Affect, 'subtraction' and 'non-performance'

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> *It seems to me that two essential aims of the arts should be the subordination of form to speed, to the variation in speed, and the subordination of the subject to intensity or to affect, to the intensive variation of affects. (Deleuze, 1997: 249).*

How might one work differently with "the intensive variation of affects" in performance? Gilles Deleuze discusses this question in his writing on Carmelo Bene's theatre. Here he points to a powerful method of "subtraction".

In what follows we first explore the method of subtraction. Thereafter we extend this notion of subtraction as a general strategy to the ethico- or politico-aesthetic. That is, we consider subtraction as an approach to ethics and politics in so far as these concern the creation and circulation of percepts and affects (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994; Guattari, 1995; Bertelsen and Murphie, 2010). [1]

We suggest that a strategy of subtraction, of what we will simply label the 'Performative', can lead to new potentials within performance, in the theatre and elsewhere. New worlds emerge with "the intensive variation of affects" allowed by subtraction. Yet in order to foster the emergence of such new worlds, we propose that subtraction encourages what could tentatively be called 'non-performance'. [2] With this idea, we are not proposing to abolish performance or theatre. Rather, we suggest the embrace of a *tendency* towards non-performance. This is an asymptotic tendency. It is a tendency that swerves away from non-performance as it approaches it—the more so as the absolute limit of non-performance is approached.

With a more thorough understanding of, and move toward, non-performance, performance could make a different kind of contribution to the solution of urgent social problems. [3] Among other things, this could involve a move away from the standard representations and performed clichés of 'Catastrophe'. These representations and clichés—even and sometimes especially of 'Catastrophe'— too often avoid a non-performative engagement with the real dynamics of problems. Subtracting such representations might also allow a rethinking of power in the light of a Spinozan/Deleuzian "power to affect and be affected". Non-performance might then move with the immanent variation in the constellation of forces involved. It might move with enough flexibility to look real disaster in the eye and yet avoid it where possible.

Subtraction

Deleuze's most detailed statement on performance and subtraction is found in his "One Manifesto Less," written about the Italian theater director Carmelo Bene (first published in French, with Bene's writing, as *Superpositions* [1979]).

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1) On performance, Deleuze, Bene and the ethico-aesthetic see Cull, 2009: 5ff. On Deleuze, the ethico-aesthetic and performance art, see Murphie, 2005.

2) Echoing Laruelle's "non-philosophy" (2010) and "non-photography" (2011), if in a very different register. This also echoes much of the history of performance art (see also Guattari, 1995: 81) and alternative theatre (Deleuze cites Robert Wilson and others in these respects). One might also think of Cage's 4'33" in which silence creates plenitude, and non-performance provides an absolute opening to the "intensive variation of affects". See also Sánchez, 2007; the 2007 art exhibition *A Theater without a Theater*, at the Museu D'Art Contemporani De Barcelona; or Florêncio, 2012.

3) We are not suggesting that this is the only way to approach performance's relations to social problems.

For Deleuze subtraction is a way of subordinating "form to speed". It subjects "the subject to intensity of affect". By "neutralising" (Deleuze, 1993: 204) what we usually do to structure the experience of performance as 'Performance', with all its usual cultural baggage, subtraction opens the performative aspect of art toward the continuous "intensive variation of affects." Deleuze proposes that this can be achieved through a subtracting of "Major" (that is, the usual dominant) processes of representation. These align schemas of power with the State, or even just a given state of things (205). Subtraction frees the "minoritarian force[s]" of becoming (Deleuze, 1993: 208), opening events to an "intensity of affect". It "render[s] a potentiality present" (219).

