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Camerados: Deleuze and Whitman in Love

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Abstract: This essay seeks to stress the importance of the American poet Walt Whitman to Gilles Deleuze, using how love is variously explored to think about their methods in relationality. I firstly consider how many classic responses to Whitman express division regarding his work. This is indicated by how D.H. Lawrence stresses the satisfactions and exhilarations of reading Whitman but also refers to the sense of embarrassment and shame which readers might experience on doing so, not least because of Whitman's own apparent shamelessness. For Lawrence, this is exemplified by Whitman's proclamation that he "aches with amorous love", as if he were a Deleuzian desiring machine existing only to ache and nothing but. Yet there is no such embarrassment detectable in Deleuze's responses to Whitman's work, and his responses are characterized by their insistence that Whitman always insists upon a dimension to experience beyond such conventional desires. He is more than a poet of the body with organs, which in turn enables an understanding of his work as an anticipation of Deleuze and Guattari's body without organs as it was first expounded in *Anti-Oedipus*. To explore this further, direct and indirect correspondences between Deleuze and Whitman are explored, with particular attention to a range of poems from the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*. These readings show that if there is a conceptual relationship in their work, their style and syntax are also a way in which they relate thought and action. To triangulate the consideration of the varieties of love that are manifest in Deleuze and Whitman, I use Hannah Stark's essay on Deleuze and love, showing how different aspects of Deleuze's writing and thought either consciously or unconsciously relate to the American poet. I reflect upon Deleuze's claim in his essay on the poet that Whitman's sustained advocacy of "comradely love" represents a practice of radical relationality, and that this also offers a sense of social and political transformability that is key to both. To provide a final shape to this discussion, I refer to Fredric Jameson's posthumously published seminars on Deleuze, in which he gives particular attention to the philosopher's particular interest in American literature. Ultimately, the essay finds that Whitman is given a unique status in Deleuze, one which even threatens to jeopardize his own philosophical system, and that the reason for this may well be love.

Keywords: Gilles Deleuze; Félix Guattari; Walt Whitman; love; American poetry; body without organs

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1. "He That Aches"

Walt Whitman teaches his readers to be ready for contradictions. From the beginning of the lifelong project of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, even before "Song Of Myself" had been given a title, Whitman had conjectured that this might well be grounds for criticism of his work. Typically, however, he also had readied an answer:

> Do I contradict myself?
>
> Very well then. . ..I contradict myself;

> I am large. . ..I contain multitudes.
>
> [1]

The tendency to self-contradict becomes not only a Whitmanian trope, but a classic form of response to his work. The best example of this comes in D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*, where the English "priest of love" initially addresses the American poet in hate-mode, remorselessly deriding him for his apparent preposterousness. The line that Lawrence finds especially unbearable is Whitman's proclamation in a poem from *Leaves of Grass* that "I am he that aches with amorous love" [2]. Lawrence repeats the phrase through the opening pages of his essay, capitalizing it as if to emphasize its noisy redundancy, or perhaps the humdrum soullessness of such a claim: "The ship of the *soul* is sunk. But the machine-manipulating body works just the same: digests, chews gum, admires Botticelli and aches with amorous love" [3]:

> I AM HE THAT ACHES WITH AMOROUS LOVE.
>
> What do you make of that? I AM HE THAT ACHES. First generalization. First uncomfortable universalization. WITH AMOROUS LOVE! Oh, God! Better a bellyache. A bellyache is at least specific. But the ACHE OF AMOROUS LOVE!
>
> Think of having that under your skin. All that!
>
> I AM HE THAT ACHES WITH AMOROUS LOVE.
>
> Walter, leave off. You are not HE. You are just a limited Walter. And your ache doesn't include all Amorous Love, by any means. If you ache you only ache with a small bit of amorous love, and there's so much more stays outside the cover of your ache, that you might be a bit milder about it.
>
> I AM HE THAT ACHES WITH AMOROUS LOVE.
>
> CHUFF! CHUFF! CHUFF!
>
> CHU-CHU-CHU-CHU-CHUFF!
>
> Reminds one of a steam-engine. A locomotive. They're the only things that seem to me to ache with amorous love. All that steam inside them. Forty million foot-pounds pressure. The ache of AMOROUS LOVE. Steam-pressure. CHUFF!
>
> An ordinary man aches with love for Belinda, or his Native Land, or the Ocean, or the Stars, or the Oversoul: if he feels that an ache is in the fashion.
>
> It takes a steam-engine to ache with AMOROUS LOVE. All of it.
>
> Walt was really too superhuman. The danger of the superman is that he is mechanical.

The ridicule that Lawrence expresses (and which he then renounces in the second part of the essay) is a familiar enough initial reaction to Whitman's work, even if it is remarkable here for its sheer duration. Having mocked Whitman as a love-aching tank engine in the first part of the essay, he then shifts entirely into an appreciation of Whitman as a figure of inspiration and mentorship: "Whitman, the great poet, who has meant so much to me". Lawrence startlingly insists upon "morality" as Whitman's greatest subject, and that he produced an unrepeatable experiment in insisting that the soul was not something redeemable or capable of redeeming, but rather a living organism: "Accepting the contact with other souls along the open way, as they lived their lives. Never trying to save them. . ..The soul living her life along the incarnate mystery of the open road". Lawrence's sense of the greatness of Whitman is a compound of sheer admiration for this enterprise, "a doctrine of life" and devastation at its failure, which he sees as a failure of imagination:

> Then Whitman's mistake. The mistake of his interpretation of his watchword: Sympathy. The mystery of SYMPATHY. He still confounded it with Jesus' LOVE, and with Paul's CHARITY. Whitman, like all the rest of us, was at the end of the great emotional highway of Love. And because he couldn't help himself, he carried on his Open Road as a prolongation of the emotional highway of Love, beyond Calvary. The highway of Love ends at the foot of the Cross. There is no beyond. It was a hopeless attempt to prolong the highway of love.
>
> He didn't follow his Sympathy. Try as he might, he kept on automatically interpreting it as Love, as Charity. Merging!
>
> This merging, *en masse*, One Identity, Myself monomania was a carry-over from the old Love idea. It was carrying the idea of Love to its logical physical conclusion.
>
> (p. 182)

Lawrence indicts Whitman's inability to think outside of the idea of "Love" as enshrined in Christianity, even as he concedes the impossibility of shedding that inheritance. Yet the field of contradictions opened by Lawrence is exhilarating, and even in his mockery of the proclaimer of "amorous love", he also identifies something formidable and unapologetic in Whitman's formulation. For a start, he cannot let the line go, and by turning it into something of a mantra, he also gives it an insistent quality that it did not have in Whitman's original setting. If there is something tautological in the idea of love being amorous, why persist with it? Why perpetuate the embarrassment? Who is feeling it?

