

Chapter 6

Modes of Violence: Deleuze, Whitehead, Butler and the Challenges of Dialogue

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Introduction

Alfred North Whitehead, as is well known, challenges many aspects of traditional Western philosophy. Whitehead states that most philosophers posit “an ultimate which is actual in virtue of its accidents” (PR 10). For Whitehead what has traditionally been conceived to be ultimate are certain facts, whether these be the forms of Plato, Descartes’s cogito, or Locke’s primary substance. These ultimates become actual by virtue of their accidental embodiments—for example, the form becomes actual when it happens to be embodied in a particular person or thing; the cogito becomes actual by virtue of the thoughts it has; and primary substance is actual by virtue of the secondary qualities that enable us to identify it. In reversing this tradition, Whitehead will no longer make “facts ultimate,” but will instead “makes process ultimate” (PR 10). Consequently, events and actual entities are no longer understood to be reducible to the facts that can be discovered about them; to the contrary, they always exceed the facts and hence assure the emergence of novelty. As Whitehead puts it, “every actual entity also shares with God the characteristic of transcending all other actual entities, including God. The universe is thus a creative advance into novelty” (PR 260).

Whitehead admits that his starting point runs counter to much of Western thought and in fact bears closer similarities to “some strains of Indian, or Chinese, thought, than to western Asiatic or European thought” (PR 10). Whitehead, however, is not alone in his criticisms of traditional Western philosophy. This critique has been a frequent mainstay of contemporary continental philosophy, but until recently there has been little attention paid to just how close Whitehead’s critique, and the metaphysics that underlies it, is to those of more recent philosophers. In the following essay we will compare Whitehead’s thought with two such contemporary philosophers—namely, Gilles Deleuze and

Judith Butler. In the first section we will examine Deleuze's and Butler's critique of traditional subject-predicate dualism, especially as this has come to dominate much of the philosophical discussions concerning theories of reference. In the next section we will turn to discuss the monistic ontology of objects and events that forms the basis of Deleuze's critique. This will also enable us to better compare and contrast the ontological commitments of Deleuze and Butler. In the final section we will continue to draw together the philosophies of Deleuze, Whitehead, and Butler. By expanding upon Butler's notion of the double movement as a critical and political strategy, we will show that despite some important differences with Butler an important and challenging dialogue emerges with the thought of Deleuze and Whitehead that facilitates, we hope to show, a more effective and radical questioning of many of our prominent cultural and philosophical assumptions.

Reference

In his book *Naming and Necessity* Saul Kripke sets forth what has come to be known as a causal theory of reference, and he offers it as a better alternative to the descriptive theories of reference. According to the latter theories, as exemplified by Frege, Russell, and others, a referent is determined by a list of descriptive predicates and properties. The problem with such theories, according to Kripke, is that they have difficulty in accounting for counterfactuals such as, "if Gore had won the 2000 Presidential election, then" It seems clear that the Gore referred to by such a counterfactual is the same as the one who, in the actual world, lost the election, and yet in this and other cases along these lines the descriptive theories are ill-equipped to account for what we commonly take to be the case concerning reference. What Kripke proposes is that a reference is determined by an initial naming, what he calls an 'initial baptism,' that rigidly designates the referent and which is then passed on from person to person in a lineage of causal connections. Hence a counterfactual concerning Gore rigidly designates its referent through the causal chain that traces back to his initial naming and as a result we tend to have little difficulties with such counterfactuals. But the theory is not without its problems, as Kripke notes, and as Judith Butler correctly stresses (more on this below). In the case of Santa Claus, for instance, Kripke recognizes that despite the fact that there "may be a causal chain from our use of the term 'Santa Claus' to a certain historical saint...children, when they use this [term], by this time probably do not refer to that saint" (Kripke 1980, 93). Kripke concludes from this example that "other conditions must be satisfied" for his theory to be a "really rigorous theory of reference," but being "too lazy at the moment" he is satisfied that his theory, such as it is, offers "a better picture than the picture presented by the received views"—namely, the descriptive theories (Kripke 1980, 93).

As Deleuze sets forth his understanding of the relationship between a subject and its predicates and properties, he too finds the descriptive theories inadequate. The reason for his misgivings with the descriptive theories is that they

reduce the subject to being merely a static substrate to which are pegged the various properties that enable us to identify it as the subject that it is. Rather than understanding reference as an external relation between a subject and its predicates, Deleuze adopts Leibniz's claim that "every predicate is in the subject" (TF 42). What this is often taken to mean is that if one knows the true nature of a given subject they would then know all the predicates that are or will be true of this subject.¹ God, for example, knew that Adam would sin, and to think of an Adam that did not sin would be to think of a subject that is not Adam. Deleuze is right however to point out that this view is mistaken. It was "Malebranche's error," Deleuze reminds us in referring to the famous dispute between Leibniz and Malebranche, "to have believed that in God we see completely unfolded Ideas" (TF 49).² The lesson Deleuze draws from Leibniz is that the relationship between subject and predicate is neither stabilized by a set of predicates that would conjointly determine the subject, nor does the subject provide the stability necessary for reference to be maintained even in the case of counterfactuals. The subsequent question for Deleuze, therefore, is to understand how reference does come to be stabilized.

