

JOSHUA DELPECH-RAMEY
Villanova University

WITHOUT ART: PETER HALLWARD'S *OUT OF THIS WORLD: DELEUZE*
AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF CREATION

What should be done with a desert island? In the famous novel, Robinson Crusoe converts his nearly-deserted island into a new home, stratifying and subduing the island in keeping with his preconceived needs. In "Causes and Reasons of Desert Islands," Gilles Deleuze argues that every healthy reader despises Crusoe, and secretly wishes the native Friday would make a meal of him.¹ Deleuze challenges us to ask what it would be for Crusoe to live not simply on but *with* a desert island. What would it be to live a life shared with or indiscernible from the attributes of a desert island, rather than to reduce the potentials of the place to a "human resource"? Deleuze writes that such a life would be essentially *creative* in the sense that a novel form of existence would emerge—not from the will of a dominating pioneer, but from the style of an inhabitant who might "give the island only a dynamic image of itself, a consciousness of the movement that produced the island . . . the island would be only the dream of humans, and humans, the pure consciousness of the island . . . then geography and imagination would be one."² Deleuze suggests that someone capable of becoming so fully aligned with the inhuman (or non-human) potencies of such a place would have to be described as almost "a god," or at least a human who "prefigures" herself: an artistic or shamanistic type willing to bind herself fully to the inscrutable powers of Earth or Ocean.³

The courage and vitality it would take to commit oneself to the impersonal forces constantly shaping and remaking life on a desert island might suggest that creativity, for Deleuze, is a consummate act of will-to-power. But as Peter Hallward is careful to make clear in his recent book, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, Deleuzian creativity is not an act of will in any ordinary sense. It must, in fact, be figured either in a subject who is bereft of even the

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974* (trans. Michael Taormina, Cambridge: Semiotext(e), 2004), 12.

² Ibid., 10-11.

³ Ibid., 13-14.

possibility of will, or in a will which is at one with transpersonal or asubjective forces. In Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, a low-life named Riderhood, whose job is to dredge up bodies from the Thames, nearly drowns when his boat is capsized. In his reading of the novel, Deleuze argues that Riderhood's frailty as he lies on the edge of death in Miss Abbey's pub exposes "a life" in its purity, a life with which everyone sympathizes only when it has been stripped of its actual qualities. People suddenly sympathize with this struggling, fragile life, no matter if Riderhood's occupation made him more or less despicable before. He has suddenly become a "man without qualities," the image of a life beyond personality, occupation, family history, or social standing. What is suddenly visible in Riderhood is an anonymous spark of life, a spark with which everyone sympathizes precisely because it belongs to no one and to everyone. A life, as such, has become visible in the emaciated body of a man on the edge of death.⁴

In some sense, Riderhood's body has become a desert island. It is momentarily stripped of its historical and even its biological determinants, and what remains is a singular intensity that while incarnate in his existence is not reducible to the sum total of the attributes that existence has garnered over time. As an overture to his reading of Deleuze's philosophy of creation, Peter Hallward generalizes from these two symbols of destitution: thanks to either the proximity of death or the potentialities of desertion, the pure activities of creation may fully appear. "The coherence of a creating," Hallward writes, "can only be grasped by suspending, and then eventually abandoning the coherence of the creature to which it gives rise."⁵ The pure forces of nature crisscrossing a desert island, like the life flickering in the face of death, seem equally to exemplify the essence of Deleuzian creativity. Hallward explicitly claims that "despite differences in context and theme, a version of [the] same separation or subtraction" is manifest in both a desert island and the body of Riderhood.⁶ But I will argue here that this equation is both the symptom and essence of Hallward's carefully documented and sometimes penetratingly insightful misreading of Deleuze's thought. Understood correctly, the creative inhabitation of a desert island, for Deleuze, would precisely *create a world* in which the subjective paralysis of human beings like Riderhood would not be required in order to perceive and employ the genuine vitalities of creation.