It also should be noted here that Whitman also showed some ambivalence toward the idea of "amorous" love. The line first appeared in the 1860 version of *Leaves of Grass*, in the fourteenth section of the cluster titled "Enfans d'Adam". In subsequent editions, it appeared as a three-line poem titled "I Am He That Aches with Love", as in the deathbed edition of 1891–1892:

> I AM he that aches with amorous love;
>
> Does the earth gravitate? does not all matter, aching, attract all matter?
>
> So the body of me to all I meet or know.

Across the versions, "amorous" never appears in the title, even though it always appears in the first line of the poem. It could be that its omission serves to highlight its presence in the verse, and that this is what Lawrence seizes upon. Yet what Lawrence apparently objects to is not so much that line, but what the rest of Whitman's poem asserts, which is that love is effectively as fundamental to the experience of the world as gravity, and that attraction and repulsion are a matter of electromagnetism, rather than sentiment. Lawrence perceives a machinic tendency in Whitman, an indifference to how life is conventionally framed by an "ordinary man" who "aches with love for Belinda, or his Native Land, or the Ocean, or the Stars, or the Oversoul". Yet Whitman allows the reader to explore the possibility of loving all that and more, as if that were all they were programmed to do, and his work feels liberative in its emphasis. What appears to be feeding Lawrence's embarrassment is that Whitman's exposure of affection to the world is so unembarrassed. Umberto Eco's notorious formula about love and postmodern irony seems relevant here:

> I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her "I love you madly", because he knows that she knows (and that she knows he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still there is a solution. He can say "As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly". At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will

> nevertheless say what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her in an age of lost innocence.
>
> [4] (pp. 67–68)

Even if it is not possible to say "I love you" with total conviction that I will be believed, it does not mean that I should not try to say it. I practically expect that my words should fail to communicate, I am simultaneously humiliated and exhilarated by even the impulse to say them. Of course, that is also why Eco uses the "I love you" utterance to make his point. It is embarrassing, and it should be embarrassing, to tell someone that you love them. It is supposed to be, if it means anything at all. The hapless postmodern of the anecdote is in fact the most 'natural' person imaginable. Whitman erases these concerns, as love is not put forward as a hypothesis that requires some kind of proof. Love for him is proof only that his motor is running. He aches, therefore he loves. This seems to be what Lawrence finds so intolerable.

Whitman also does not carry out the conventional work of poetry in terms of trying to fashion a symbol adequate to the idea of love. Yet the poetic tendency to try and find an image for love might be seen as a strategy of evasion, of really attempting to conceptualize how and why love happens. Such images of love can seem as grotesque as they can be beautiful. A perfect image can come to seem overly so. Dante's multifoliate rose as an image of divine love in *Paradiso* is overpowering, even musky and disgusting. If John Donne's amazing conceits in his love lyrics (love as a pair of compasses in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning", sainthood in "The Canonization", fleas in "The Flea") convince as feats of ingenuity, that same ingenuity is also alienating, a way of saying that his love is so singular that no-one can share the experience of it, rather just its poetic representation. According to Donne, he and his lover are the only persons allowed to be in this kind of love, everyone else is "dull" and "sublunary".

The problem here lies in "likeness", perhaps, of trying to describe the practically indescribable. To map love into the world through such symbolization of objects is not how Whitman works. He continually writes of loving and of love as a liquid and uncontainable phenomenon, something that spills over all reality, as "Bunch Poem" in the 1856 *Leaves of Grass* (later editions retitled it "Spontaneous Me") manifests:

> Love-thoughts, love-juice, love-odor, love-yielding, love-climbers, and the climbing sap,
>
> Arms and hands of love—lips of love—phallic thumb of love—breasts of love—bellies, pressed and glued together with love,
>
> Earth of chaste love—life that is only life after love,
>
> The body of my love—the body of the woman I love—the body of the man—the body of the earth,
>
> Soft forenoon airs that blow from the south-west,
>
> The hairy wild-bee that murmurs and hankers up and down—that gripes the full-grown lady-flower, curves upon her with
>
> amorous firm legs, takes his will of her, and holds himself tremulous and tight upon her till he is satisfied,
>
> The wet of woods through the early hours,
>
> Two sleepers at night lying close together as they sleep, one with an arm slanting down across and below the waist of the
>
> other,
>
> The smell of apples, aromas from crushed sage-plant, mint, birch-bark,

> The boy's longings, the glow and pressure as he confides to me what he was dreaming,
>
> The dead leaf whirling its spiral whirl, and falling still and content to the ground,
>
> The no-formed stings that sights, people, objects, sting me with,
>
> The hubbed sting of myself, stinging me as much as it ever can any one,
>
> The sensitive, orbic, underlapped brothers, that only privileged feelers may be intimate where they are,
>
> The curious roamer, the hand, roaming all over the body—the bashful withdrawing of flesh where the fingers soothingly
>
> pause and edge themselves,
>
> The limpid liquid within the young man,
>
> The vexed corrosion, so pensive and so painful,
>
> The torment—the irritable tide that will not be at rest,
>
> The like of the same I feel—the like of the same in others,
>
> The young woman that flushes and flushes, and the young man that flushes and flushes,
>
> The young man that wakes, deep at night, the hot hand seeking to repress what would master him—the strange half-welcome
>
> pangs, visions, sweats—the pulse pounding through palms and trembling encircling fingers—the young man all colored, red, ashamed, angry;
>
> The souse upon me of my lover the sea, as I lie willing and naked,
>
> The merriment of the twin-babes that crawl over the grass in the sun, the mother never turning her vigilant eyes from them,
>
> The walnut-trunk, the walnut-husks, and the ripening or ripened long-round walnuts,
>
> The continence of vegetables, birds, animals,
>
> The consequent meanness of me should I skulk or find myself indecent, while birds and animals never once skulk or find
>
> themselves indecent,
>
> The great chastity of paternity, to match the great chastity of maternity,
>
> The oath of procreation I have sworn,
>
> The greed that eats in me day and night with hungry gnaw, till I saturate what shall produce boys to fill my place when I am
>
> through,
>
> The wholesome relief, repose, content,
>
> And this bunch plucked at random from myself,
>
> It has done its work—I toss it carelessly to fall where it may.
>
> [5]