An initial answer to this question emerges in Deleuze's *Logic of Sense*. In discussing the nature of the proposition Deleuze argues that manifestation – which concerns the relation of a proposition to the person who expresses it – is primary with respect to denotation – namely, the relation between a proposition and that which is individuated, picked out, or referred to by a given proposition. Deleuze credits Hume with this insight: "Hume had seen this clearly: in the association of cause and effect, it is 'inference according to the relation' which precedes the relation itself" (LS 13). In other words, it is the stabilization of habit and custom that makes possible the rigid designation of a referent, including reference to the subject who speaks. As Deleuze puts this same point years later in his book on Leibniz, an individual is to be defined as a "concentration, accumulation, coincidence of a certain number of converging preindividual singularities" (TF 63). Only once this process is complete, or reaches a threshold, does it then become possible to determine a referent. Hence, not only does Deleuze argue that "determination itself supposes individuation," but that "all consciousness is a matter of threshold" (TF 64; 88). In the case of consciousness, for example, Deleuze develops a Leibnizian theme and claims that our macroperceptions of objects as determinate, identifiable objects are constituted of "minute, obscure, confused perceptions ... [and had we] failed to bring together an infinite sum of minute perceptions that destabilize the preceding macroperception while preparing the following one, a conscious perception would never happen" (TF 86). The stabilization of habit that allows for denotation and reference, for the determinations of a consciousness that is, according to the Husserlian phenomenologists, always consciousness of *something*, is therefore nothing less than an integration of preindividual singularities. This integration, however, presupposes wayward singularities, much as Kripke's causal theory, according to Butler, presupposes the catachresis that diverges from established social practice (e.g., children's use of the term Santa Claus, or naming

one's pet aardvark "Napoleon", to give Kripke's example). Deleuze is quite forthright on this point:

The animal that anxiously looks about, or the soul that watches out, signifies that there exist minute perceptions that are not integrated into present perception, but also minute perceptions that are not integrated into the preceding one and that nourish the one that comes along ("so it was that!"). (TF 87)

To clarify this final point we can turn to the work of Judith Butler, for Butler turns to Kripke for reasons that are much in line with Deleuze's understanding of reference—namely, to avoid a descriptive theory. From a Deleuzian perspective a descriptive theory presupposes a static substrate which bears the various descriptive properties—or it presupposes, to use Russellian language, the argument that makes the functional relationship to the descriptive properties true. By allowing for reference to be fixed by the act of naming itself, Kripke allows for the possibility of giving prominence to historical contingencies, which was something Butler was critical of Žižek for, who saw all social formations as following upon the same necessary constitution of an outside, or as being "reduced to a 'lack' with no historicity, the consequence of a transhistorical 'law'" (TF 220). But although Kripke's approach may appear more amenable to historical contingency, his position ultimately relies upon a "homogeneity of intention." In a passage Butler cites from *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke argues that "When the name is 'passed from link to link', the receiver of the name must, I think, intend when he learns it to use it with the same reference as the man from whom he heard it" (Kripke 1980, 96).³ But, Kripke admits, if I were to use the name "Napoleon" for my pet aardvark, then "I do not satisfy this condition." Such a divergence and "failure to keep the reference fixed" may account, Kripke argues, "for the divergence of present uses of 'Santa Claus' from the alleged original use" (Kripke 1980, 96-97). Butler goes even farther: for her it is the possibility for divergence, the uses that are outside the current homogeneity of uses that makes this homogeneity of intention and hence reference itself possible when the wayward uses are policed and kept at bay.⁴

We can now return to our earlier claim that reference and denotation are made possible, for Deleuze, by the stabilization of habit, a stabilization that presupposes wayward singularities that escape integration. Similarly for Butler discourse presupposes a constitutive outside—catachrestic uses for instance—that makes referentiality possible precisely by being excluded, by not being allowed within the purview of proper discourse. For both Deleuze and Butler, therefore, reference presupposes a process of filtering and selection. For Deleuze preindividual singularities are filtered, integrated, and individuated into an identifiable, determinate entity—for instance a consciousness that is a consciousness of something. For Butler, an identifiable discursive practice is identifiable as such only as a consequence of disallowing the practices that would challenge and potentially undermine the very identity and integrity of the practice. But has this not left us with a form of dualism, or with what Donald Davidson has referred to as the third dogma of empiricism?⁵ On the one hand there are the conceptual

schemes that filter, select, and shape a content that is distinct from and outside the schemes themselves (the constitutive ‘outside’), and then there is the content itself that is taken up by varied and potentially incommensurable schemes. Davidson charges Quine and others with adhering to this third dogma, and it appears a similar charge could be made of Deleuze and Butler. To make matters even worse, Deleuze himself both claims that empiricism itself is defined, in its essence, by dualism and admits repeatedly to being inspired by empiricism.⁶ Is Deleuze therefore embracing the very dualism Davidson finds problematic? It is to address this question that we now turn.