Hallward begins his book by establishing a link between Deleuze's notion of being as expressive or creative with pre-modern mystical notions of the world as

⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: A Life* (trans. Anne Boyman, New York: Zone, 2001), 28-29.

⁵ Peter Hallward, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006), 26.

⁶ Ibid.

theophany or divine self-revelation.⁷ For Hallward, this link undermines the credibility and relevance of Deleuze's thought for contemporary life. By conjoining Deleuze's philosophy of expressive becoming to traditional mystical ideas of the world as divine self-revelation (in pre-modern Islamic and occidental mysticism), Hallward attempts to show that Deleuze's philosophy is not ultimately concerned to change the world but rather to find ways out of it toward contemplative communion with an abstract or virtual power, even if such power is understood as immanent to creativity, and is not projected into the idea of a transcendent divine creator. While Hallward admits that, for Deleuze, proximity to the powers of creation involves intense forms of experimentation with our bodies and selves and societies, Hallward nevertheless remains unconvinced that this experimentation is genuinely necessary, let alone sufficient to address the complexities of actual "material" problems of "this world."

According to Hallward, genuine materialist philosophers, among whom he includes figures such as Marx, Darwin, Sartre, and Badiou, all insist that "actual or worldly processes inflect the course of both natural and human history" while Deleuze, on the other hand, believes that only virtual or "spiritual" processes (as he tendentiously calls them) are the true determinants of natural and human lives.⁸ Virtual processes, which Deleuze variously calls intensities, singularities, sense-events, or folds, are described by Hallward as the harbingers of a cosmic creativity irreducible to actual causal or spatio-temporal dynamics. But then Hallward argues that despite equating Being with a creative process, Deleuze's philosophy cannot count as a true materialism. Deleuze's thought is not finally a philosophy attempting to change the actual world, but to escape it. Thought does not change actuality, but merely reacts to or "counter-actualizes" actual experience such that a contemplative, even mystical communion is established between thought and the creative forces of life. Whatever effects such contemplation may have on the actual world and its mundane affairs are ultimately irrelevant to the adventures of thought itself. Such, at least, is Hallward's argument.

Hallward's claim about the whole of Deleuze's thought, if true, is devastating to any attempt to relate Deleuze's work to contemporary ethics and politics. The claim is not that Deleuzian creativity does not transform the actual world in important ways, but that such transformation is fundamentally irrelevant because it is oriented beyond activity toward mere contemplation of the abstract essence of creativity itself. This claim, however, is based on a strategic misreading of Deleuze's *oeuvre*. Although Hallward admits that his reading is neither a close textual exegesis nor an attempt to elucidate the details of any single one of

⁷ Peter Hallward, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006), 82-85.

⁸ Peter Hallward, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006), 7.

Deleuze's thoughts on time, the structure of events, the nature of repetition, or any of the other topics Deleuze's vast work covers, Hallward does root his arguments deeply in Deleuze's texts. Often this rooting takes strange liberties, such as the following passage from Hallward's "Introduction" that splices a sentence from Deleuze's *Logic of Sense* with *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*. Hallward writes,

Rather than seek to elaborate rules for the consistent representation of reality, Deleuze sees the fundamental task of philosophy as exclusively conditioned by our immediate participation *in* reality. Rather than represent the world in a reliable way, Deleuze maintains that our real concern is to "know how the individual would be able to transcend his form and his syntactical link with the world" so as to become the transparent vessel for that "non-organic life of things which burns us, [...]" which is the divine part in us, the spiritual relationship in which we are alone with God as light" (LS 178; C1, 54).⁹