In "One Manifesto Less," Deleuze outlines the manner in which Bene releases and re-constitutes the minor characters and through this, activates the minor forces of various texts (1993: 205). For Deleuze, Bene's "theatre is deployed only in relations of variation that eliminate 'masters'" (1993: 215). Deleuze sees Bene's subtraction of major elements or "representative[s]" of power as creating a constitutive "operation", rather than a classical "critique" (1993: 205-207). If there is critique in Bene's work, this is a critique that involves "the constitution" of something new—a moving on from "State power" (205) and the State of things, a pragmatics. This is a critique emerging from a different "logic". While a more traditional critique of major "elements of power" often operates within a representational and interpretive logic (Deleuze, 1993: 207), Bene's constitutive 'critique' through subtraction emerges from an affective logic or register—what Guattari terms "the logic of affects rather than the logic of delimited sets" (1995:9). This affective register is "collective" (1995:9), "polyphonic" (1995:1) and "multi-polar" (Guattari, 1996:158). It is "a nonrepresentational force always in disequilibrium" (Deleuze, 1993:207) and it does not reside in the human individual alone (see Manning, 2010:117). As such, Bene's constitutions do not create new representations so much as free up "nonrepresentational forces". In doing so, Bene's plays bring various elements into a "milieu of variation" (Deleuze, 1993: 214).

Bene's eliminations rework a range of powers. First, Bene subtracts major "characters" from the texts. In *Romeo and Juliet* Romeo is subtracted—"the power of families". In *Richard the Third* the entire "royal and princely system" is eliminated—"the characters of State power." In *S.A.D.E* (on de Sade), "the sadistic image of the master" is "neutralized"—"the representative of sexual power" (Deleuze, 1993: 205-207). This subtraction brings about a "constitution" of minor characters. In S.A.D.E., the slave, for example, ceases to be a slave (Deleuze, 1993:205). The women of *Richard the Third* emerge as powerful forces. As Mohammad Kowsar notes:

> *The women, in the absence of fathers, husbands, and sons, are everything … inter-changably children, young girls in love, princesses, queens, grandmothers, women of state, and above all, warriors … the very notion of the male as warrior is being tested by the complex variation of things that the female can be at any given time. (1986: 27)*

Not simply negative, Bene's subtraction rather creates an opening to the world, to potential and to a more ethical (if minor) power to be affected and to affect. Notably, Deleuze's Bene often removes the supposed '*Catastrophe*' of conflicted State or Major powers. Such powers might still be present in diminished form—often in the fall that is the stuff of State tragedy and even critique. Yet the fall of the State is, strictly speaking, no longer 'Catastrophic' in that States no longer matter. The method of subtraction undoes our attachment to them, and their fall becomes nothing remarkable. They are not even at the centre of attention. Indeed, the re-assemblage of attention—*of what is attended to, and how, as the ground for all that follows*—is fundamental. This provides us with a method for dealing with real catastrophes (if the term remains appropriate) within what Guattari

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(2008) called the "three ecologies" of self, social and environment. Crucially it does this quite separately from the need of Major configurations (such as the State, the 'Economy', big 'Oil', 'Capitalism') to either continue intact or become the focus of attention as they fail.

Deleuze further explains that Bene not only removes major "characters" or "representative[s]" of "state power" but also subtracts "the text, a part of the text". The words no longer make "up a text": "*let the words stop making up a "text"…*" (Deleuze, 1993: 205-207). Although words remain, the *text* as such (we might say the Text as Major/dominant structuring of the performance) is subtracted and "[t]he character is nothing more than the totality of the scenic assemblages, colors, lights, gestures, words". Such a subtraction leaves no "ego" in the characters. Deleuze argues that even the actor "ceases to be an actor" (206-207). Neither the *Text* nor the *Subject* (neither the character nor the actor) dominate. Indeed, if a character is created the play finishes: Bene's plays end "with birth, whereas customarily one ends with death"[4] (or Catastrophe). Deleuze writes that Bene "detests every principle of constancy or eternity, of the permanence of the text" (1993:206).

For Deleuze then, what we experience in Bene's plays are "the continuous series of metamorphosis and variations" (1993: 206), not the life of a subject. We might say that we become immersed in the affect of the world rather than of the character per se. The experience is no longer primarily one of a subject performing or a character being performed. Rather it is experience of a relational constellation of forces at work. The works allow the operation of affect itself to come to the fore. Affect becomes not a 'state' for a subject, so much as an event of affecting and being affected. It is at the same time opening, deconstitution and reconstitution. One experiences powers to affect and be affected in the very process of affecting and being affected—that is, not via representation but immanently. In short, the method of subtraction allows for a second method, the taking up of an activation of a more open potential (and on, to the virtual as a broader "relational potential" [Massumi, 2000: 202]).