Randall Jarrell wrote in 1955 that "[T]o show Whitman for what he is one does not need to praise or explain or argue, one needs simply to quote" [6] (p. 107). It is also necessary to quote him at length, otherwise it is practically impossible to suggest just how weird and compelling his transitions are, moving from an orgiastic blurring of love-acts amongst a range of species to an insistence on "continence" and "chastity". The passage refers to love continually, but never defines it, or seeks a comparison for it. Similes in

Whitman are infrequent, as if he was uninterested in likeness, at least as a basis for aesthetic judgement. Rather than the intellectual likeness of metaphor or simile, Whitman's sense of likeness is a physical condition of reality, another manifestation of the electromagnetism that generates attraction and repulsion, a vital part of machinic love.

2. Syntaxes and Others

Whitman's machinic desiring and ever-rolling mobility might help to explain the particular attention that was paid to him by different strands of Gilles Deleuze's work. Along with Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Deleuze also used Whitman to exemplify the exceptional situation of being American. He claimed that Americans enjoyed remarkable freedom to escape the identifications and psycho-encapsulations of Europe, even as they retained remnants of an old attachment to the root systems of national identity. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is cited as a living demonstration of the difference of America from Europe:

> America is a special case. Of course it is not immune from domination by trees or the search for roots. This is evident even in the literature, in the quest for a national identity and even for a European ancestry or genealogy (Kerouac going off in search of his ancestors). Nevertheless, everything important that has happened or is happening takes the route of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, bands and gangs, successful lateral offshoots in immediate connection with an outside. American books are different from European books, even when the American sets off in pursuit of trees. The conception of the book is different. *Leaves of Grass*.
>
> [7] (p. 19)

Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is presented here by Deleuze and Guattari as a self-explanatory statement, the special example that proves America to be a "special case". Its attraction for them is clear. "Song of Myself" in particular, is an evidently rhizomatic text, full of wandering and strayness, even as it affirms what is usually the arborescent category of the Self. What saves Whitman (and his reader) from the trap of arborescence is the sheer mobility of his writing, his refusal to settle into the kind of categories which define lives under Capital. Whitman's proclamation of "I contain multitudes" expresses this very effectively. The phrase begins with "I" appearing to enjoy effective dominance, a statement of confident vertical authority and subjectivity. This persists to a degree in "contain", and yet it also means that the "pure" authority of "I" is now somewhat qualified in that it is having to explain its relation to the rest of reality. "Multitudes" in effect topples the arborescent "I" and brings us onto a horizontal plane of spillage, where lines of flight become evident. If the rules of grammar stipulate that "I" remains the subject, the rules of the poem allow for that to be undone, and for "multitudes" to run free.

It is also curious to revisit Lawrence's critique of Whitman's mechanized love in "I Am He That Aches With Love" with reference to Deleuze. At an early juncture in *Anti-Oedipus*, he and Guattari refer to how Lawrence complained that modern thinking about love had pushed a "process into a goal": "The process should work to a completion, not to some horror of intensification and extremity wherein the soul and body ultimately perish" [8] (p. 5). This reads consistently with Lawrence's irritation with machinic aching in Whitman, as if there were no directionality to his desire, only repetition. Yet whatever ache Whitman's speaker expresses dissolves into a query about how all "matter" might be connected through such aching. To ache is to be, and everything appears to ache. Aching is no longer an extraordinary event, but proof of being vital. It is nothing to fear, but nothing necessarily to celebrate, either. Whitman can be seen as inevitably multitudinous

in his exploration of what is more commonly seen as a unifying and concentrative theme of love, but an especially vital part of that variousness is how he resists sentimentality more determinedly than might be immediately apparent. It is important to remember that these are poems which the reader can laugh at (and with) in numerous ways, and with the poet's encouragement. Attempts to limit this, and to try and fix Whitman into familiar pathologies or psychologies, come across as sneering micro-aggressions fearful of Whitman's carelessness about such things. When Harold Bloom afforded himself the assertion that the "real scandal" of Whitman's work is that it is essentially "masturbatory", and that it is doubtful that he ever had sex with another person in his life [9] (p. 15), the real joke is that this is no scandal at all. Whitman really is masturbatory, and everything else as well—nothing is omitted in his writing or made obscene. In such a context, it takes a great effort to seize upon a particular thing that is particularly scandalous. What manifests most in any reading of Whitman is its strangeness, the way in which "Otherness" is a constituent part of what is happening, where nothing is allowed to be specifically one thing: "Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical, I and this mystery here we stand" (p. 28). Whatever the specifics of what is being described, the most remarkable thing is the energy that is generated—not just a matter of imagination, but of Whitman's incredible syntax, which resolves to generate new possibilities and unforeseen trajectories.