The crucial point missing here is that the "light" that is mentioned in the Cinema books is precisely the light of film itself. The "divine part in us" Deleuze is thinking of here is not that which removes us from one another, but that which joins us most intensely together in the creation of a work of art: it is the efforts which culminate in the projection of a film—as Deleuze himself once put it, there is no intersubjectivity except an artistic one.¹⁰ Consider the collective effort involved in making a movie, or making music, or works of theatre or dance. We transcend our organic forms and syntactical links with the world not as an act of dematerialization or evaporation, but as a concrete, messy experiment that can be carried out only in and as the *work* of making art, doing science, or creating philosophical concepts. It is Deleuze's constant focus on *work*—his focus on the ideas of artistic and philosophical apprenticeship, initiation, and experimentation from *Difference and Repetition* through *What is Philosophy?*—that makes his thought materialist, but this is the aspect of Deleuze's thought for which Hallward has the least attention.¹¹

What makes Deleuze a materialist philosopher is his constant and careful study of the variety of ways in which creativity is activated, and the ways in which creative

⁹ Peter Hallward, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* (trans. Richard Howard, London: Continuum, 2004), 42.

¹¹ In a way, Hallward reads Deleuze under the aegis of what Whitehead would call the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. While Deleuze's entire philosophical effort is an argument that the actual—the common sense world of ordinary facts, objects, causes and effects—is itself an abstraction and an ideality, Hallward simply complains that Deleuze does not focus thought on an object that Deleuze would have us realize is ultimately unreal.

intensities transform quantity and quality, how the cinematic and painterly extraction of any-space-whatever transforms ordinary times and places, how in literature new forms of what would otherwise be nonsense come to reconfigure the possibilities of sense itself, how birdsong establishes territory. Philosophy's task is to make explicit a kind of hidden complicity between mind and matter, nature and art. But Hallward evades this point by insisting that art for Deleuze is simply the handmaiden of thought, a final step (à la Hegel) through materiality towards the "thought of the line itself" that is fully out of this world: philosophy as such.¹²

At a climactic moment in *Out of this World*, a strange sequence appears. Hallward writes that for Deleuze, "art transforms is material. Art is a dematerializing."¹³ Why would the application of paint to canvas or the ordering of sounds in a composition, or the montage of shots in a film be a "dematerialization"? It can be true only if one conflates, as Hallward does throughout his book, the actual and the material. The evidence for this reading is supposed to be found in Deleuze on Proust, where Deleuze argues that for Proust the signs of art are superior because they are the most rarified and least dependent upon particular material supports. But art for Deleuze is not a dematerializing alone, but also a rematerializing. Here lies the crux of Hallward's book: Hallward refuses to read the transformation process of art—the model for philosophy—as simultaneously de- and rematerializing.

It is true that for Deleuze the new or subtle bodies of works of art are not themselves material in an ordinary sense. But the sense in which art remains material while being irreducible to actual words or sounds or colors is precisely the emblem of the co-presence of virtual and actual, throughout Deleuze's work. The "spiritual substance" of works of art is defined by the fact that it *sticks* to this world. In some sense art works are the only things that *cannot* get out of this world. If there were no material to transform, there would be no art. So it is somewhat ridiculous to claim that Deleuze's philosophy of change leaves no room for the mediation of actuality. The paradox is that artists are closer to the grains—the textures, the limitations, the geometries of words, sounds, colors, etc.—than anyone on earth. Closer to the essence of wood than a carpenter, closer to the structures of molecular chemistry than a pharmacist or a cook, closer to pure sound than an air traffic controller. Yet on Hallward's reading, the sequence leading from art to philosophy is away from this new vision of materiality. As Hallward reads Deleuze, art produces or enacts the truth of creation by dematerializing essence. Philosophy can then be defined as a yet-more-dematerialized presentation of essence, an "absolute deterritorialization." But the

¹² Peter Hallward, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006), 126.

¹³ Peter Hallward, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006), 124.

sequence Deleuze leads us through is actually, and decisively, the reverse of this order. This can be seen in precisely the place Hallward does not see it: in Deleuze's reading of Proust's signs as the reversal of Platonic ideas.