Precisely because of the importance of the theatrical and the performative to broader culture, Bene's subtraction of various "components of power" (family, sexuality, the State) achieves more than a simple change to the "theatrical material" and text. For Deleuze the "theatrical material" is not separable from the power of theatre itself in relation to the constitution of broader powers. Deleuze therefore points to a second level of critique (and reconstitution of powers) in Bene's plays. This critique changes/challenges the broader constitution and social function of theatre itself.

> *…the elements of power in the theatre are those which assure at once the coherence of the subject dealt with and the coherence of the representation on stage. It is at the same time the power of that which is represented and the power of theatre itself. In this sense the traditional actor has an ancient complicity with princes and kings—the theater with power…Theater's own power is not separable from the representation of power in the theater, even if it is a critical representation. (1993: 207)*

As mentioned, Deleuze's version of Bene's work therefore develops "another conception of critique". This begins in a simple method of subtraction but it continues to a very different constitution of powers, affects and forces. To reiterate, this has very little to do with a theatre practice involving

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4)   Others see Bene's work in a very different light, especially regarding the issues of domination, birth and death (decay)—see Chiasa, 2009 and Bogue, 2003: 115ff. Cull notes that Deleuze may not even have seen the actual production of Bene's *Richard III* before he wrote about it (2009: 21). Although we touch on elements of Bene's productions, we cannot do more than hint at the specifics. For more, see Cull; Chiasa; Bogue; Kowsar; Fortier; Deleuze and Bene.

a critical representation of various forms of power. "When [Bene] chooses to *amputate* the components of power, it is not only the theatrical material he changes, it is also the form of the theatre, which ceases to be 'representation' at the same time that the actor ceases to be an actor" (Deleuze, 1993:207).

In sum, if Deleuze is correct, the actor in Bene's plays stops being an actor, the subject stops being a formed subject, the text is no longer a "text" (1993:206). Established powers are "amputated" in favour of an ongoing relational constitution of "active minoritarian force[s]" (1993:208). Family, State, Sexual Power are all subtracted. The historical key links between theatre, performance and the state are broken, and not in favour of a more critical or even alternative *representation*. What takes the place of representation? As Bogue points out, "Bene often speaks of the various 'impossibilities' of the theatre" (2003: 148-49). Yet despite Bene's negative view of the avant-guard and his "seemingly pessimistic remarks about the uselessness of theatre", Bogue argues that Bene "strives to create the impossible," he strives to "render a potential present" – a new potential "for a people to come" (2003:148-49).

In de-dramatisation, "we found each other"

Deleuze proposes that for Bene the question is "how to reduce to *minorize*…how to impose a minor or minimizing treatment in order to extricate becoming from history, lives from culture, thought from doctrine, grace or disgrace from dogma" (1993: 208). Deleuze adds the question of how to extricate potential (1993: 219)—an increased power to affect and be affected—from over-coded or stratified modes of the Performative and the state. This suggests the possibility of drawing out a relational becoming from within even the most challenging of events.

Yet the Performative can often be an obstacle to this relational becoming. First, Performative logics often prop up the ironically disastrous[5] forces within the complex representational logics of 'Catastrophe' itself. Second, the Performative has its own 'Catastrophic' logic. *Not to perform (and not to affirm the ongoing dramatisation of certain states of affairs, of the State, Capital, given forms of subjectivity) is often regarded as a 'Catastrophe'*.

In this, the Performative tames affect. First, powers to affect and be affected are subsumed under a Janus-headed attachment to what is, and panic about its possible loss. Second, but perhaps less recognised, there is an attachment to/panic about the possible loss of *established modes of dramatisation* tied to the State/states of affairs.