In his essay on Whitman in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze is drawn to him as a phenomenon of style: a writer who can hold disintegration and integration in productive tension. He describes Whitman as a fragmentary poet who makes "the world as a sampling" [10] (p. 57), but then uniquely finds ways to articulate material that does not ordinarily become articulated:

> For Whitman, fragmentary writing is not defined by the aphorism or through separation, but by a particular type of sentence that modulates the interval. It is as if the syntax that composes the sentence, which makes it a totality capable of referring back to itself, tends to disappear by setting free an infinite asyntactic sentence, which prolongs itself or sprouts dashes in order to create spatiotemporal intervals.
>
> (pp. 57–58)

Rather than the "merging" that Lawrence warned of, Whitman's writing does not dissolve the distinction between fragments, even as he finds ways to move between and around them, following the "Urge and urge and urge, /Always the procreant urge of the world" (p. 28). Deleuze calls this "convulsiveness", and it is tangible wherever you look in Whitman, as in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* and the opening of what later editions would come to call "Song of Myself":

> I CELEBRATE myself,
>
> And what I assume you shall assume,
>
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
>
> I loafe and invite my soul,
>
> I lean and loafe at my ease. . ..observing a spear of summer grass.
>
> Houses and rooms are full of perfumes. . ..the shelves are crowded with perfumes,
>
> I breathe the fragrance myself, and know it and like it,
>
> The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.
>
> The atmosphere is not a perfume. . ..it has no taste of the distillation. . ..it is odorless,
>
> It is for my mouth forever. . ..I am in love with it,

> I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,
>
> I am mad for it to be in contact with me.
>
> The smoke of my own breath,
>
> Echos, ripples, and buzzed whispers. . ..loveroot, silkthread, crotch and vine,
>
> My respiration and inspiration. . ..the beating of my heart. . ..the passing of blood and air through my lungs,
>
> The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and darkcolored sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn,
>
> The sound of the belched words of my voice. . ..words loosed to the eddies of the wind,
>
> A few light kisses. . ..a few embraces. . ..a reaching around of arms,
>
> The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs wag,
>
> The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields and hillsides,
>
> The feeling of health. . ..the full-noon trill. . ..the song of me rising from bed and meeting the sun.
>
> (p. 27)

If the passage begins with statements of inclusiveness and mutual assumption, Whitman quickly shifts the reader out into a more associative and fragmented field. In the first version of this poem, the "spatiotemporal intervals" that Deleuze remarks are themselves signaled by ellipses, whereas later editions of the poems would rely on commas to do this work. A curiosity of Deleuze's response is that he argues that Whitman's style "sprouts dashes" to keep the "asyntactic" work of the poem alive, even though the piece of standard punctuation that he uses least is the dash. It could be that Deleuze is thinking of the dash-intensive work of Whitman's great contemporary, Emily Dickinson, but it also makes sense with reference to Whitman if the dash is not so much seen only as an instrument of punctuation, but as a temporal effect of the text—a means of radically altering the experience of time. As Deleuze says in *What is Philosophy?*, "[A]rt thinks no less than philosophy, but it thinks through affects and percepts" [11] (p. 66). Whitman's syntax and mobility of phrasing is remarkable in this way, with sensations and thoughts coming constantly to attention, then moving on. They couple, decouple, and make way for other flows of thought to emerge. "Love" is one of these flows in Whitman. In the opening of "Song of Myself", "love" first emerges out of experiences of smell, but is then replaced by an "atmosphere" that is both "odorless" and "tasteless" (p. 27). "Love" only enters after the clearing-out of immediate sensual experience, even as the language expressing a kind of narcotic ecstasy. This is the first expression of love in the poems of *Leaves of Grass*, and it is not a singular event, but rather a state of affect that will lead to another. He is in love with "it", or the atmosphere, if that is what the pronoun here relates to: love turns into the urge to be "undisguised" and "naked" and "mad for it to be in contact with me". "It" is what keeps Whitman convulsing, and it is whatever he needs to do that.

Deleuze insists that this "convulsiveness, as Whitman makes clear, characterizes the epoch and the country as much as the writing": "America brings together extracts, it presents samples from all ages, all lands, and all actions. The simplest love story brings into play states, peoples and tribes; the most personal autobiography is necessarily collective" (p. 57). This sounds more elegant in Deleuze's words than Whitman's declaration in "A Promise to California" that his task is "to teach robust American love,/For I know very well that I and robust love belong among you, and along the Western Sea" [12] (p. 282). Nobody is perfect, and especially not Whitman. When he adopts the purposive mode of advertising himself and his intentions to speak of "American love" Whitman can sound

especially unrefined. Yet for Deleuze, a key part of Whitman's appeal was that he was so distinctively and definably American, so determinedly non-European in his thought and action, and that his roughness was a part of this:

> Europeans have an innate sense of organic totality, or composition, but they have to acquire the sense of the fragment, and can do so only through a tragic reflection or an experience of disaster. Americans, on the contrary, have a natural sense for the fragment, and what they have to conquer is the feel for the totality, for beautiful composition. The fragment already exists in a nonreflective manner, preceding any effort: we make plans, but when the time comes to act, we "tumble the thing together, letting hurry and crudeness tell the story better than fine work". What is characteristic of America is not the fragmentary, but the spontaneity of the fragmentary: "Spontaneous, fragmentary" says Whitman.
>
> (p. 56)

Whitman's "hurry and crudeness" are what Deleuze finds so vital. Yet his formulations of "European" and "American" are in themselves crude and somewhat immobile. Snared within his own perception of the European, Deleuze appears envious of the freedoms that Whitman makes manifest. He can be characteristic of America in ways that exceed conventional expectations. It is not as if Whitman himself was always resolute about his feelings for America, as in "Song of the Broadaxe", where he states (within a curious parenthesis), "(America! I do not vaunt my love for you/I have what I have.)" [13] (p. 338). This can either be read as a statement of satiety, or as an expression that Whitman has as much love as he can possibly manage, the question remains of whether that is enough or not. Evidently, not all references to love in Whitman resonate in the same way. When it is appropriate, he describes love in very orthodox terms. In parts of the first version of "Song of Myself", Whitman explores the Christianized love that Lawrence was so concerned by, using an anaphoric framing that recalls the insistent rhythms of the Book of Genesis:

> And I know that the spirit of God is the eldest brother of my own,
>
> And that all the men ever born are also my brothers. . ..and the women my sisters and lovers,
>
> And that a kelson of the creation is love;
>
> And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
>
> And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
>
> And mossy scabs of the wormfence, and heaped stones, and elder and mullen and pokeweed.
>
> (p. 47)