Deleuze philosophy—paradigmatically Plato's philosophy—tends to generate ideas that do not so much falsify reality as falsify themselves. As Deleuze understands it, for Plato, participation of actual substances in the ideal forms occurs through *imitation*. The forms remain eternally self-same, without variation, while various participants attempt to imitate and thus to emulate an essence which remains eminent to them. The Form is thus “apart” or held in a reserve even a completely illuminated philosophical vision cannot cross. In some sense, as Deleuze reads Plato in *Difference and Repetition* and *Proust and Signs*, Plato's notion of essences as forms makes the forms *less than essential* to the nature of things. This is, as Hallward insightfully puts it, because in some sense a Platonic Form is trapped within its own static actuality. Hallward writes, “a Platonic essence (according to this reading) is merely one that allows actuality to resemble it via imitation, approximation, or generalization, rather than one that directly produces the actual in its unique, non-typical or non-general thisness.”¹⁴ In his work, *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze articulates a counter-Platonic notion of essence, where essences are not models of identity but powers of individuation: the powers to make individuals discrete or distinct. This power, however, is not the force of being but of *becoming* revealed not in generalities or types but in singularities or what medieval philosophy called *haecceities*. These singularities “are” only insofar as they are incarnated in an array of individuals—insofar as they are repeated differently. Ultimately what distinguishes a genuine essence as essential, for Deleuze, is its untrammelled power to create—its uncanny immanence in that which repeats it. Its power cannot be limited to a discrete series of individuals that represent it; essence simply *is* the power of individuals to distinguish themselves as individuals, and so Deleuze writes that “the world enveloped by essence is always a beginning of the World in general, a beginning of the universe, an absolute, radical beginning.”¹⁵

This is why Deleuze says that in Proust, it is only the signs of art that fully spiritualize essence, or fully reveal the dynamics of life. If in some sense for Deleuze art *is* the dynamism of life, philosophy's goal should not so much be to take art further or to places it cannot go because it is constrained by its mediums, but to inhabit its own medium—the medium of the concept—in a way that is as revealing as is art. The rarefaction or transmutation of materiality that art always involves is not for its own sake but for the sake of the production of new material

¹⁴ Peter Hallward, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006), 123.

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* (trans. Richard Howard, London: Continuum, 2004), 44.

realities—what Deleuze called in his *Cinema II* the restoration of belief in this world.¹⁶

The paradox is that what *seems* to be the quest for immaterial essence is nothing else than the quest for material transformation. While Deleuze entertains this paradox as a paradox, Hallward incessantly attempts to *reduce* the production of new materialities to the dematerialization which is its virtual aspect. Its artistic aspect, however, is *also* the “actuality” of long hours in the studio or on the road, the boredom and fatigue of repetitive and monotonous labor, the careful and patient development of muscular and perceptual skills—the kind of actualities, ironically, which might form models for collectivities and social exchanges that would be politically relevant. Such collectives and activities would be based on a kind of absolute *attention* to the labor of this world and not to its escape. This is not to say that art produces the virtual from the actual, but that art’s apprenticeship to the virtual involves an inhabitation of actuality that may itself be Deleuze’s most important image of a new people and a new earth. Could it be for this reason that Deleuze proclaims that “there is no intersubjectivity except an artistic one”¹⁷?

Hallward claims that Deleuze is only interested in the artist because the true artist is no longer a subject, leaving out the crucial point that the overcoming of subjectivity is precisely for the purpose of motivating and marshalling new and as-yet-unimagined forms of collective being and belonging. Not because we should all live in artist communes (any more than Deleuze would have us all become nomads), but because what we have left to learn from (or as) artists, as from nomads, is precisely how to re-envision actuality such that it is rendered capable of transformation. The actual work of such transformations would not resemble escape but *involvement* of the most intense kind.