Yet what potentials would open up if we subtracted the Major from the assumed 'Catastrophes' we face? What if we even subtracted all "Catastrophic thinking"? What if such Catastrophes were 'de-dramatised' when necessary? Let us take the example of climate change. What if in the process of confronting climate change we subtracted, for example, what Naomi Klein has called the "shock doctrine" and "disaster capitalism" (Klein, 2007)? What if we subtracted Corporations? Industries? The "Economy"? State politics? Phony because unnecessary debates about climate science? And so on. Then what intensities, variations and affects might be set free, what potentialising forces, what worlds might be possible in a becoming with (rather than a denial of) the demands of climate change?

Such becomings would not be a matter of finding "points of origin and termination" (Deleuze, 1993: 207)—new representations, new States—but of adapting to an ongoing process. For Bene

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5) Such forces are genuinely if ironically disastrous because they perpetuate problems by placing them within the representational logic of 'Catastrophe'. The choice here has always been between what we know—the State or state of affairs—and collapse.

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(as for Deleuze and Guattari) "the interesting thing is the middle, what happens on the way" (207). As Bene puts it, the work is ongoing: "I will not arrive anywhere. There are no arrivals" (207). For Bene "[i]t is by the middle that things push" (208).

This push does not concern the individuation of subject or object per se (although individuations do emerge, if transiently, from within this push). It concerns the middle of events, what Massumi calls "the being of a relation" (1997: 175). In the middle, in becoming, as in Bene's plays, we find "[a]ffects and no subject, velocities and no form" (Deleuze, 1993: 215). It is here minor "molecular revolutions" (Guattari, 1995:21) can do their work. Deleuze writes of Bene's theatre that "beneath the ambitions of formulas, there is the modest appreciation of what could be a revolutionary theatre, a simple, loving potentiality, a component for a new becoming of theatre" (1993:222). This different understanding of performance is one in which affect is at the level of world—a relational world.

As mentioned the method of subtraction can carry out constitutive work beyond the theatre and the arts. The Occupy movement, for example, is an ongoing emergent event that employs a clear method of subtraction in its resistance, its critique and its attempt to create the new. It is a movement that often seems to de-dramatises the Major (in order to re-dramatise the minor). It pushes from the collective middle, subtracts many stratified modes of the Performative, subtracts much of the State and perhaps more importantly the 'state of things'. It initially refused 'clearly stated aims' so friendly toward the Performative, the possibility of Major-co-option (not to mention media bites). The movement generally has no predetermined endpoints or final arrivals. Rather, it aims to "render a potentiality present" (Deleuze, 1993: 219).

Much has been said about the Occupy movement and here we will only briefly consider it in relation to subtraction. Of particular interest is what became known as the "human microphone". The human microphone emerged out of an imposed subtraction – a banning by the State in New York of any kind of electronic amplification, including loudhailers. Through this move the State hoped to close down the movement. However, the imposed subtraction was turned to the positive by the Occupy movement. When speeches were performed at the gatherings the crowd employed the method of echoing the words of the speakers, phrase by phrase. In Naomi Klein's case her words were echoed numerous times. This created a kind of slowing down and "stammering of language" as speakers attempted to adapt (Deleuze also finds this "stammering" in Bene's plays as they move with "minoritarian force[s]" [1993:212, 214]). In short, with the human microphone the "intensive variation" of the crowd was able to participate in the speech. There was a shift in the power to affect and be affected, in the structure of the performance, and in the relation between performance and audience. So the imposed subtraction led to a new relation. Both the "intensive variation of affects" and the process of collective gathering were *rendered perceivable* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:281), in the echo produced by the human microphone. This was no longer (at least not only) a question of the "ego" of the speaker. This was particular clear in Naomi Klein's speech. As language was slowed down to a kind of collective "stammering" (Deleuze, 1993:212) by the multiple echoes of the crowd, a space productive of difference and "variation" opened up. Klein (2011) became a little thrown and uncertain, although she moved with the crowd. She said:

> Yesterday, one of the speakers at the labor rally said: 'We found each other.' That sentiment captures the beauty of what is being created here. A wide-open space (as well as an idea so big it can't be contained by any space) for all the people who want a better world to find each other.

