy, which are equally oriented, in very different ways, to the ordering of chaotic forces), this is not in the unity of what has been, but only in the unity of a common future: the "power of the future" is that most urgent of forces and the most imponderable. At bottom, Deleuze suggests, it may be that what all the arts share is the aim of capturing the *force of time*, of opening up sensation to the force of

32. Deleuze has the same disdain for opinion, doxa, "good sense," and other self-satisfied solutions to the problems life poses as early as *The Logic of Sense*.

the future, of making time able to be sensed not in order to control or understand duration (which cannot be controlled and is that which ensures that the self-identical is always transitional, always other, never actual) but to live it as one can, even if that means becoming-different: "To render Time sensible is itself the task common to the painter, the musician, and sometimes the writer. It is a task beyond all measure or cadence" (2003:54).³³ It is this goal that makes art itself eternal, always seeking a way to render time sensational, to make time resonate sensibly, for no art can freeze time or transform its forces except through the invention of new techniques, new forces and energies.

PAINTING TODAY

Modern painting, the art of the twentieth century and beyond, can, for the sake of argument, be divided into three broad lines that distinguish themselves in the ways in which they regulate relations between sensation and chaos. Each is a response to the end of figuration and the crisis of realism and representation posed by the advent of photography as an art form in the nineteenth century. The first is through abstraction, along the lines of the Russian constructivists from Malevich to the works of Mondrian, Klee, Kandinsky, and others. Here, for Deleuze, chaos remains the source for art, but chaos is narrowly and carefully codified, often through a mystical code, to produce an optical geometry, an artistic Platonism where art takes on the function of a kind of spiritual salvation.³⁴

The second line is abstract expressionism, as perhaps initiated by

33. "When the visual sensation confronts the invisible force that conditions it, it releases a force that is capable of vanquishing the invisible force, or even befriending it [at least in the case of Francis Bacon]. Life screams *at* death, but death is no longer this all-too-visible thing that makes us faint; it is this invisible force that life detects, flushes out, and makes visible through the scream" (ibid., 52).

34. "[Abstraction] . . . offers us an asceticism, a spiritual salvation. Through an intense spiritual effort, it raises itself above the figurative givens, but it also turns chaos into a simple stream we must cross in order to discover the abstract and signifying Forms" (ibid., 84).

the whirling indeterminate forms of Turner, but represented most clearly by Jackson Pollock and action painting. Here, instead of being directed through codification, chaos is “deployed to a maximum” (2003:68), spread throughout the work itself, cramming every inch of the painted field. Painting comes as close as it possibly can to falling into chaos. Instead of the optical or geological frame, the tactile, the haptic dominates. The pattern is no longer discernible, all standard frames of reference (top/bottom, figure/ground) are subverted. Thus the eye is confused, for it functions at the mercy of the chaotic or random movements of the hand (and the body as a whole).³⁵

Thus far we have either a kind of code-painting or a kind of catastrophe-painting. The third line, which lies midway between figurative art and abstractionism, Deleuze describes, following Lyotard (1971), as figural. Here Deleuze includes works (for example, those of Cézanne, Bacon, and Soutine) that rely on the visceral force of painting (unlike abstraction) yet aim to contain it to a part but not the whole of the painted field (unlike expressionism). The figural is, for Deleuze, the end of figuration, the abandonment of art as representation, signification, narrative, though it involves the retention of the body, planes, and colors, which it extracts from the figurative. The figural is the deformation of the sensational and the submission the figurative to sensation. It is the development of art as an “analogical language,” a nonrepresentational “language” of colors, forms, bodily shapes, screams.³⁶

35. “In the end, it was abstract painting that produced a purely optical space and suppressed tactile referents in favor of an eye of the mind: it suppressed the task of controlling the hand that the eye still had in classical representation. But Action Painting does something completely different: it reverses the classical subordination, it subordinates the eye to the hand, it imposes the hand on the eye, and it replaces the horizon with a ground” (*ibid.*, 87).