Such use of anaphora is a familiar trope in his work, but what really stands out (at least initially) is the extraordinary term "kelson" (a more familiar spelling is "keelson"), which Whitman uses to express a conventional Christian teaching that "love" is the spinal column of creation, the "kelson" of the ship of life. Yet if this is an apparent example of Whitman achieving an image for love that is unusually metaphorical, reminiscent of Dante or Donne, it is also noticeable how his attention quickly wanders out into the rhizomatic spaces of the "elder and mullen and pokeweed". It is this straying of thought that seems to attract Deleuze to Whitman more than anything, the way in which connections between things remain explorable because they are unfixed. Whitman's "heaped stones" represent a compelling image of the world to Deleuze, one that he echoes in his own writing: "The world as a collection of heterogeneous parts: an infinite patch-work, or an endless wall of dry stones (a cemented wall, or the pieces of a puzzle, would reconstitute a totality)" (p. 57). Here, a fundamental "likeness" exists in writing between Deleuze and Whitman,

not in the sense that they share an identity, but rather that they share a form of writing which veers out into the nomadic, a way of wandering between the spaces in the rocks. If this straying can be baffling in Deleuze, discussions of Whitman often tend to try and encapsulate his wanderings within an inclusive idea of America, or democracy (or both). Yet that does not really account for his instinct for the "mossy scabs of the wormfence". The experience of reading Whitman shifts quickly into encountering phenomena beyond democracy, a strangeness that cannot be reconciled.

Whitman is a vital model for other writers, as Lawrence's essay conceded, yet it is not because he offers a lesson in "democracy", or how to be "democratic". Just after the publication of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Ralph Waldo Emerson famously wrote to Whitman, saying that the book "meets the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile & stingy nature, as if too much handiwork or too much lymph in the temperament were making our western wits fat & mean" [14]. Emerson's emphasis on bodily health and efficiency is fascinating, in that it seeks to promote the encounter with the book as a physical phenomenon, a source of exercise and healthy living. His response affirms Whitman as a part of nature, to whom Deleuze and Guattari's description in *Anti-Oedipus* of the desiring machine applies very well: "[N]ot man as the king of creation, but rather as the being who is in intimate contact with the profound life of all forms or all types of beings, who is responsible for even the stars and animal life, and who ceaselessly plugs an organ-machine into an energy-machine, a tree into his body, a breast into his mouth, the sun into his asshole: the eternal custodian of the machines of the universe" (p. 5). Whitman undoubtedly presents this kind of vital being, and yet he also declares that this is not in itself sufficient, but that another experience of being moves beyond it. In this, Whitman is vitalist, as was Deleuze, who wrote in *Negotiations* that "[A]ll I have written has been vitalist, at least I hope so" [15] (p. 196).

3. Love and Stuff

Ian Buchanan defines vitalism as "the position that life in all its forms cannot be explained adequately or completely in either chemical or physical terms" [16]. The sense of the unexplained or inexplicable is a frequent result of encountering Deleuze, the way in which he ventures out into dimensions of language that might almost appear poetic, or at least not adherent to the common-sense laws of classical prose. This inexplicably "beyond" aspect of life is also evident in Whitman, and he too finds strange ways of expressing it. In "Song of Myself", Whitman writes that he is "[S]tuffed with the stuff that is coarse, and stuffed with the stuff that is fine" (p. 42). Whitman does not move here so much into abstraction, but into a mystery of the counter-sublime: what is the stuff? In this moment, Whitman also summons what might be the most elusive of all concepts to be found in Deleuze and Guattari—the body without organs. In one sense, what Whitman calls "stuff", whatever its perceived quality, might be a deliberately vague description of organic material, although elsewhere in "Song of Myself", he is evidently meticulous in his anatomical writing. In that sense, it seems curious that he should use a term that is so imprecise. On the other hand, "stuff" can mean something ineffable, too large for comprehension. In turn, this suggests that there are different bodies at work in Whitman, one that feels and senses in a precisely organic way, and another one that experiences reality much less certainly and predictably. In Deleuze, if there is a body that works through the conventional promptings of desire, to the point that it might seem overwhelming, the body without organs is the alternative state which renounces such desire and makes lines of flight possible.

Hannah Stark's essay on love in Deleuze does not directly reference his writing on Whitman but generates yet more lines of correspondence between them. Stark argues that

for Deleuze, "love is tied to the notion of novelty, both in the generation of philosophy as a creative act but also in the production of new affects and sensations, new bodies, assemblage and subjectivities, in encounters with other people" [17] (p. 108). This description is also a more than adequate description of what happens upon reading Whitman, where Deleuze sees both "spontaneity or the innate feeling for the fragmentary, and the reflection on living relations that must constantly be acquired and created" (p. 60). Love is only possible in that it is part of this never-ending relationality and novelty. It might be argued that it is practically impossible to love anything in such an environment, at least in the conventional or sentimental sense that one might want to love the same person for a long time. Yet Deleuze and Whitman show contrarily that it is possible to love everything and nothing at the same time:

> Relations will consequently be posited as something that can and must be instituted or invented. Parts are fragments that cannot be totalized, but we can at least invent nonpreexisting relations between them, which testify to a regress in History as much as to an evolution in Nature.
>
> (p. 58)

Deleuze argues that Whitman offers "as many meanings as there are relations" [10] (p. 58). This seems to present an unending indeterminacy, and a problem for anyone who wants to believe in love as an eternal or unchanging phenomenon. Stark indicates a comparable problem in Deleuze's conception of difference as "the underlying field of differential relations" (p. 100). This means that "[D]ifference is behind everything, but behind difference there is nothing" (p. 101). In "By Blue Ontario's Shore", Whitman performs his own suggestion of a fundamental backdrop to experience:

> Underneath all is the Expression of love for men and women,
>
> (I swear I have seen enough of mean and impotent modes of expressing love for man and women,
>
> After this day I take my own modes of expressing love for men and women.).
>
> [18] (p. 481)