Such an experience could be seen to emerge from a larger "relational field" (Massumi in Massumi and Zournazi: 2002:224)—the affective field. Yet if we seem to have suggested so far that everything is better when attention is paid to this affective field, this is not quite the case. As Massumi points out, this is also the very field which the "capitalist logic of surplus is" taking "over" (2002:224). Yet this suggests that a resistance to this taking over also has to operate within this affective field. This is precisely what the Occupy movement attempts to do. They do not always and immediately have clearly stated aims and their resistance did not involve a "politics of identity" or big egos but "an ethics of caring, caring for belonging" (Massumi in Massumi and Zournazi, 2002:223, 241). This ethics must necessarily incorporate a space for difference as well as variation, for a rethinking of performance, perhaps through some of the subtractive practices used by the Occupy movement—"We found each other".

To dramatise or not to dramatise

So far we have suggested that subtraction and associated methods open up variation within performance in a number of settings, in an immanent and ongoing way. This ungrounds the very constitution of 'performance' itself. This in turn allows for the ongoing reconstitution of performance, of performance's own internal powers, and of intensities and relational powers within the broader ecologies in which performance is immersed. As such, *performance becomes the transformation of powers*. In part, this is the transformation of Major power into micropolitical powers. Deleuze argues that Bene "gives free reign to other theatrical material and another theatrical form, which would not have been possible without the subtraction." The movement is toward a minor, "nonrepresentational" (1993: 207) potential of performance brought out from within performance (from within *Richard the Third* or the human microphone for example). It is a movement toward a "becoming-minoritarian" (Deleuze, 1993:219) of performance and theatre itself. Subtraction can then enable performance to *de-dramatise* both the subject (Debaise, 2012) and the subject matter, the State and a state of affairs, concepts and propositions, constellations of affects and percepts, events and "ecologies of practice" (Stengers, 2012). This includes even critical events, forms or concepts that, despite their criticism, reterritorialise thinking and affect upon the Major even if just by reinforcing a certain staging of the Major.

Ethical action within the (micro)political powers of performance now concerns a decision about what is to be dramatised and what is to be de-dramatised[6]—in situ. Which 'stagings' of events, of political formations, even of concepts are to be developed? Which 'stagings' of events, of political formations, are to be dismantled, actively forgotten or even ignored—in situ? How can a performance recalibrate the relations between useful dramatisation and necessary de-dramatisation across all of these? What mix of dramatisation and de-dramatisation comes next? Non-performance involves an ongoing engagement with the power to affect and be affected, now from within the immanent "intensive variation of affects". It does not dramatise everything, just because it can. Instead, it often subtracts, de-dramatises, practices silence, walks away, dismantles the very thing that works, that excites, that commands attention and brings about a state of affairs/a State/a particular assemblage of powers to affect and be affected. In contemporary management terms, we might say that non-performance practices 'performance *un*development'.

6) On dramatisation see Gilles Deleuze, 1995: 251. Here dramatisation involves incarnation in "spatio-temporal dynamics". See also Debaise, 2005 and Massumi, 2011. On "dedramatisation" see Debaise, 2012; Lehmann, 2006 and Cunningham, 1987. See also Vujanović and Milohnić, 2012. On catharsis in such contexts, see the work of Charlotte Farrell in this issue.

We have also begun to suggest that, in non-performance's general relations to the social, a recalibration of dramatisation and de-dramatisation could, for example, defuse Catastrophic thinking.[7] It could simultaneously dramatise a more beneficial *ecology of relations*. 'Catastrophe' would become only the Major's failing, or the failure only of the ongoing dramatisation of the Major, now necessary only to its own survival.

In sum, when we write of a move towards *non-performance*, via subtraction and other methods, this does not only involve an asymptotic move away from Performance as inscribed by the Major. It also involves a nurturing of tendencies towards a more intensive engagement with the immanence of expression. This nurturing of tendencies is 'dramatic' in a particular way—it *stages* a questioning of what we are 'dramatising' or 'de-dramatising' within any given method or moment of practice. It is a question of care and method however as to how we work with or encourage some tendencies in the mix more than others. This is in part a technological question, but just as much a question of "cultural technique" (on "Kulturtechnik" see Parikka, 2012). We need to develop habits/cultural techniques that can *render perceivable* another possible world: another "potentiality" (Deleuze, 1993: 219).