Empiricism

Davidson’s arguments concerning what he calls the third dogma of empiricism are directed primarily at the naturalized epistemology that follows in the wake of Quine’s critique of the analytic-synthetic distinction as set forth in Quine’s famous essay, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism.”⁷ As a result of Quine’s critique the dualism between sentences that are true “both because of what they mean and because of their empirical content” and sentences that are true “by virtue of meaning alone, having no empirical content,” this dualism has largely fallen into disrepute. Nonetheless, Davidson claims that “in place of the dualism of the analytic-synthetic we get the dualism of conceptual scheme and empirical content” (Davidson 2001, 1989). With Quine, for example, naturalized epistemology, or our “scientific heritage” is prompted by and ultimately organizes our “sensory promptings” (Quine 1980, 46).⁸ And social linguist and anthropologist Benjamin Whorf offers for Davidson a quintessential example of the third dogma when he claims that “all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated.”⁹ What Davidson comes down against in such arguments is the conclusion that incommensurable conceptual schemes are possible, what Davidson refers to as the “failure of intertranslatability” between conceptual schemes. In other words, not only are observers not led by the same evidence to the same picture of the universe, they may be led to entirely incommensurable pictures, pictures that cannot be calibrated and hence translated from one conceptual scheme to another. The result, for Davidson, is what he calls conceptual relativism, and essential to it is the “idea that there be something neutral and common that lies outside all schemes,” and this neutral something is usually taken to be some form of empirical evidence (e.g., sensory promptings in the case of Quine). Similarly for Deleuze and Butler it appears there is something that lies outside schemes, whether preindividual singularities that are then integrated and individuated to the point where a threshold of consciousness is crossed and an identifiable something is possible; or for Butler there is the constitutive ‘outside’ that is not taken up by any discourse and yet is integral to the final shape and form a discourse takes. It would appear that Davidson’s critique of Quine and others might equally apply to Deleuze and Butler.

To see that Davidson's critique would not extend to Deleuze we need first to see precisely what Davidson proposes as a counter to the third dogma of empiricism. To state it succinctly, Davidson argues that incommensurable conceptual schemes are impossible for the very possibility of having differing schemes and interpretations presupposes a foundation of general agreement. For Davidson our ability to interpret what another says presupposes a "general agreement on beliefs," or that most of our beliefs are true, even if we cannot pinpoint precisely which beliefs are or are not true.¹⁰ This general foundation of agreement does not imply nor is it "designed to eliminate disagreement, nor can it; its purpose is to make meaningful disagreement possible, and this depends entirely on a foundation—some foundation—in agreement" (Davidson 2001, 196-197). This may indeed seem to be entirely at odds with Deleuze's views for he ends his book on Leibniz by challenging the Leibnizian assumption of a preestablished harmony, proclaiming almost triumphantly that "dissonances are excused from being 'resolved,' [and] divergences can be affirmed...it could be said that the monad, astraddle over several [incommensurable and impossible] worlds, is kept half open as if by a pair of pliers" (TF 137). We will return to this theme in the next section but first it is crucial to recognize that Davidson is not calling for an identifiable pre-established harmony, or for a unitary conceptual scheme to replace the incommensurable conceptual schemes. In an argument that echoes Nietzsche's claim that one cannot pass judgment on life since it presupposes the impossibility of a position outside of life,¹¹ so too for Davidson one cannot find a position outside the multiplicity of beliefs and discourses that would give us the leverage necessary to determine whether there are indeed incommensurable conceptual schemes or a single shared scheme. Davidson is clear on this point: "It would be equally wrong to announce the glorious news that all mankind—all speakers of language, at least—share a common scheme and ontology. For if we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly say that they are one" (Davidson 2001, 198).

Where we stand, according to Davidson, is in the midst of an ontology of objects and events, what Davidson refers to as a "single ontology of objects and events, a form of monism" (Davidson 2001, 281). This single ontology and monism, however, is not to be confused with an organizing conceptual scheme, nor is it to be confused with the empirical content that comes to be organized; to the contrary, and in a move to avoid falling back into the third dogma of empiricism, this ontology of objects and events includes behavioral, mental, and physical objects and events. When we use two different explanatory vocabularies to refer to subjective and objective phenomena we are not, according to Davidson, resurrecting the idea of incommensurable conceptual schemes. Rather, in affirming a position Davidson calls anomalous monism, irreducibly different "explanations of the very same events could be produced...[and hence] the vocabularies of the mental and the physical belong to two different, but equally complete, systems of explanation for the same world. The possibility just bruted describes Spinoza's metaphysics: ontological monism and a multiplicity of conceptual systems" (Davidson 2005, 304-305). These explanations, however, these conceptual systems are not distinct from the events and the world being explained,

as conceptual relativists would have it, but they too are events in the world and are themselves subject to explanation and further enquiry, to being causally related to other objects and events, and so on.

To clarify this point further we can return to Whitehead, and in particular to Whitehead's critique of Hume. In *Modes of Thought* Whitehead calls for an inversion of Hume's philosophical approach. Rather than introducing the world "as a secondary conjecture" that is constituted on the basis of a multiplicity of discrete impressions and ideas, Whitehead argues that discrimination itself is exercised on the basis of an "experienced world," an experience that "starts," Whitehead claims, "with a sense of power, and proceeds to the discrimination of individualities and their qualities" (MT 119). In other words, we do not begin with "the many data" and then construct an experiential unity of the world; or, to restate the point using Davidson's terminology, we do not begin with a multiplicity of empirical data that is then taken up and organized by a conceptual scheme. We begin, Whitehead argues, with an experiential unity and power that Whitehead characterizes as the "compulsion of composition," or the process whereby a felt unity discerns and discriminates (or prehends to use Whitehead's term) novelties that perpetuate the process of composition. As Davidson might put this point, we begin with a general agreement that serves to make intelligible the differences and discriminations about which we subsequently disagree and argue. It is therefore not that which is discriminated that is most real – in contrast to Hume – nor is it a completed, self-sustaining composition – in contrast to the rationalists – but it is instead the compulsion of composition itself which is most real for Whitehead, or, as we will see in the next section, it is the process of dialogue, the process of working and reworking amidst a single ontology of objects and events, an ontology that includes the working and reworking process itself, that is most real for Davidson (and for Whitehead and Deleuze on our reading).