36. “‘Analogical language,’ it is said, belongs to the right hemisphere of the brain, or better, to the nervous system, whereas ‘digital language’ belongs to the left hemisphere. Analogical language would be a language of relations, which consists of expressive movements, paralinguistic signs, breaths, and screams, and so on. . . . More generally, painting elevates colors and lines to the state of language, and it is an

I myself have nothing particular invested in this schema, which, while contestable, is certainly not an exhaustive overview of the art of the last one hundred years or so. I am more interested in looking at an art that had barely emerged when Deleuze wrote his study of Bacon's paintings and in seeing how useful or relevant Deleuze's conception of the arts may be to how we can understand the art of the western desert artists of Australia.³⁷ I don't want to suggest that contemporary Aboriginal art is Deleuzian, for no art is Deleuzian. At best Deleuze provides some concepts that are useful, or not, for understanding another dimension of the various arts than is available to sensation or vision alone; as a philosopher, Deleuze can provide us with a way of thinking the same forces as the arts address.

Western desert art is fascinating not only because it comes out of a nomadic tradition that has had little to do with Western art practices until less than four decades ago³⁸ but also because it directly

analogical language. One might even wonder if painting has not always been the analogical par excellence" (*ibid.*, 93).

37. There is something about Western desert art that corresponds quite closely to the interpretive practices associated with abstractionism, which may be why there was a relatively ready acceptance of indigenous artists almost from the beginning: "The basic Western desert painting techniques: the dots, the lines, the monochrome backgrounds, the effects of super-imposition, are basic to modern western painting also—which is why the results looked to audiences of the 1970s and the early 1980s like modernist abstracts. But the painters derived all these methods originally from their own ceremonial paintings and the ancient rituals of the ground mosaic. The classic Western Desert painting ambiguously depicts actual geographical ceremonies in which these connections are re-affirmed by the Dreaming's custodians. These contents are fused into a coherent visual image using a code of abstract symbolism which makes modern western experiments with abstraction look naïve" (Art Gallery of South Australia 26).

38. The inception of dot painting using acrylic paints and canvas can be very precisely located in 1971, when Geoffrey Bardon began working with members of the local community to create a mural in western art materials for the Papunya School and the subsequent creation of the Papunya Tula Artist's cooperative. See Bardon's own account (2005); and Nicholls and North 2001:19ff for a more detailed history of the Western desert painting movement.

defies the categorizations by which twentieth-century Western art has been described. Instead of falling into the stylistic schools of either abstraction or expressionism, or the “middle” position of the figural, much of western desert art, including acrylics as well as prints, batiks, carvings, and sculptures, seems to occupy all three positions simultaneously. These arts share an obsession with a mystical code (or many) and a fascination with the geometrical forms and with abstraction. They are also concerned with the direct expression of rhythm and force, movement and embodiment that characterizes expressionism. But no less concerned with the figure than in the works of Cézanne or Bacon, the figure, alone, coupled, boxed in, deformed, subjected to invisible forces, is as explicitly the object of sensation in these various works; in addition, while figural, they must also be understood as landscapes, in Maldiney’s sense, spatializations of lived space that nevertheless can also be mapped and coordinated, can function also geographically.

While I have no particular expertise in the art of the western desert (or, for that matter, in any art) and do not want to speak of and for works that are now loquaciously able to articulate their concerns more directly, I do nevertheless want to look at some works to see how they link territory, animality, and the earth together to

39. There are, of course, real risks of romanticizing the works of these profound artists and of submitting their works, pictorial and sonorous, to a kind of Westernized translation that robs them of their own autonomy and the location of these works within their own cultures and histories. It may be that any mention of such work in a text such as this, written primarily for a Western audience, already performs such a robbery. But it is also the case that Western desert artists seek an audience (to come), present and sell their works to Westerners and are prepared, even if highly elliptically, to discuss their work in English. It is significant that many of the leading artists of the first generation of Western desert artists sought recognition not only within Australia, and from Australian institutions and galleries and the state itself, but also from Europe and the United States. See, for example, Johnson’s discussion of Clifford Possum’s interest in travel abroad; or Nicholls and North’s discussion of Kathleen Petyarre’s American travels. It is also true that the younger generations of painters are no less consciousness of the “European” world that surrounds and sometimes engulfs them and the place of painting in their peoples’ gaining some access to the goods and services of use of them from and through “Europe.”

generate sensations.³⁹ Through looking at a few examples, we can see how Deleuze's speculations about art and sensation, art and the earth, and art and the body may be supported in relation to these works from a very different tradition of narrative, representation, and temporality.