Instead of difference, the "[E]xpression of love" is established as a foundational means of establishing "relations". Yet even as he does this, Whitman also stresses that this needs reform and renewal, given the meanness and impotence of existing "modes". Whitman's new mode of expressing love requires something other than the conventional language of love. In "Starting from Paumanok", the experience of love is described as traumatically "great", fraught with its potential for both pain and satisfaction:

> What do you seek so pensive and silent?
>
> What do you think you need camerado?
>
> Dear son do you think it is love?
>
> Listen dear son—listen America, daughter or son,
>
> It is a painful thing to love a man or woman to excess, and yet it satisfies, it is great,
>
> But there is something else very great, it makes the whole coincide,
>
> It, magnificent, beyond material, with continuous hands sweeps and provides for all.
>
> [19] (p. 181)

The pain of love is displaced by a turn towards something else, the magnificent "It" that exists beyond the material. This again summons the idea of the body without organs,

a turn towards something beyond where the individuated pain of romantic love is felt. The "magnificent" "It" here is as interesting a problem to consider as the question of "the stuff" in "Song of Myself". It might be that Whitman is writing about the soul here, and yet this remains unspecified. In Deleuzian terms, the magnificent "It" might be what Deleuze and Guattari describe in *Anti-Oedipus* as the "miraculated", a path of moving beyond the intensity and immediacy of desires that is one possible line of flight for the body without organs. This "miraculate" trajectory is possible for a full body without organs, one that offers a smooth and consistent potential for moving between intensities without getting caught up in them. Yet the immediate pain of "love", that "ache" which has been central to this discussion, remains foundational to understanding what the "something else very great" might be. If the painful experience of love in a body with organs is too great, then the body without organs offers clarifying liberation from that, a shift into something beautifully intangible even as it is thoroughly depersonalized. At the same time, it does not mean that the memory of the organic pleasure can necessarily be obliterated. The other possibilities for what Deleuze and Guattari see as the fugitive schizoid body are less beatific: the empty body without organs is chaotic, but only chaotic, in that it does not allow for intensification or differentiation of experience, whereas the cancerous body is over-determined and over-diagnosed.

This is an infuriatingly fuzzy phenomenon to encounter, as hard to explain as it is to forget. What I think has not been explored adequately is that this difficult and unsettling way of encountering how people might think and love has already been ventured by Walt Whitman, and that Deleuze responds to that in both what he writes and how he writes it. In "Sauntering the Pavement or Riding the Country" from the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*—the poem that would become "Faces" in later editions—Whitman performs a prototypical line of flight away from both the pleasures and pains of organic life into a different form of intensity. He begins his "[S]auntering" by observing the faces that he encounters in ways particular to themselves:

> SAUNTERING the pavement or riding the country byroad here then are faces,
>
> Faces of friendship, precision, caution, suavity, ideality,
>
> The spiritual prescient face, the always welcome common benevolent face,
>
> The face of the singing of music, the grand faces of natural lawyers and judges broad at the backtop,
>
> The faces of hunters and fishers, bulged at the brows. . ..the shaved blanched faces of orthodox citizens,
>
> The pure extravagant yearning questioning artist's face,
>
> The welcome ugly face of some beautiful soul. . ..the handsome detested or despised face,
>
> The sacred faces of infants. . ..the illuminated face of the mother of many children,
>
> The face of an amour. . ..the face of veneration,
>
> The face as of a dream. . ..the face of an immobile rock,
>
> The face withdrawn of its good and bad..a castrated face,
>
> A wild hawk..his wings clipped by the clipper,
>
> A stallion that yielded at last to the thongs and knife of the gelder.
>
> Sauntering the pavement or crossing the ceaseless ferry, here then are faces;
>
> I see them and complain not and am content with all.
>
> [20]

This expression of contentment is immediately followed by a querulous contradiction: "Do you suppose I could be content with all if I thought them their own finale?". What appeared to be an inexhaustible desire to enlist as many faces as possible becomes a source of the unbearable:

> This now is too lamentable a face for a man;
> Some abject louse asking leave to be..cringing for it,
> Some milknosed maggot blessing what lets it wrig to its hole.
> This face is a dog's snout sniffing for garbage;
> Snakes nest in that mouth..I hear the sibilant threat.
> This face is a haze more chill than the arctic sea,
> Its sleepy and wobbling icebergs crunch as they go.
> This is a face of bitter herbs. . ..this an emetic. . ..they need no label,
> And more of the drugshelf..laudanum, caoutchouc, or hog's lard.
> This face is an epilepsy advertising and doing business. . ..its wordless tongue gives out the unearthly cry,
> Its veins down the neck distend. . ..its eyes roll till they show nothing but their whites,
> Its teeth grit..the palms of the hands are cut by the turned-in nails,
> The man falls struggling and foaming to the ground while he speculates well.
> This face is bitten by vermin and worms,
> And this is some murderer's knife with a halfpulled scabbard.
> This face owes to the sexton his dismalest fee,
> An unceasing deathbell tolls there.
> Those are really men!. . ..the bosses and tufts of the great round globe!
> Features of my equals, would you trick me with your creased and cadaverous march?
> Well then you cannot trick me.
> I see your rounded never-erased flow,
> I see neath the rims of your haggard and mean disguises.
> Splay and twist as you like. . ..poke with the tangling fores of fishes or rats,
> You'll be unmuzzled. . ..you certainly will.
> I saw the face of the most smeared and slobbering idiot they had at the asylum,
> And I knew for my consolation what they knew not;
> I knew of the agents that emptied and broke my brother,
> The same wait to clear the rubbish from the fallen tenement;
> And I shall look again in a score or two of ages,
> And I shall meet the real landlord perfect and unharmed, every inch as good as myself.