Despite Whitehead's critique of Hume, he nonetheless finds Hume's philosophy indispensable. As Whitehead argues,

This conclusion that pure sense perception does not provide the data for its own interpretation was the greatest discovery embodied in Hume's philosophy. This discovery is the reason why Hume's *Treatise* will remain as the irrefutable basis for all subsequent philosophic thought. (MT 133)

In other words, the data of sense perception do not, by themselves, provide the means whereby they become absorbed by a unifying interpretation. Although on his reading of Hume the sense data is indeed what is taken up and organized by an interpretive process (the third dogma), for Whitehead there is no sense data or data of any kind that exists independently of being taken up by an interpretive process. Whitehead avoids the scheme-content dualism in much the same way Davidson does—namely, by calling for an ontological monism, in this case a monism of actual entities: "apart from the things that are actual, there is nothing" (PR 53). And the actual entities that constitute actuality are to be "conceived," according to Whitehead, as an act of experience arising out of data. It is

a process of 'feeling' the many data, so as to absorb them into the unity of one individual satisfaction. But this data is nothing less than other actual entities, and thus each actual entity is an event, a process, whereby it is simultaneously a subject that prehends other actual entities and "absorb[s] them into the unity of one individual satisfaction" and it is in turn a unity that can be taken up within the prehensions of other actual entities, and so on—actual entities are thus both subject and superject as Whitehead puts it.¹²

It is this aspect of Whitehead's thought that Deleuze finds most compelling, and it is here where the concept of a necessary screen becomes an explicit theme. As Deleuze understands Whitehead, he is a successor to the philosophical tradition that asks the question, "what is the event?" This tradition begins for Deleuze with the Stoics who understand events to be incorporeal effects of language—the sense of a word is such an event that is inseparable from corporeal words and expressions and states of affairs but which is nonetheless incorporeal and not to be confused with them; then there is Leibniz's theory that the predicate is in the subject, not as an external property or descriptor that is in some sense contained by the subject but rather "the predicate is an event," meaning that the subject—that is, the monads—express and actualize the best of all possible worlds, and do so in a distinctive and particular way, but express the world in a way that cannot be reduced either to the world itself nor to a list of predicates and properties that would constitute the monad's particular expression. It is precisely for this reason that Deleuze groups Leibniz with Bergson and Whitehead, for by understanding the predicate to be an event irreducible to a world it expresses or to a completely determinate list of descriptive predicates, the monad can change and allow for creativity. As Deleuze puts it, "the best of all worlds is not the one that reproduces the eternal, but the one in which new creations are produced, the one endowed with a capacity for innovation or creativity: a teleological conversion of philosophy."¹³ Nonetheless, and as Deleuze points out, for Leibniz "the monads that exist wholly include the compossible world that moves into existence" (TF 81); in other words, there is no space of impossibles, for divergences and dissonance (as noted above). For Whitehead, by contrast, and this is why Deleuze believes Whitehead's philosophy of the event is a successor to Leibniz, "bifurcations, divergences, impossibilities, and discord belong to the same motley world...Even God desists from being a Being who compares worlds and chooses the richest compossible. He becomes Process, a process that at once affirms impossibilities and passes through them" (TF 81). It is for this reason that Deleuze, following Whitehead and breaking with Leibniz, argues that "events are produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity, but only under the condition that a sort of screen intervenes" (TF 76). Events are not the means whereby the best of all possible worlds "moves into existence," but are the means whereby a chaos becomes, by way of the necessary screen, a cosmos, and yet a cosmos that includes the divergences, impossibilities, and wayward processes—a chaosmos.¹⁴ As Whitehead recognizes the difference between his position and Leibniz's, what is crucial is that for Leibniz "monads change," whereas for Whitehead, "in the organic theory, they merely become" (PR 7). In other words, although monads are dynamic for Leibniz inso-

far as they include their predicate, and a predicate that is an event, they are dynamic only as intermediaries between various states of the best of all possible worlds. The monads thus change, and can even allow for novelty, but in the end this ultimately brings about a change from one state to another. For Whitehead, by contrast, and as Deleuze stresses, the cosmos and world itself is an event, a process, and therefore the monads no longer function as intermediaries between states of the world but are rather the very becoming of the world itself. Monads become; they do not change.