That there is nothing primitive about western desert art ought to be made clear. It is not a timeless traditional indigenous art form, but rather a very recent contribution to contemporary art.⁴⁰ The technical and aesthetic proficiency and beauty of these works is obvious; younger artists are trained by older, more experienced, and respected artists in both traditional techniques and in the acquisition of new, ever changing procedures, methods, and colors. Works are often collective and commonly involve more than a single artist, often including many members of one's family or those who share one's dreaming, and thus lineage, filiation, totemic identifications, territory, and history. While art is part of everyday life to the extent that it pervades the visual images, activities, and artifacts of desert culture, nevertheless, art making is a special activity, invested with not only respect and authority in traditional communities; it has become one of the few means by which Aboriginal peoples have

40. There is a clear separation in the minds of the artists themselves between the traditional methods, materials, and practices, which are directly derived from the earth, and those introduced through "European" techniques from the early 1970s and an easy ability to move between the one and the other as the situation warrants. The acrylic and oil paintings have never represented themselves as traditional or tribal, though they are always marketed through the narratives, the dreamings, that each work of art apparently depicted: "That Dreaming been all the time. From our early days, before the European people came up. That Dreaming carry on. Old people carry on this law, business, schooling, for the young people. . . . They been using the dancing boards, spear, boomerang—all painted. And they been using them on the body different times. Kids, I see them all the time—painted. All the young fellas, they go hunting and the old people there—they do sand painting. They put down the story, same like I do on the canvas. . . . Everybody painted. They been using ochres—all the colors of the rock. People use them to paint up. I use paint and canvas—that's not from us, from European people. Business time, we don't use the paint the way I use them—no we use them from rock, teach 'em all the young fellas" (Clifford Possum, quoted in Johnson 2003:16).

acquired financial and social support from white culture without complete paternalism and condescension. This is not the place to provide an adequate analysis of the complex and mired history of these gloriously dynamic, resonating, and unique artworks,⁴¹ which are, in my humble opinion, among the most stunning, affecting, and least understood and appreciated works of the twentieth and twenty-first century and beyond, although there is now an avid international art market growing around the production and sale of these magnificently shimmering works.

I can really only undertake a sampling—the briefest of detours—and look at the work of two major artists from the western desert: Kathleen Petyarre (from Anmatyerr, a region northeast of Alice Springs, painting at Utopia) and Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri (also an Anmatyerr, painting at Papunya), two of the most internationally well-known indigenous artists, whose work has now been exhibited in the U.S., the UK, France, and elsewhere, and certainly the most well-known in Australia and well represented in the collections of the National and State Galleries. The work of each is an attempt to map out in spatial and figural terms the geography of their dreaming country, a cartography of the events, the topography, and the animal beings that link to the artist's own bodily and clan history. Their works are temporal maps of those ancestral spatial terrains that are distinguishable and significant not for their geographical features but for the life a geography sustains, the practices that it engenders and the movements it requires. These works are dynamic portraits of a long past history, a history of events of war, natural destruction, births, marriages, sexual alliances, animal ancestors and totems, a living history concerned primarily with the past and how its narratives and practices effect the present, like the cinematic reel compressed into a single highly complex frame. Many of these works are remarkable for their capacity to envision, from an aerial point of view, the detailed topography of a land that has been

41. See the writings of Johnson 2003, Nicholls and North 2001, Hylton 1996, and especially Bardon 2005 for further details about the history and marketing of the major artworks of the Pintupi, Papunya, and Utopia artist communities.

primarily traversed only by foot, in which the slightest undulations or natural feature, tree trunks or animal remains may hold ceremonial and ancestral significance. Maldiney's landscape coincides here with a geography that now also includes history.