Arguably, “politics as usual” is almost entirely bound up with promises of escape, with ways in which political slogans promise to pick us up out of where we are and lead us to whatever relieves us of our burdens. While it is true that real political protests announce that a particular actuality is intolerable, the philosophical question remains as to the basis for such a realization, or the hope of something different. That basis, for Deleuze, lies in the reality of the virtual, of intensities and powers not reducible to the actual. If, for Hallward, Marx’s or Darwin’s notions of difference or novelty as emerging from the dialectical struggle of actual identities is superior to that of Deleuze’s, Hallward needs to do more than simply point out that Marx and Darwin situate the mechanics of change fully

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image* (Trans. Tomlinson and Galeta, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989), 172-173.

¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* (trans. Richard Howard, London: Continuum, 2004), 42.

within the actual world.¹⁸ As it stands, Hallward merely gestures toward what he takes to be the obvious irrelevance of a philosophy that does not privilege relations of conflict or solidarity over the singular differences those relations might involve.¹⁹ This is not yet an argument, and looks something like the attempt to avoid one.

One thing Hallward says very little about is the fact that creation—like thought itself—is not something *optional*, not something we can will ourselves to do or even choose to do. All important thought, for Deleuze, is a being-forced to think. Likewise, creation is not something optional but necessary. Creativity in Deleuze is not an alternative to boredom. It is a matter of survival. The visions film makers invent allow us to once again believe in this world. Such visions are as much a matter of necessity as is the shamanic vision which will determine how and when to hunt or gather in extreme climates where over-depletion can lead to starvation. The necessity of artistic vision is the basis for Deleuze's simultaneous discussions of, for example, both birdsong and the most advanced techniques in modern composing. The "experimental" aspect is also the most necessary, the most urgent, even the most *desperate* aspect of creation. The problem with "mainstream" culture's conformism and lack of innovation is not the fact that it makes life uninteresting. It is the fact that it *endangers* life itself.

This is why it is so important to keep the image of the desert island and of Riderhood's ailing body distinct. It may be the case that artists and the characters or figures they portray approach the intensity and splendor of virtual becomings via a certain destructive path. But there are two very subtle but important things to keep in mind here. First is that there are always concrete rules immanent to any experimental line of flight that must be observed, relative to each practice (film, literature, masochism, even religious asceticism, even philosophical enquiry). Second, and much more important, is the fact that artistic creativity, while potentially debilitating to the isolated selves that artists are in some sense forced to be (in order to extract themselves from cliché, from the constraints of ordinary time and the dominance of the organism over affects and percepts), does not have as its

¹⁸ Hallward makes it seem as if Marx and Darwin simply include consideration of what Deleuze does not. But Marx and Darwin are working with a metaphysic that derives super-structural or "virtual" aspects from those that are apparently more concrete. But for Deleuze the reality of the virtual is far more concrete than the actual. Deleuze's entire philosophical project attempts to undermine the apparent rationality of the view that attempts to derive symbolic reality from empirical reality. If Deleuze's arguments are successful, then Marx and Darwin are approaching their problems from a mistaken starting point. It would require a much larger argument to demonstrate the superiority of an approach to the emergence of novelty that begins with the actual or a dialectic of actual relations.

¹⁹ Peter Hallward, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006), 162-163.

goal the splendor of creating new works of art, but of creating the possibilities for new people and ultimately a new earth. In other words, new bodies or a new collective (impersonal or at least non-individual) body *for whom greater proximity to the virtual dynamics of cosmic becoming would not be debilitating, paralyzing, or mortally perilous*. This would be something like the glorious (if dangerous) inhabitation of a deserted island.