Bruno Latour has developed this line of thinking extensively in numerous works, but most notably in *We Have Never Been Modern*, and he among others (especially Isabelle Stengers) have pointed to Whitehead as a major influence.¹⁵ For Latour as for Whitehead (and for Davidson) there is a single ontology of events, and these events function as mediators that continually work, rework, and transform other events. Over time these events come to be stabilized as either natural events and phenomena or as subjective and cultural artifacts. The modern view Latour contests, by contrast, views events as intermediaries from the start that already embody their subjective or objective essence, an essence that will be revealed. In the first case, events are historical and anti-teleological in that they reflect the contingencies of their relationships to other events that are taken up over time though without presupposing whether such collectives (as Latour calls them) are guaranteed of success. In the second case, events are ahistorical and teleological. The essence is already there and whatever contingencies occur are accidental to the nature of the event, a nature that is predestined to be revealed at the end of the day.

We can now return to Whitehead's critique of Hume and to what Whitehead considered to be indispensable in Hume's thought, namely his claim that sense perception "does not provide the data for its own interpretation [which] was the greatest discovery embodied in Hume's philosophy." By adopting a monistic ontology of events, it is no longer a question for Whitehead of having to construct, amidst a multiplicity of already identified and identifiable entities, the necessary relation between them such as cause and effect, a subject's belief about the world and the way the world is, etc. Rather, for Whitehead when the event develops amidst a chaos of actual entities and events that come to be excluded by way of the screen that then enables the coming to be of a stable world or cosmos, it is the very identifiable, determinate and stable nature of the entities that *are* which marks for Whitehead the end of actual entities, the end of process. Only as determinate facts after the end of process do entities then embody certain relationships. The screen thus does not exclude or repress any determinate and identifiable entity. Deleuze and Foucault both echo Whitehead on this point, and this explains why they reject Freud's view of the unconscious.¹⁶ The screen does not function for Deleuze, and for Whitehead as Deleuze reads him, as the guard Freud discusses in the metaphor he uses to explain repression.¹⁷ In the metaphor there are two rooms. One room contains entities that we are conscious of. Some of these entities are the focus of our conscious attention while the rest are part of the background of our conscious awareness. The second room consists of entities that are in our unconscious. Between the two rooms is a door

and a watchman who monitors who can or cannot move from the unconscious to the conscious, or what, conversely, of our conscious life gets put into the unconscious. The problem with this theory for Deleuze is that it results, at worst, in a form of ontological dualism, or at best in a continued adherence to the third dogma of empiricism. As ontological dualism, the conscious and unconscious constitute two distinct realms, each containing entities the watchman then allows to pass between the two, much as reason for Plato allows for the recognition of the ideas outside the cave to be grasped within the cave, or the pineal gland for Descartes allows for the relationship between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. If the relationship between events and chaos is taken to be one where a chaotic realm of entities is forged into a stable cosmos, then we would again be back to the view whereby a conceptual scheme is inseparable from the screen that excludes those entities that are from the start outside all conceptual schemes – in short, we would be back to the third dogma. For Deleuze, by contrast, the unconscious is not distinct from the conscious, the chaotic is not a separate and distinct realm from cosmos. By an “unconscious in finite understanding,” Deleuze means that there is “something that cannot be thought in finite thought . . . a nonself in the finite self” (TF 89). In short, there are nothing but actual entities; or, as Whitehead claims, “apart from things that are actual [i.e., actual entities], there is nothing” (PR 53). The screen between events and chaos, therefore, is nothing less than the self-organization of actual entities themselves and reflects the fact that events, as processes and becomings, already exceed themselves and are assured of becoming other. In contrast to this view of the screen as part and parcel of processes of self-organization, Butler’s understanding of the foreclosure and exclusion that is inseparable from determinate discourses and social formations appears to draw sympathetically from Freud. As discussed earlier, Butler points out that for Kripke’s causal theory of reference to be possible it presupposes “a *policing* of the linguistic constraints on proper usage” so that a homogeneity of intention can assure the successful iteration of a name through the causal links (BTM 218, emphasis mine).¹⁸ Butler will also frequently refer to the violence associated with foreclosing the political field and that rules out (polices) any improprieties that may lead to any form of questioning and dialogue that may challenge and transform the political field. Does this violence and policing rely on a form of dualism or upon the third dogma? Even if it does, it might be argued, does not Butler’s understanding of the screen as a form of policing and violence pave the way for a more nuanced understanding of political activism? A Deleuzean-Whiteheadian understanding of the screen as simply the process of self-organization, by contrast, may leave one questioning whether there is much place in this philosophy for politics, much less for political activism.¹⁹ We will address these questions in the next and final section.

Modes of Violence

In comparing Butler’s thought with Whitehead’s, a striking point of agreement between them concerns the necessity of foreclosure and exclusion to any deter-