It may be true that abstraction and spatial representation were acquired as survival skills in an extremely harsh and relentless terrain and climate, but, rather than being simply the results of a kind of natural selection, an evolution concerned with survival alone, these conditions, the territory in its harshness and in its minute richness, become the basis of all ceremonial representations and, eventually, artistic representations that tend to retain their ceremonial connections but move well beyond the traditional.⁴²

To take only one example from Kathleen Petyarre's productive oeuvre as one of the Utopia artists, she shares a *Dreaming with a number of her painter sisters and brothers*,⁴³ the mountain or thorny devil *Dreaming*. This particular story involves a typical conjunction of territory and animal, of animal traversing territory, of territory inscribed by animal movements and the qualities and sensations capable of being released through their coupling, the

42. "Such an ability—to orientate oneself in space by envisioning a large tract of land as an entity that comprises smaller parcels of land, then conjuring up the whole in abstract form and reproducing it visually—was necessary for survival. In fact, successful land navigation and its corollary, the capacity for accurate location of food and water were essential for group survival. Collectively, these invocations of large stretches of 'country' constitute 'aerial views' of particular tracts of land" (Nicholls and North 2001:7).

43. Utopia is a somewhat misnamed generic label for about twenty small settlements in the Northern Territory of Anmatyerr and Alyawarr speaking groups. Petyarre worked for nearly twenty years, from 1969–1988 as an assistant teacher at the Utopia school that educated the children from these groups. Shortly after the opening of the Papunya art school, Utopia also developed into an artists' community, primarily directed to the production of works by women artists. Petyarre and her many sisters, including Violet, Gloria, Myrtle, and Nancy Petyarre, began as batik- and printmakers and only turned to painting in the 1980s. She had her first solo exhibition in 1996. The land around Utopia was returned to its traditional owners after a land claim, made primarily on behalf of women and their ceremonial ties to the land, in 1980.

eruption of colors, speed, and stillness, of terrain illuminated by reptile movements and through the humanized history of reptile ancestors. Petyarre and her sisters each produce mountain devil Dreaming in a series of remarkable paintings, each varying minutely, each taking a different element or aspect of the same Dreaming and extracting from it a vibrating series of dots, which resonate, op-art style, not just with optical but above all with haptic effects that reproduce while transforming the devil-movement through linking it to the becoming of the terrain or landscape. Devil-skin marks the land, devil-arcs of movement provide paths or tracks for lines of flight that transform hostile earth into territory.

The mountain devil (called *arnkerrth*) is a very small, spiky, ominous-looking lizard that inhabits much of the central Australian desert. It has the remarkable capacity, chameleonlike, to transform itself, to augment visual qualities. It usually has an ochre and earth coloring, especially in sedate and unthreatening conditions. It moves in a characteristic semicircular path, leaving parallel tracks that inflect in a gentle arc of circular movements, then back again, snaking in one direction then in another, creating an undulating pathway as it heads in a particular direction. It can freeze without any trace of movement on viewing possible predators and, when threatened, can change color very rapidly from its ochre coloring to brilliant reds and yellows and then change back to its ochre/olive coloration again when it feels safe. The mountain devil, as a wily and wise character, a traveler or nomad, has many adventures and must rely on her skills and wisdom to survive. Kathleen Petyarre and her sisters have grown up, have studied, and, in some sense, have become, through these Dreaming stories, the hardy and "artistic" creatures who make their own bodies into a canvas of predator-sensations.

None of Kathleen Petyarre's paintings provide an image, resemblance to, or portrait of the mountain devil, but each is a becoming-devil of paint itself, the coming alive of the corrugations and patterns of its skin, of its tracks, the arcs of its movements as well as the projection of the skin onto the terrain, the belonging together of both the skin, the movements of the devil over its terrain,

the home country of Kathleen and her people (the people of the Atnangker), and the earth and its secret locations, which sustains them all through its own excesses and their ingenuity.⁴⁴

The terrain, a two hundred square kilometer area in the eastern desert of central Australia, is mapped in detail in a number of massive, elaborate paintings that contain not only a spatial, almost aerial, “map” but also the history of the animal and human events that occur there, from the ancient and more recent past, not only the time of the Dreaming but also incorporating events from memory or circulating narratives—the massacre in Darwin in 1869, the Coniston massacre of Aboriginal peoples in the 1920s, various devastating bushfires, the movement of forced and voluntary migrations from traditional lands through the intervention of various governmental policies and ordinances directed to assimilation into white culture, including the most recent and invasive government interventions into child-raising practices, which continue a long tradition of violent even genocidal assimilation and annihilation.⁴⁵