Even by the standards of Whitman, this is an extraordinary number of transitions to experience. If the poem begins in what appears to be a familiar context of Whitman's preference for the present tense, and that this offers sufficiency for him, the poem also does something less familiar in his work by allowing a different form of voice to emerge, one darkened and damaged by personal history. The poem makes apparent reference to the mental illness of Whitman's brother, Eddie, as well as the Whitman family's fraught history

of poverty and domestic precarity. Whitman links economic and psychological vulnerability in a way that is extraordinary, at least for him. This produces an understanding of the self from which he desperately needs to escape, and he does so along what appears to be a conventional route for the desperate in America—that of Christianity:

> The Lord advances and yet advances:
>
> Always the shadow in front. . ..always the reached hand bringing up the laggards.
>
> Out of this face emerge banners and horses. . ..O superb!. . ..I see what is coming,
>
> I see the high pioneercaps. . ..I see the staves of runners clearing the way,
>
> I hear victorious drums.
>
> This face is a lifeboat;
>
> This is the face commanding and bearded. . ..it asks no odds of the rest;
>
> This face is flavored fruit ready for eating;
>
> This face of a healthy honest boy is the programme of all good.
>
> These faces bear testimony slumbering or awake,
>
> They show their descent from the Master himself.

The real "landlord" is identified as "The Lord", and Whitman's verse shifts into a more measured and reassuring rhythm, achieving a sense of an ending and establishing a kind of peace in the intense realm of faces, even if the idea of a face ripe enough to eat remains troubling in its implicit violence. Yet the poem is only about half-done, and it is its next shift that particularly intrigues. Out of the apparent triumph of the Master, a new kind of query appears:

> Off the word I have spoken I except not one. . ..red white or black, all are deific,
>
> In each house is the ovum. . ..it comes forth after a thousand years.
>
> Spots or cracks at the windows do not disturb me,
>
> Tall and sufficient stand behind and make signs to me;
>
> I read the promise and patiently wait.

This is readable as a conventional expression of a millennialist belief in the return of the Messiah, but what is more striking is the reference to "the ovum" as the thing of such potential, not least because it anticipates Deleuze and Guattari's foundational (and most resonant) definition of the body without organs in *Anti-Oedipus* as an egg:

> The body without organs is an egg: it is crisscrossed with axes and thresholds, with latitudes and longitudes and geodesic lines, traversed by gradients marking the transitions and the becomings, the destinations of the subject developing along these particular vectors.
>
> (p. 19)

Whitman's "ovum" is not just the thousand-year promise of a Messiah; rather, it promises a birth into radical new intensities for "each" house, for all its structural or superficial flaws, its spots and cracks. The egg of the body without organs is a plane of immanence for Deleuze and Guattari, its "smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface", resisting "linked, connected and interrupted flows", "it sets up a counterflow of amorphous, undifferentiated liquid" (p. 9). The revelation of the "ovum" in Whitman leads to a scene of remarkably fluid eroticism, as Whitman transitions from third person to first person, man to woman, flowing on "albescent honey":

> This is a fullgrown lily's face,
>
> She speaks to the limber-hip'd man near the garden pickets,

> Come here, she blushingly cries. . ..Come nigh to me limber-hip'd man and give me
>
> your finger and thumb,
>
> Stand at my side till I lean as high as I can upon you,
>
> Fill me with albescent honey. . ..bend down to me,
>
> Rub to me with your chafing beard..rub to my breast and shoulders.

If this still seems to be still an example of desiring machines at work, it also manifests a new form of becoming, as the fundamental anxieties that dogged the subject's desire in the opening of the poem have disappeared. Deleuze and Guattari describe how the body without organs is aggrieved by "every production of a machine": "Beneath its organs it senses there are larvae and loathsome worms, and a God at work messing it all up or strangling it by organizing it" (p. 9). These horrors clearly manifested in the preceding parts of Whitman's poem but no longer seem to afflict the scene with the "fullgrown lily" and the "limber-hip'd man". The scene is clearly sexual, but it also remains somewhat inscrutable and unclear about what exactly is happening, despite what appear to be straightforward instructions from the voice of the woman. Before this can become a matter of further interpretation or crisis, Whitman shifts attention yet again, firstly to the "old face of the mother of many children/Whist! I am fully content" and then to a natural scene that appears to have no causal connection to what has just occurred, other than that they exist on the same plane of immanence:

> Lulled and late is the smoke of the Sabbath morning,
>
> It hangs low over the rows of trees by the fences,
>
> It hangs thin by the sassafras, the wildcherry and the catbrier under them.

The smoke hanging over the trees is as much part of the love scene as what happened between the "lily" and "the limber-hip'd man"; and even then, Whitman performs yet more distractions up until the end of the poem:

> I saw the rich ladies in full dress at the soiree,
>
> I heard what the run of poets were saying so long,
>
> Heard who sprang in crimson youth from the white froth and the water-blue.
>
> Behold a woman!
>
> She looks out from her quaker cap. . ..her face is clearer and more beautiful than the sky.
>
> She sits in an armchair under the shaded porch of the farmhouse,
>
> The sun just shines on her old white head.
>
> Her ample gown is of creamhued linen,
>
> Her grandsons raised the flax, and her granddaughters spun it with the distaff and the wheel.
>
> The melodious character of the earth!
>
> The finish beyond which philosophy cannot go and does not wish to go!
>
> The justified mother of men!

The mother here is "justified" in that she is sufficient in herself; at the same time, she is not her own "finale", but the sum of her relations to others and the world, and her continuing ability to experience such relationality. In this way, "the finish" might not necessarily be read as a statement of an ending, but rather as the smooth surface of the body without organs that Whitman has made through the making of his poem. More than

that, it is *Leaves of Grass*, the book, that is the full body without organs, manifesting not only "Walt Whitman" but the ability to become more than that, to experience the self as endless potential rather than as a limit. Whitman is not the first poet to have suggested that there are things that exist beyond philosophy, but he also manifests poetry as something that goes beyond its own terms. In this, he demonstrates to Deleuze a prototype for his own way of thinking and writing.