minate form of identity. We have already detailed this aspect of Butler's thought, but in Whitehead as well one finds him beginning with the assumption that "we experience more than we can analyse" (MT 89), from which it follows for Whitehead that any determinate conclusions one may draw from the various forms of analysis will necessarily exclude the "more than" can be analyzed. For Whitehead "no fact is merely itself" but rather its essence is its connectedness to all other facts; it follows from this, Whitehead concludes, "that in every consideration of a single fact there is the suppressed presupposition of the environmental coordination requisite for its existence" (MT 9). Even a fact of history, Whitehead argues, cannot be understood "until we know what it has escaped and the narrowness of the escape," such as, for example, the history of British dominance in North America that was a consequence of the "double failure of Spanish domination over California in the nineteenth century, and over England in the sixteenth century" (MT 90). Butler would certainly agree and does so explicitly in her essay "On this Occasion . . ." where she singles out a remark of Isabelle Stengers concerning Whitehead—"critical consciousness admits so many things without criticizing them" (Stengers 2002, 74). A consequence of this excess, this remainder, is a critical strategy of double movement that Butler continually calls upon. In *Bodies that Matter* Butler invokes the double movement as a strategic tool to be employed against the violence of foreclosure, the policing that excludes improprieties in the very establishing of what is determinate and proper. On the one hand, we are to continue "to invoke the category and, hence, provisionally to institute an identity," and yet on the other we are "at the same time to open the category as a site of permanent political contest" (BTM 222). This same point is reiterated in *Giving an Account of Oneself* when she seconds Adorno's claim that if "the human is anything, it seems to be a double movement, one in which we assert moral norms at the same time as we question the authority by which we make that assertion" (GAO 103). And more recently still in a follow up essay on a debate with Robert Post concerning academic freedom, Butler questions Post's argument that academic freedom ought to be "founded upon established and agreed-upon academic norms, set and enforced by a professional class of educators who know the fields in question..." (Butler 2009, 773). Her difficulty with this view is, in short, that it fails to follow the double movement. If "academic norms," Butler argues, "become the legitimating condition of academic freedom, then we are left with the situation in which the critical inquiry into the legitimacy of those norms not only appears to threaten academic freedom but also falls outside the stipulated compass of its protection" (Butler 2009, 774). These norms, in other words, would be invoked without allowing for them to become a "site of permanent political contest." If everything we analyze, therefore, if each of the determinate forms of identity we call upon presupposes an excess, and an excess that may well undermine and transform the very form of identity we have called upon, then one can understand the Whiteheadian reasoning for Butler's double movement.

We can now return to the questions with which we ended the previous section. As a resistance to the policing and violence that forecloses the excess in order to establish forms of propriety, does the double movement function as a

liberationist strategy, meaning a strategy that serves to free, along a traditional Enlightenment way of thinking, a repressed and imprisoned subject, a subject that has forcibly lost and been removed from its truer nature? Certainly Butler rejects any notion that there is an essential nature to the subject, and she repeatedly and persuasively argues for a new bodily ontology of the subject that would entail “the rethinking of precariousness, vulnerability, injurability, interdependency, exposure, bodily persistence and desire, work and the claims of language and social belonging.” The “being of the body to which this ontology refers,” Butler concludes, “is one that is always given over to others, to norms, to social and political organizations that have historically developed in order differentially to maximize precariousness for some, and minimize precariousness for others.”²⁰ The self cannot be abstracted from its network of interdependencies, and yet there is a self whose precariousness can both be identified and questioned, and a self that is identifiably distinct from the world and others, even if this identifiable self is provisional and subject to challenge and questioning (Butler’s double movement). Despite these arguments, it nonetheless appears that Butler continues to draw upon the third dogma. Butler does recognize that in her early work on the sex/gender distinction she “assumed that nature was a fact or, at least, a given, and that gender was somehow constructed or articulated through linguistic and cultural means.”²¹ She admits to having moved on from this position and has come to appreciate the important role a “social history of nature” could play in her thought. But has Butler gone to the ontological monism of events we sketched earlier? In particular, has or ought Butler to move towards the monism of events found in Latour? According to Latour the subject-object dualism only emerges at the end of the stabilization of events and this dualism is not, as Butler implies, there from the beginning of the process (if only indeterminately and provisionally so).²² It would seem that Butler has not moved this far from her earlier positions, though at the same time there is no reason, it seems to me, that she could not do so. One could offer, as we have, a Whiteheadian justification for Butler’s strategic employment of the double movement. In fact, Whitehead and Latour could also be seen to be offering the ‘new bodily ontology’ Butler calls for.

We can gain added insight into Butler’s employment of the double movement by returning to Deleuze, and in particular to our earlier question regarding whether Deleuze’s thought ought to have moved further in the direction of Whitehead and Latour. This will also clarify how the ‘new bodily ontology’ Butler calls for is already at work to an important extent in Deleuze’s writings. As was said earlier, Deleuze understands the event as a self-organizing phenomena that presupposes a chaos that is not an identifiably separate and distinct reality rather is inseparable from the actual and determinate as the in-finite and indeterminate that assures the transformation and becoming-other of the actual and determinate. To clarify what this means we can turn to Chapter 12 from *A Thousand Plateaus*, “Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine.” This chapter is especially relevant since Deleuze, as he ends his book on Leibniz, calls for a nomadology to replace monadology, and hence in this chapter attempts to cash in on this proposed advance upon Leibniz, an advance that