44. “In Kathleen’s art, as is the case with other Anmatyerr, Centralian, and Western Desert artistic production, *Arnkerrth* [the Mountain Devil] is not represented figuratively but conceptualised spatially. In Anmatyerr art all living creatures, including human beings, are depicted as predominantly spatial rather than psychological beings, interacting in natural and cultural landscapes that occupy space over time. . . . The spatial information or patterns that Kathleen creates in her art correspond to and can be mapped onto existing geographic features in Atnangker country, for example, the rockholes, hills and mulga spreads that Arnkerrth encountered in the course of her epic travels during the Dreaming. Satellite imagery and computer-generated overlays indicate a surprisingly close correspondence to the work of traditionally oriented Indigenous artists, including that of Kathleen Petyarre” (Nicholls and North 2001:10). Johnson makes a similar point: “The peoples of the Western desert are justly renown for their uncanny mastery of their terrain and its resources. Their phenomenal skills of site location, tracking and spatial orientation in apparently featureless country almost defy explanation for those dependent on maps to find their way around. . . . They do not need to read directions off a map because they know how to read the ground itself” (2003:79).

45. As this text is being finalized, the Australian government has announced, just in time for the next elections, that it needs to intervene into the alarming rate of child rape and child sexual abuse that has occurred in many remote indigenous

In Petyarre's work the land, the mountain devil, the weather, and catastrophic events that occur to the land—hail, storms, drought, fire, sandstorms—are not readily distinguishable from one another, rather the one is incorporated into the other, the skin is part of the land, the land is made by what occurs on it and has its particular effect on the events that are hitherto marked by their origins, and the people who inhabit the land, including the artists who sing and paint its ceremonies and make "white man's art" as a second-order representation of the art that is part of their own cultural life. Yet, "it's still body painting, still ceremony, even looking from the sky [it is] still dancing, still ceremony, my new style is still dancing ceremony" (Kathleen Petyarre, quoted on Nicholls and North 31). Sensations are liberated from their religious and sacred position in the rituals that help in the transmission of knowledges from one generation to the next (while never thoroughly detached from these origins) to become coloring, forming, artworks that "stand up alone," that function perfectly well as autonomous objects, as artworks, in other nonceremonial contexts. Though their sacred relations remain implicit in such artworks, they are no longer sacred objects or part of sacred ceremonies.

Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri was probably the most well-known indigenous artist of his generation, second only in fame to Emily Kame Kngwarreye's luminous works (an aunt to Kathleen Petyarre and the yardstick or measure of white success for many indigenous artists in terms of her acceptance by museums, galleries, and auction houses). Originally a woodcutter and carver of considerable

communities. While of course it is laudible to "protect children," it is significant that in the same week that the prime minister, John Howard, chose to bring in troops to address this issue (a new "war" on abuse?), newspapers revealed that more than fifty million dollars of government funds specifically earmarked for Aboriginal communities has been left unspent. In other words, rather than actually provide and disburse the money that should have been spent on health, educational, and employment services, the government has chosen a path that cannot possibly adequately address child sexual abuse and will only further participate in the alienation of Aboriginal peoples from both their own traditional life and lands as well as their involvement in white culture as autonomous subjects.

skill, he joined the Papunya Tula Artists Cooperative in 1972, becoming chairperson of the cooperative in the early 1980s. His most stunning and complex works, like Kathleen Petyarre's, were huge paintings, undertaken as a kind of elaborate map or topography of his people's Dreaming. His early paintings on walls and boards, including the Warlugulong series (mid to late 1970s), were focused on painting the Dreaming of a catastrophic bushfire, which was the result of a long series of transgressions by two brothers.

