IN CONCLUSION…

Deleuze's status as a ‘Kantian’ does not in the end depend on the extent of Deleuze’s engagement with Kant’s ideas, but on the nature of this engagement: how Deleuze in fact formulates an original philosophy, significantly different from Kant’s, but taking certain key critical tenets as his points of departure. What constitutes a ‘key critical tenet’ is hardly beyond dispute: the choices in this matter are what define and distinguish a strain of Kantianism. Here, the key notions have been the rejection of an transcendent identity as ground or goal of thought; the rejection of conceptual analysis as sufficient reason for the determination of thought; and the location of pure judgement as the implicit centre of an immanent thought, which we might also express as a gesture beyond transcendent rules or norms as universal structure of thought. These mostly negative formulations are based, however, in a positive critical principle: that of the necessary autonomy, freedom and vitality of thought, which no less rejects a sceptical attitude than a dogmatic one. Thus, the rejection of transcendence is based in the development of an auto-orientation of thought, which distributes and populates its own territory, and finds its necessity within itself. The concept of identity is displaced from the centre of thought only in virtue of its more fundamental sense in connection with the ideal and existential determinations of the problem. The challenge to the ‘world order’—macro- and micro- cosmic—represented by the aesthetic is also the principle of its generation and the index of ‘new possibilities of existence’.

One of the central connections developed throughout this thesis has been that between the status of thought as an action and the correspondingly indeterminate status of ‘being’ or ‘what is’. This, as we understand it, is the critical ‘overture’ of Kant’s project, literally, in his preface to the first critique. It is a connection, however, that, qua overture, is not the ‘end of the story’, and already in itself has several different senses. In its most well known sense, as given by Kant, it is the theoretical indeterminacy of ‘things-in-themselves’, given the necessary conditions of experience, in the form of our pure a priori concepts and forms of intuition. It is also the indeterminacy of the truth and falsity of the objects of thought, outside of the judgements that give them
sense and value. It is the ‘default’ indeterminacy, or non-determination, of what exists, given the necessary self-determination of the will. It is thus precisely not, in the first place, an isolable theory of being or existence—that it is indeterminate, chaos—but rather the necessary consequence of a position of thought. ‘Position’ here is used deliberately, as it is the case, as in Kant’s essay on orientation, that what comes first is the position or attitude, from which an action or judgement may ensue, and only then may we—if this is our concern—resolve these elements into a ‘theory’.

More pertinent, for Deleuze especially, would be to resolve them into a central problem, question or Idea. The problem combines the notions of the active determination of thought and indeterminacy in several ways. In the first place, the ‘indeterminacy’ of existence takes on a more positive and localised sense, as the problematic instance or event that spurs us to act. It also presents us with an ideal horizon, “objective but indeterminate”, as the horizon of our actions. In both of these forms it preserves the element of an ‘outside’ to thought which is as necessary to its sense as an act as its freedom. This is perhaps especially evident in reflecting on the aesthetic, as it is here that the indeterminacy of existence emerges given the limits of our power to determine, in a legislative sense. Characteristically for Deleuze, however, this encounter with our limits is also the discovery of the secret heart of our power: the dynamic engagement with the actual that continually both grounds and undermines our thought. Deleuze poses the problem of thought in terms of what it presupposes, what gives it sense, and what renews it. We can only properly speak of the relationship between thought and being in those cases where they confront their very limits—the encounter between the unthought and the inactual, the site of a transformation on both sides. The success of this transformation depends on its ability to initiate a productive and viable ‘plane’, forestalling the nihilism of simple chaos, but more importantly keeping at bay the equally nihilistic stupor of habit.

It was suggested in the Introduction that the notion of the “problem” forms both a virtual and actual nexus for the concerns of this thesis. In his books on cinema, Deleuze speaks of the problem as being characterised above all by the presentation of an alternative, a choice. The choice, as he conceives it, is not between two terms, but between two modes of existence: that of the
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one who persuades themselves there is no choice, in virtue of a moral, physical or psychological necessity (the Good, the state of affairs, desire), and that of the one who knows that one must choose, and continue to choose—

It is a choice which is not defined by what [the persona] chooses, but by the power that it possesses to be able to start afresh at every instant, of starting afresh itself, and in this way confirming itself by itself, by each time putting the whole stake back into play each time.a

In other words, the alternative is between those for whom there is effectively a problem and those for whom there is none, or who falsely identify its terms. The alternative is not overcome by committing to one path over another, or finding a third term which mediates the choice, but through committing to the problem itself, which Deleuze terms here as the object of “belief.”

This passage reflects a form of dichotomy and dialectic that has recurred throughout this examination of the critical project between Kant and Deleuze. Kant’s solution to the competing claims of dogmatism, scepticism and ‘enthusiasm’, in the form of the “need of reason”, effectively amounts to choosing the problem itself: it locates the instance which both generates the alternatives and forestalls the errors arising from following a single path. The defining trait of Deleuze’s dogmatic image of thought is that it has persuaded itself that it has no choice, submitting to nature or “established values”, and has precisely chosen to do so. It is a tension which exists within Kant’s philosophy itself, according to whether the “need” of reason settles into its ‘fact’, and follows “paths already traced”, or instead seeks the point which awakens its need and animates its facts. The forms in which dichotomies present and resolve themselves in Kant and Deleuze’s work—antinomy, antithesis, contradiction, contrariety, disparity, and, of course, difference—represent a topic of study by themselves, not able to be attempted here. We can nevertheless observe the tendency in both to refuse the alternative, in the sense of ‘either/or’, and operate a shift in orientation that incorporates both terms while maintaining their distance.

This may appear to favour a philosophy of infinitely deferred judgement: a negative philosophy of the suspense of commitment in the absence of any determined course. In what sense then is this a philosophy which affirms thought as “the only moment of presence and precision”?b Kant presents the ‘problematic judgement’ in terms of an ‘inclusive disjunction’, where alternative hypotheses are equally affirmed as possible. In Deleuze’s
work, this epistemological suspense is transformed into an affirmation of the communication between orders which differ in nature, precisely in virtue of their difference. It is again a matter of emphasising the problem as a ‘vital’ rather than an intellectual instance: an object of a form of faith rather than knowledge, even “hypothetical” knowledge. To “choose to choose”, or to “choose the problem”, from a theoretical perspective, would indeed suggest the suspension of judgement. But this is precisely a choice not to choose, implying an absence of “sufficient reason”, which is to say a (non-)choice that is a function of “the situation.” Kant already reverses this order of reasons: it is the capacity and necessity to judge that confers rights on the status of our concepts, rather than the reverse. To choose to choose, from a practical perspective, is precisely to commit, to “put into play all that is at stake”, even on the most contingent of provocations, and to allow the force of the commitment to surmount and preserve the distance between the ideal and the actual.
Endnotes for Conclusion

2 Cinema 1, F160-161/E114.
3 Cinema 1, F182/E115.
4 Cinema 2, F231/E117.
5 DR, F43/E28.