draws heavily from Whitehead. Of particular relevance to the themes we have been discussing is the violence associated with the war machine. In fact, there are two modes of violence that parallel the two key modes of thought Whitehead discusses in his book *Modes of Thought* (MT). In MT Whitehead claims that the “understanding has two modes of advance, the gathering of detail within assigned pattern, and the discovery of novel pattern with its emphasis on novel detail” (MT 57-58). Details can thus be gathered according to an ‘assigned pattern,’ thereby excluding that which exceeds the pattern, foreclosing upon it; and the understanding can turn toward a novel pattern, or to what Whitehead understands ‘conrescence’ to be in *Process and Reality*—namely, “the ‘production of novel togetherness’” (PR 26). In the chapter on nomadology the war machine’s modes of violence are quite analogous to Whitehead’s two modes of thought. From the perspective of nomadology, these two modes are now understood to be the “two poles of the war machine.” On the one hand, there is the war machine that “takes war for its object and forms a line of destruction prolongable to the limits of the universe” (TP 422). When the state captures the war machine and yet allows the war machine to take over the functions of the state then what one ends up with is the suicidal trajectory of totalitarianism.²³ This aspect of the war machine is thus not to be confused with the functions of the state, with royal science and other disciplines (in the truest sense of that word) that seek to preserve various forms of identity. Although the state has its forms of violence—police, law, bureaucratic institutions, etc.—that foreclose the improper and the nomadic, it is not a suicidal violence and is, as Butler argues, an integral aspect of the double movement that Adorno identified as part of what it is to be human. Deleuze thus recognizes, as does Butler, that there is the necessity of forms of identity as well as the necessity for the processes that challenge and transform these forms. The other pole of the war machine occurs when it “has as its object not war but the drawing of a creative line of flight, the composition of smooth space and of the movement of people in that space” (TP 422). This creative line of flight entails its own violence for it will break with and undermine established patterns in order to create, as Whitehead puts it, ‘novel togetherness.’ When this creative line of flight is successful it will manage to avoid the violence of the state, the policing and repression that maintains the forms of identity that are nonetheless necessary; and it will avoid the suicidal violence of the war machine that simply destroys all forms of identity and composition. And it is this last term, ‘composition,’ that is key. For Deleuze to be creative is not to become beholden to an either/or mandate: either you abandon established forms of identity, break all the rules, or you are not creative. To the contrary, one finds between the two poles, between the “organization and domination” of state violence and the suicidal destruction of the war machine a multiplicity of elements that are to be organized, composed, and set in motion such that they result in processes that are irreducible to either of the two poles, even though they forever risk collapsing into them.

We can now see, finally, why Deleuze was drawn to empiricism, and in particular why he claims that “empiricism will not be correctly defined except by means of dualism” (ES 108). When Deleuze admits that his logic of sense was

“inspired in its entirety by empiricism,” he offers this for an explanation: “Only empiricism knows how to transcend the experiential dimensions of the visible without falling into Ideas” (LS 20). In other words, empiricism as Deleuze understands it consists of the effort to avoid falling into the disintegrating sands of positivism whereby general statements and abstract thoughts become undone, and yet at the same time empiricism is able to generate abstract thoughts without calling upon Ideas. What empiricism seeks to do, in short, is to compose an assemblage, or collective as Latour calls it, between the two poles of positivism and idealism, much as the creative line of flight avoids the two destructive modes of violence. To give an example to clarify we could say that a dialogue, in particular a challenging dialogue, may begin with two contrasting positions, as was the case in Plato’s *Philebus*, but it then seeks, as Davidson shows, to attain, between the two positions concerning whether the life of the mind or the life of pleasure is best, “a well-proportioned, rationally generated mixture,” and as

Davidson clarifies, the goal of this process “is not fixed in advance . . . [but rather entails] knowing the art of discriminating, judging, selecting, and mixing the appropriate elements of a life in a way that exhibits measure, proportion, and stability” (Davidson 2005, 269; 274).²⁴ One thus begins in the middle, with established modes of violence, and by working through the various elements that are already there, already part of the scene of which we are a part, one attempts to generate a ‘composition,’ a “well-proportioned, rationally generated mixture.”²⁵ In response to the violence of the state, the violence of foreclosure, one can, through challenging dialogue, question the legitimacy of this violence as Butler suggests through her double movement; however, this challenging dialogue is not guaranteed of success, of drawing a creative line of flight into a “composition of a smooth space.” One may instead generate the tools and knowledge that get taken up by the state, by the forces of “organization and domination”; or one may end up at the other pole and undermine the very possibility of generating a ‘collective,’ a ‘composition.’ Either way, political activism for

Deleuze is not a matter of releasing forces of becoming that have been foreclosed; to the contrary, it is a matter of already being in the middle of such forces and attempting to navigate and compose them such that the result is the “production of novel togetherness.”

It is in this spirit, finally, that we may summarize the preceding arguments. We have not sought to approach Deleuze, Whitehead, and Butler as antagonists—even where we disagree—nor as allies guided by a set platform and agenda that we are working towards, perhaps in a groping manner as we attempt a totalizing truth that will stitch together each of their various claims of Whitehead, Butler, and Deleuze into a complete package. Rather, we have attempted to generate a challenging dialogue, and challenging in both senses of the word. The work of Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler sets forth a challenge to dialogue if dialogue is taken to be the effort to establish a consensus or reaffirm an established *doxa*; and it is challenging in the sense of being difficult work, difficult to organize, compose, and situate precisely what is said and the rela-

tionship of what is said to what others are saying. As for the first sense of challenging this is why Deleuze and Guattari accuse Socrates (at least Plato's Socrates of the early dialogues if one accepts Davidson's arguments [see fn. 67]) of failing even to engage in dialogue but rather "in a pitiless monologue that eliminates the rivals one by one," (WP 29) or why they are not attracted to the view of "philosophy as providing pleasant or aggressive dinner conversations at Mr. Rorty's" (WP 144). In both cases what is engaged in is not challenging dialogue but either the elimination of dialogue (in the case of Socrates) or the questioning of *doxa* in order to return to, or in exchange for, another *doxa* (in the case of Rorty). The challenging dialogue of Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler is one that seeks a creative, critical practice that is neither reducible to a *doxa* nor will it desist from challenging even one's own dialogue if it subsequently becomes *doxa*. In both senses, therefore, an encounter with Butler's texts, on their own and in connection with the texts of Whitehead and Deleuze (and Deleuze and Guattari), has indeed been a challenging dialogue.