Significantly, he painted this series with his brother, Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri. Warlugulong is the Anmatyerr name for a site around two hundred miles from Alice Springs where the Blue-Tongued Lizard Man started a great bushfire, the primordial or original bushfire, one of the Dreamings of the "origins of the earth" where his two sons perished. However, it may be that the two sons perished because they ate all of a sacred kangaroo without sharing with their father or group, a double-barreled crime or transgression that demanded the severest punishment. The Warlugulong paintings are topographical diagrams of the sons, the fire, the father, the kangaroo, painted as if they were sand paintings, on the ground, where their orientation and the location of up and down becomes irrelevant.⁴⁶ The bushfire Dreaming repeats and elaborates sensory motifs and regions of the Warlugulong series, the skeletons of the two brothers bringing more and more dynamic and less traditional colors to canvases now saturated with Dreaming stories, placed together instead of separated on the canvas.

For Clifford Possum and his patrilineal descent group, the primary Dreaming explicated in the Warlugulong series and in many other paintings he and his brother undertook is the Love Story, a story with a number of episodes, one that involves a man named Liltipility who falls in love with his classificatory mother, a relative with whom he is forbidden various types of contact, especially

46. "Like almost all Western desert paintings, Warlugulong was painted flat on the ground [like Pollock's work]. This displaces the European assumption that the top of the painting must, like a western map, be north, with a perspective from which there are only four sides, any of which might be the top depending on which side of the canvas the artist is located at the time" (Johnson 2003:89).

sexual contact. The paintings that make up the Man's Love Story series are all intensive visual interpretations of elements of this narrative. Many of his paintings are episodes or fragments of this Dreaming, explorations of sites and locations where it took place and of animals and insects who shared this terrain, including honey ants, rock wallabies, and possums, that figure heavily in some of his art.

Yet his art, and that of other desert artists, cannot be construed as narrative or representational or sacred. If there is a narrative or representation, it is only that which is captured visually, technically. This is perhaps why the story of the Dreaming is commonly appended to artwork as an external document, a written narrative sold with each painting, a kind of authentication for Western eyes of the ceremonial value of these works. As embedded as they are in history and collective narrative, however, these contemporary works require an artistic pop, "a flash," in Clifford Possum's own words, the eruption of sensation at the level of the artwork itself to work as contemporary artworks rather than to serve only as non- or preartistic religious rituals.⁴⁷

Their colors are as dazzling, iridescent, and luminous as territorial deep sea fish. The dots make the landscape sing and dance with a buzzing resonance of poster display.⁴⁸ But here it is not only the (animal) body that is on display, rendered sensational, but the very earth itself, with every feature, characteristic, and undulation, every shrub or tree, now laden with its events, the very forces necessary for a sensory elevation of color to the "cry of the earth," more

47. When asked by Vivien Johnson what gave him the idea to compress two or more stories into a single artwork, he answers: "Nobody. My idea. I think, I do it this way: make it flash" (*ibid.*, 79).

48. Clifford Possum was very aware that the traditional ocher palate, colors derived directly from the earth and its products, had become predictable, perhaps even cliché, and he sought out, through combining ochers and the use of Western acrylics, a new range of colors, and with them new possibilities of sensation: "I gotta change'm see? Make'm nice colours. Nobody try to mob me on this, because colours—I gotta change'm. I tell'm everyone, soon as I saw my canvas, I gotta be changing colours. Not only this same one, same one—colours, I change'm all the way along. Gotta be different" (Clifford Possum, *ibid.*, 180).

clearly here a summoning of a “people to come” perhaps than in any other form of art today!

This is not an art that is understood conceptually.⁴⁹ Its effect is largely visceral, dazzling the eyes with color vibrations, beckoning hands to touch and ears to hear its shimmering forms, its stories of origin, its rhythms and movements that are both abstract and realist, both representational and antirepresentational in one and the same canvas, disorienting our optical and spatial coordinates in favor of a more haptic understanding of terrain or earth and of its relation to the living, struggling, producing body while nonetheless retaining a new kind of optic, producing a new kind of landscape perhaps even more decentered than postmodernism itself. There is no ready distinction between background and foreground, no figure discernible against a neutral ground, no active subject, only becomings, animal-becomings, honey-ant-becomings, and territorial-becomings, the-becoming of anthills and honey mounds, of fires and natural catastrophes.