This is a world that co-exists with, and in many ways is more real than, the one we already feel we know. Yet there are many reasons it might be difficult to perceive. First, as Deleuze notes, "belief in the world is what we lack most. We have totally lost the world: we have been dispossessed of it" (1990: 239). Second, we have perhaps lost the stomach for dealing with a world that has become so difficult. Isabelle Stengers has recently spoken about "Gaia" that implicitly makes strong demands, but refuses negotiation (2012). Third, both these problems arise because we have a long history of approaching the world from within what Alfred North Whitehead called the "bifurcation of nature" (2007: 26ff). Yet, if we are to become equal to the environmental and other events that confront us, we must overcome all of these obstacles. We will conclude our discussion of this overcoming via a different approach to performance and affect by taking up the third issue just mentioned—the "bifurcation of nature".

Non-bifurcation and Non-performance

Theatre and performance are (and famously) at worst captured by, at best heavily indebted to, a "bifurcation of nature". Theatre and performance certainly dramatise, at a very basic level, a division of the world into that performed (stage) and that which perceives the performance (audience). More generally Whitehead (1968 and 2007) meant this bifurcation to refer to what he saw as the split between one assumed kind of nature—the world at large—and the somehow separate nature of (human) perception (and perhaps cognition) of this world.

Theatre and performance do not just reflect the bifurcation. As we have begun to suggest, they are essential to it. It *is the ongoing performance* of this bifurcation that provides the ground for the subsequent spectacle of the Major (that is in effect the bifurcation of nature magnified). Indeed, this ultimately false and problematic bifurcation *must* be constantly performed. The conflict and ambiguities around this basic fact provide a constant tension within the long history of theatre and performance and the thinking about theatre and performance.

Affect has also often been thought in terms of a bifurcated world. Affect, even more forcefully than 'cognition', is often understood to reinforce our own 'unique' and different nature—'our own'

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7) There are obvious echoes of Brecht's thinking, although Deleuze (on Bene), writes that Brecht "does not push 'critique' far enough" (1993: 218) and remains more or less within representation, if of a different kind to "bourgeois representation".

feeling, 'our own' perception, somehow divided from a wider, and separately unified world. Our duty is supposedly to interpret (and counter-interpret) the world as faithfully as we can. In such conceptions, affect usually ends up as another way to interpret the world by a subject.

However, affect—and performance—can also be approached from within a non-bifurcated world. In this approach, which we adopt here,[8] *affect is the world*—the world as affect. This is the entire world understood as affects affecting, and being affected by, other affects. This includes whatever arises from within this world, from winds on the sand, to nation-states to emotional states to thinking to political events. Moreover all these, and more generally world, perception and thinking, all occur on the same plane. Such an affective world is inevitably incomplete, unfinished – in "continuous variation" and "alive" (Whitehead, 1968:148). This means such an affective world is a constant return to potential, to a general ecology (by which here we mean simply a complex network of mutually supportive if differential and dynamic relations).

Subtraction is only one of the ways, if one of the more interesting and curiously less explored ways, to achieve an opening to affective potentiality. This opening returns expressive acts to a "non-bifurcated", which is to say a densely interwoven and incomplete world. We are suggesting then that the method of subtraction could at its basis be understood to involve the subtraction of bifurcation. Accessing the minor forces of becoming (of the middle) necessarily involves a movement toward non-bifurcation, an escape from the subject-object divisions necessary to, and constituted within, bifurcation. This involves a different kind of movement within performance, precisely away from what has constituted much of theatre and performance, in itself and as an important constitutive component of the world, particularly the political, social and even ethical world. Can the latter be "unperformed"—processually? Here we have suggested an approach to non-performance as a response to such a question. What we mean is a becoming-minor of performance towards a non-bifurcated world that is a world open to potential and "*continuous variability*" (Deleuze, 1993: 209) It is not the represented world separate from and open to control and interpretation by an autonomous subject. Rather, it is a world in which resistance and change achieve potential for emergence. It is a world in which it is possible to find each other once again.

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8)   Following a well-known history that included Spinoza, Guattari, Deleuze, Massumi, Manning etc.

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