Notes

1. A representative statement comes from a letter Leibniz wrote to Arnauld: "In saying that the individual concept of Adam involves all that will ever happen to him, I mean nothing else than what all philosophers mean when they say that the predicate is in the subject of a true proposition." *Leibniz-Arnauld Correspondence*, translated by H.T. Mason (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), 47.

2. This same point is made in John O'Leary-Hawthorne and J.A. Cover's "Haecceitism and Anti-Haecceitism in Leibniz's Philosophy," *Noûs* 30:1 (1996). As they argue, "for Leibniz, God sees a priori, though not via deductive means trading upon logical form, what is there to be seen in the contents of individual concepts....To be analytic, then, or for a predicate to be contained in a subject, we needn't suppose the subject to have a complexity of the sort that allows it to be represented as anything like a conjunction," 21-22.

3. Cited by Butler in BTM 213.

4. "If referentiality is itself the effect of a policing of the linguistic constraints on proper usage, then the possibility of referentiality is contested by the catachrestic use of speech that insists on using proper names improperly, that expands or defiles the very domain of the proper by calling the aardvark 'Napoleon,'" (Kripke 1980, 217-218).

5. See Donald Davidson, "On the very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

6. In his early book on Hume, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, translated by Constantin Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), for example, Deleuze claims that "empiricism will not be correctly defined except by means of dualism" (108). In LS Deleuze claims that "the logic of sense is inspired in its entirety by empiricism" (LS 20); and repeatedly throughout his writings, from his early book on Hume to his final publication, "Immanence: A Life," Deleuze claims to be setting forth a transcendental empiricism.

7. For this essay see W.V.O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View: Nine Logico-Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

8. Cited by Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 191. See also W.V.O. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), where Quine again stresses the role of sensory promptings.

9. Cited by Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 190.

10. See Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 200-201: "We cannot interpret on the basis of known truths, not because we know none, but because we do not always know which they are."

11. See "Twilight of the Idols," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Press, 1968), 490: "One would require a position outside of life, and yet have to know it as well as one, as many, as all who have lived it, in order to be permitted even to touch the problem of the value of life."

12. See PR 34: "An actual entity is at once both the subject experiencing and the superject of its experiences. It is subject-superject, and neither half of this description can for a moment be lost sight of."

13. See TF 79. Earlier on this same page Deleuze announces: "For with Leibniz the question surges forth in philosophy that will continue to haunt Whitehead and Bergson: not how to attain eternity, but in what conditions does the objective world allow for a subjective production of novelty, that is, of creation?"

14. See TF 81: "It is a 'chaosmos' of the type found in Joyce, but also in Maurice Leblanc, Borges, or Gombrowicz."

15. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, translated by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). See also Isabelle Stengers, *Penser avec Whitehead* (Paris: Seuil, 2002). Butler credits both Latour and Stengers with leading her to a greater appreciation of Whitehead's thought in "On this Occasion . . ." in this volume.

16. For Deleuze's critique see DR 106-107; and for Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the College de France: 1973-1974*, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008).

17. See Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis*, ed. and translated by James Strachey (New York: Liverlight, 1989), 366.

18. See n. 8 above.

19. Badiou, for instance, has argued that Deleuze's thought has no political theory, nor any place for understanding political activism. For Badiou's most extensive critique of Deleuze see *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, translated by Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

20. See Butler's "On this Occasion . . ." in this volume.

21. See Butler's "On this Occasion . . ." in this volume.

22. See Butler's "On this Occasion . . ." in this volume: "We do not make up the thing, and neither does the thing induce our consciousness. We are bound together, from the start, and in partially unknowing ways; if the object solicits me, I provoke it in turn, and if I provoke it, it answers back in some way or another." To describe the relationship between subject and object, or consciousness and thing, as bound together, even if "in partially unknowing ways," implies separate entities that come together to form the bond, that are then tied, even inextricably, together.

23. On this point Deleuze and Guattari largely echo Hannah Arendt's arguments in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973).

24. Davidson argues that Plato's *Philebus*, one of the late dialogues, returns to the elenctic method of the early dialogues due to dissatisfaction with the search for an adequate method in the middle dialogues. In particular, Plato came to doubt, according to Davidson (and Gadamer makes a similar argument, as Davidson acknowledges), the merits of the theory of forms in addressing ethical and political issues (although he continued to adhere to it with respect to epistemological standards). Developing the arguments of Whitehead, Latour, Deleuze, and others (including Butler), we would extend this understanding of dialogue even to epistemological matters.

25. Bruno Latour has taken a similar stance toward political matters in his essay "A Compositionist Manifesto" that largely echo many of the claims made here, and hence Latour's essay further supports the connections being made in this chapter between Latour, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler. Latour's essay is unpublished but is available at his website: www.bruno-latour.fr/articles/article/120-COMPO-MANIFESTO.pdf.