The very forces and energies of the earth and all that populates it are summoned up and become sensation. Even the most elementary forms of life, plants, for example, make of their situation, their territory, climate, and milieu a contraction, a making of something more—colors and perfumes that motivate and provide materials for art.⁵⁰ Everything—territory, events, animals, man—are pro-

49. Clifford Possum himself has suggested that his work less involves “brain” than “heart”: “‘Soon as I pick up my brushes, I got’m in my head.’ What an amazing brain he must have, I exclaimed, to be able to conceive such a complex image in advance of its creation. He gently corrected me. ‘Not brain, Nakamarra.’ He said to me, ‘Not brain—heart’” (ibid., 185).

50. In a quite stunning passage, Deleuze and Guattari affirm, along with Bergson and Darwin himself, the remarkable inventiveness—freedom—of even the most apparently dormant of life forms. Plant-becomings are evident everywhere for Bergson, and plants retain for him an incipient consciousness, a kind of elementary freedom linked to their possibilities of movement. Deleuze and Guattari, however, suggest that plants are contemplative, they have passions, they contract to produce sensations: “The plant contemplates by contracting the elements from which it originates—light, carbon, and the salts—and it fills itself with colors and odors that in each case qualify its variety, its composition: it is sensation in itself. It is as if flowers smell themselves

duced equally, without hierarchy, on the flat plane of canvas or board, the weather no more enveloping human and animal figures than being enveloped by them, humans no more the object of representation than the animals to which they are ancestrally connected, the earth no more a passive ground for the action of living agents than a living agent (or many) itself.

These works exhibit a preoccupation with becoming, with duration and the virtual. They are concerned above all with the time that passes and marks events but also with the time that marks eternity and the unchanging. They are concerned with that virtuality that constitutes history, cultural and natural memory, the memory of events, of seasons and their practices, of upheavals and changes, a history conserved and condensed into the present as the present's conditions for its own overcoming into a new future. These works represent a surveying-without-distance, an absolute survey, a self-surveillance, in Ruyer's sense,⁵¹ a history both indigenous and alien, both autonomous and brutally colonized, a history now embedded in the land and the living creatures it supports, that the paintings celebrate even as they look forward to a time in which the earth is returned to them. Is this not precisely the kind of territorializing, deterritorializing, and reterritorializing structure, hovering between the animal and the human, between the earth and territory, that Deleuze has claimed is the basis of all the arts? And don't these indigenous artists, and the many others with their blazing vision

by smelling what composes them, first attempts of vision or of sense of smell, before being perceived or even smelled by an agent with a nervous system and a brain" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:210).

51. For Ruyer, sensations are the consequences the activities that do not themselves require a sensibility to perceive them. Vision, hearing, smell, touch, and taste are sensory experiences, not mediated representations of the real, but the real itself in absolute self-proximity, true form: "It is a primary, 'true form as Ruyer defined it: neither Gestalt nor a perceived form but a *form in itself* that does not refer to any exterior point of view, any more than the retina or striated area of the cortex refers to another retina or cortical area: it is an absolute consistent form that surveys *itself* independently of any supplementary dimension, which does not therefore appeal to any kind of transcendence" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:210). See both Ruyer 1952 and, for an insightful elaboration of his claims, Bains 2002.

of the earth and its possibilities for life, make sensation the means by which their very culture and not just its arts can live again, live anew? Is this not a gesture to the multisensory unity of the arts where painting summons up and incites song and dance and where narratives, transformed into song, dance, musical rhythms and themes, become the very emblems or posters of the earth itself and the future life it might sustain?

BECOMING COSMIC

Painting has been about the visual and plastic image of the invisible forces of the earth, forces that are the combination of universal forces regulating all the cosmos—gravitational forces, magnetic forces, the force of light, and so on—and the historically contingent eruption of life on earth in the particular forms it has taken—forces that are cellular, chromosomal, biological, regulated by impersonal cosmic forces through which evolution operates. Painting is one response, by no means the only possible one, to the dynamization of biologically regulated forces (forces of both the body and the Body without Organs) by cosmic forces, through the random production of excess. Life has no choice but to respond to these random cosmological forces, which it must incorporate into its morphology and behavior. In addition to the necessities imposed on life by these forces of the universe (to take as some obvious examples, the separation of day from night or light from dark, the separation of oceans and waters from the earth and dry land, the geological separation of continents and migrational pathways, the effects of specific regional, climatological and geographic features on life forms), there is also the production by these forces of an excess, of more than living creatures need to survival.