4. Camerados

To return to the short poem on "amorous love" that so exercised Lawrence, it is remarkable that it contains a confusion of subjects, where Whitman's "I am he that loves" reads like a relation of Rimbaud's "J'est un autre", where I is a lover. The phenomenon of radical Otherness (or Deleuze's "otherwise Other" [21] (p. 319) also dispels the sentiments attendant upon conventions of identity and the sympathies that it engenders. Deleuze's essay on Whitman argues that "[N]ature is not a form, but rather the process of establishing relations. It invents a polyphony: it is not a totality but an assembly, a 'conclave', a 'plenary session'" (p. 59). Whitman's proclamations about himself are part of this polyphony, not separate from it. Yet the strange cumulative effect of Whitman is one of distance, even as the many intensities of his work remain so thoroughly apparent. It is all but impossible to keep pace with who or what is becoming whom or what from line to line at times, and as such, it becomes more and more difficult to attach thorough credibility to the idea of Whitman as a conventional subject, but rather a system of connection to other things and beings. This might well be what really happens when you sing of yourself: you become dispersed into the domain of the Others. Stark contends that this is what also lies behind Deleuze's philosophy of love, to reject the traditional tendency to see love as convergence or "merging" (p. 108), but rather as a way in which the "the self is undone" through encountering "otherwise Others" (p. 108). Love is necessarily depersonalizing, in that the subject gives themselves away: "love eradicates the subject while retaining both subjectivity and subjective experience" (p. 108).

It makes no sense to be talking of the denial of the self if we are talking about Walt Whitman. Yet Deleuze gravitates to Whitman because his statements of self were not simple proclamations but were situated within a context of seeking liberation from the idea of the self as it was conventionally contained by Capital. This was not only an imagined tyranny; for Deleuze, Whitman projected the solid possibility of a kind of common love that went beyond conventional relations:

> "Camaraderie" is the great word Whitman uses to designate the highest human relation, not by virtue of the totality of a situation but as a function of particular traits, emotional circumstances, and the interiority of the relevant fragments (in the hospital, for example, a relation of camaraderie must be established with each dying man). In this way is woven a web of variable relations, which are not merged into a whole, but produce the only whole that man is capable of conquering in a given situation.
>
> (p. 60)

Amidst all the interplay of difference, Deleuze seems to imply that there is in fact a hierarchy of loves, and that the love of comrades is at its highest point, beyond conventional forms of affection. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze had struggled with the terms "friend" and "lover", nearly using them interchangeably:

> What does a friend mean when it becomes a conceptual persona, or a condition for this exercise of thought? Or rather, are we not talking of the lover? Does not

> the friend reintroduce into thought a vital relationship with the Other that was supposed to have been excluded from pure thought?
>
> (pp. 3–4)

Whitman's "Camerado" offers a mode of affectionate being that is nevertheless disinterested, not needing motive or pretext, but rather a related impulse to travel, as in "Song of the Open Road":

> Camerado, I give you my hand!
>
> I give you my love more precious than money,
>
> I give you myself before preaching or law;
>
> Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?
>
> Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?
>
> [22] (p. 307)

As in "Sauntering" (later, "Faces"), Whitman sees man and woman in constant relation, folding and unfolding. He could imagine and give body to what, for Deleuze, was often only abstract: camaraderie as a state of relationality beyond conventions of gender and social function. Women and men had to be seen in terms of such relationality, rather than as distinct:

> Unfolded only out of the inimitable poem of the woman can come the poems of man—(only thence have my poems come;)
>
> Unfolded out of the strong and arrogant woman I love, only thence can appear the strong and arrogant man I love;
>
> Unfolded by brawny embraces from the well-muscled woman I love, only thence come the brawny embraces of the man;
>
> Unfolded out of the folds of the woman's brain, come all the folds of the man's brain, duly obedient;
>
> Unfolded out of the justice of the woman, all justice is unfolded.
>
> [23] (pp. 515–516)

A "comradely love" is one of maximal relations, non-exclusive, within which a transformative agency might always be immanent. To be a lover is just to perform a role in Whitman, but to be a comrade is to be exceptional. Everything else is just a form of occupation:

> A wandering savage,
>
> A farmer, mechanic, or artist. . ..a gentleman, sailor, lover or quaker,
>
> A prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician or priest.
>
> [1] (p. 43)

Similarly, in *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari envision ancient Greece as a similar jostle of occupations and roles which saw the "formation of societies of friends or equals but also the promotion of relationships of rivalry between and within them, the contest between claimants in every sphere, in love, the games, tribunals, the judiciaries, politics and even in thought" (p. 4). From this, we might adapt Stark's summary of Deleuze's argument that there is no subject who experiences; there is just experience (p. 103). Therefore, it is arguable that there is no subject who loves; rather, there is just love.

It is worth remarking that if Deleuze had a special interest in American literature, as Fredric Jameson has indicated [24] (pp. 371–372), the range of American writing that he referred to was not particularly extensive. In *Essays Clinical and Cultural*, Melville's

"Bartleby the Scrivener" is the only other American text apart from *Leaves of Grass* that he singles out to write about, setting a precedent for the innumerable interpretations that have since been visited upon that story by European philosophers and theorists such as Negri, Berardi, and Žižek; as Jameson says, "[N]ow everybody is talking about Bartleby, politically and otherwise, and I think that this comes out of Deleuze's essay" (p. 371). Deleuze's interest in Whitman did not prove to be so politically fashionable, but it is an especially compelling phenomenon to contemplate for precisely that reason.

As Deleuze moves into the final statement of his essay on Whitman, he hits an unfamiliarly grand note, as if he has found something even more than a comrade—perhaps even a model or a master: "Spontaneous fragments constitute the element through which, or in the intervals of which, we attain the great and carefully considered visions and sounds of both Nature and History"(p. 60). Jameson argues that Deleuze tended to make other thinkers sound like they were also Deleuze: "What does he do with all of these philosophies? Well, he takes them and turns them into versions of himself" (p. 369). There is an argument that this is also what he did with Walt Whitman, as this essay in part suggests. But, conversely, it also contends that the opposite is equally true—that Walt Whitman made Deleuze Whitmanian, and that their relationality is not only a matter of temperament and query, but texture, style, and comradely love. Does Deleuze contradict himself? Very well then, he contradicts himself.

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