To see this, it is important to read artistic experimentation in Deleuze under the aegis of spiritual adventure, as Hallward is aware. Not, however, in the sense that Hallward picks up on—the sense in which ultimate reality is “out of this world.” Rather, it is in the sense that a shaman undergoes the excruciation of initiation and the dangers of ecstasy for the sake of the community s/he serves. The difference Deleuze’s spiritualism makes is not mystical, but magical. Creativity in Deleuze is not contemplative passivity, but congenial, practical, and active healing. In this sense, Deleuze’s virtual powers are much better understood as something like the realm of the Afro-Caribbean spirit-powers, known in the Western hemisphere as Legba in Voodoo, or Orixas in Brazilian Candomblé: an uncanny but ever-present pantheon of multiple powers. In Brazilian Candomblé or Haitian voodoo, great care and intense collective (i.e. liturgical) work (also involving a certain attrition and fatigue) goes into sustaining the presence of these virtual powers of the crossroads, of erotic intrigue, of earth, sea, and fire.²⁰ And it is worth noting that this creative encounter with virtual powers motivated one of the greatest popular uprisings in the 20th century—Haiti’s struggle against oppressive regimes, a struggle about which Hallward himself has written extensively, but without any consideration of the role of voodoo.²¹

Without romanticizing or fetishizing “primitive” spirituality, we can at least say that the relative lack of collective participation in these rituals in the West, and the ostracization of the magically inclined, is a major reason why the kind of creativity Deleuze articulates occupies a space in our culture that is proximate to isolation, alienation, and insanity—and why we can so easily conflate the potentials of a desert island with the impotence of Riderhood’s failing body. This does not entail, however, that the constitution of new collectivities such as the neo-pagans, wiccans, or other “alternative” communities will solve the problem of how to connect properly with the powers of the virtual. More often than not, the

²⁰ The “spiritual” aspect of the virtual in Deleuze is more like the realm of these mediating spirits than it is like Eckhart’s “night of unknowing” within God. Derrida’s *différance* matches up much more closely with this nothingness within God; Deleuze’s difference retains a specificity—however uncanny or obscure—that is more like the specificity of the Legba or Orixas that are invited in at voodoo or candomble ceremonies than the utterly shapeless and formless void occidental mystics find at the heart of the godhead.

²¹ See Hallward’s otherwise admirable “Option Zero in Haiti” *New Left Review* 27 (May-June 2004).

constitution of these revived archaic societies are museums of their own disenfranchisement, and are formed around a cult of “purity” (such as choosing to live in frozen Scottish castles and eat raw meat in order to bring back a 13th century “authenticity”), a bland aestheticization (and narrow athleticism) of existence that would be hilarious if it were not so totally irrelevant to the problems of contemporary life, which are the problems of how to create authenticity *without* resorting to myths of original purity or authoritative tradition—the traps of both fundamentalism and unreflective avant-gardism.

Magic is always about relevance, always about acknowledging the full scope of the technologies and terrors, possibilities and tragedies that surround us *now*. An almost impossible-to-specify balance between innovation and legacy must be constantly refined. And the proof of the “adequacy” of any spiritual practice, if creative in Deleuze’s sense, must always be in the new actuality that it renders viable, the kind of life it engenders. This is why if actuality is in some sense the husk of the virtual, it is also in some sense its fruit. Hallward tries his best to acknowledge this point, but doesn’t really know what to make of it, stymied as he is by his basic difference with Deleuze, a difference that amounts to a political theorists’ demand that the mediation of actual conflicts take precedence over all else in thought. But the idea that Deleuze does not care about the mediation of actual conflicts is ridiculous. What else would the virtual be worth other than a genuinely novel approach to actuality, with all of its conflicts, other than a way to see those conflicts in terms other than the ones which lead to “actual” deadlocks? The paradox in Deleuze’s thought is that the more the virtual is “for itself,” the more the actual is transformed. The real stakes of materialism lie, today, between those who view experimentalism as necessarily co-opted by global capitalism’s black magic, and those such as Deleuze who believe we must fight magic with magic.

JOSHUA DELPECH RAMEY teaches in the Philosophy Department at Villanova University. Having written several articles on aesthetics and contemporary continental philosophy, he is currently completing a manuscript on unexplored connections between Deleuze and Renaissance philosophy.

©2007 Joshua Delpech-Ramey. All rights reserved.

Delpech-Ramey, Joshua. “Without Art: Peter Hallward’s Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation.” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 8 no. 3 (Fall 2007): 136-145.