Bare survival is rare in even the harshest climate and conditions: the more difficult the region, the more ingenuity and artistry is involved in the production of (random) qualities. The thorny mountain devil is capable of survival in even the driest of climates because it is able to live on the water generated only by condensation. Yet it does so much more than survive. Not only does it produce the most

vivid and striking colors and color changes, it has also perfected the theatrical arts of stillness and speed. And not only does it manage to survive in the most forbidding of conditions, it also inspires totemic identifications, it serves for many Aboriginal peoples, and through them, perhaps "Europeans," as an emblem, a Dreaming, of many of their own struggles and triumphs, both daily and historically. It is because there is an animal-becoming, a devil-becoming, in the coexistence of traditional groups and the thorny mountain lizards in a common terrain, where each fights in its own way, that human subjects become inscribed with animal-becomings, the movements, gestures, and habits of animal existence (which is not confined to the visual arts, but occurs above all in dance and music) and that animal, even lizard subjects, become endowed with human wishes and skills, wisdom, fortitude, cunning, calm, envy, gratitude.

Cosmic forces—of climate, geography, temporality—impinge on, transform, and become the objects for living beings. We can understand these as the coming together, however uncomfortable, of an interior milieu with an exterior milieu, an unpulsed organic totality, and vibratory cosmic forces that generate the possibilities of expression and intensity. These living beings take what they need from the objects produced by such cosmic forces, but also more than they need. They extract that which may not be of survival value—colors, sounds, shapes—qualities that only emerge as such to the extent that they can be extracted or abstracted from the objects in which they are found and taken from this excess to become pleasurable and intensifying qualities that can be used to adorn both territory and body. Territory and body only emerge as such to the extent that such qualities can be extracted.

There is only earth rather than territory until qualities are let loose in the world. Qualities and territory coexist, and thus both are the condition for sexual selection and for art making—or perhaps for the art of sexual selection and equally the sexuality of art production. It is this excess, of both harnessable forces and of unleashed qualities, that enables both art and sex to erupt, at the same evolutionary moment, as a glorification of intensity, as the production and elaboration of intensity for its own sake. Where art comes to use sensations, the condensation, purification, and exploration

of percepts and affects; sex comes to use embodied gestures, traces, connections from which the percept or affect may be born. It is because of the beauty of the thorny lizard, its peculiar epidermal geography, its characteristic ways of moving, its color intensifications, that it serves to spur on human art making, which does not so much seek to imitate or represent it as to partake in some of those features and characteristics that allure and attract.

Art is the process of making sensations live, of giving an autonomous life to expressive qualities and material forms and through them affecting and being affected by life in its other modalities. As songbirds are themselves captivated by a tune sung by their most skillful and melodious rivals and fish are attracted to the most striking colors and movements of fish, even if these are not their own, so these qualities—melody, sonorous expression, color, visual expression—are transferable, the human borrows them from the treasury of earthly and animal excess. But art is not simply the expression of an animal past, a prehistorical allegiance with the evolutionary forces that make one; it is not memorialization, the celebration of a shared past, but above all the transformation of the materials from the past into resources for the future, the sensations unavailable now but to be unleashed in the future on a people ready to perceive and be affected by them.

Cézanne yearns for a future in which the solidity of objects and forces can be felt, sensed, real; Bacon yearns for a future in which reality directly impacts the nervous system, where forces are liberated from their artistic boundaries; Papunya and Utopia artists yearn for peoples, Aboriginal and white, reconnected to their lands, no longer only through animals but through what the West has to offer them, through planes and cars, through Europe, as a world people, as custodians of a world-Dreaming. In making sensation live, each evokes a people and an earth to come, each summons up and pays homage to imperceptible cosmic forces, each participates in the (political) overcoming of the present and helps bring a new, rich, and resonating future into being.

