PART I

CONCEPTS ENCOUNTERED
2 Immanent critique, micropolitics, and constituent power

The modern world is one of simulacra. Man did not survive God, nor did the identity of the subject survive that of substance. All identities are only simulated, produced as an optical ‘effect’ by the more profound game of difference and repetition.

Gilles Deleuze

2.1 Introduction

It is a truism: art imitates life, and life art. The resulting union of fiction and fact is celebrated in every public and private display; the litany is nonstop. Spectacle extends from advertising, architecture, park, art gallery, and museum, to whatever is presented on stage, screen, page, and airwaves. Spectacle, be it ritual or theatre, runs as shallow and as deep as the homely mirror, which conjures up a public, at call, for each human body. In what manner human bodies become active in their thinking and doing, instead of each being the creature of its public, is the concern prompting the present chapter.

Immanent critique in the use of signs gives thought, and the body, a fresh purchase in all the areas just mentioned, from advertising through to the use of the mirror. In immanent critique, it is accepted that what is said to be, and the sayer who predicates it, are parts of one loop: this is a commitment to the univocity of being. Immanent critique in the use of signs is fostered by Deleuze’s image of thought as a clinical practice, which I outlined in chapter one. The result is a ‘critical and clinical’ engagement with life, including language in its widely accepted use as a means of representation. The idea is that the performative and the constative can rub shoulders, and furthermore, unless they do, cogitation will be sadly uneventful.¹

To anchor the discussion of immanent critique in something concrete, section 2.2 looks at what narrative in the public sphere, or public storytelling, can do. It begins by touching on the negative effects that arise from certain uses of exemplars in public storytelling. The section then broaches the question of what users of language do, in order to function other than as servants of language-borne fictions such as exemplars.

Section 2.3 discusses two instances of works – one is a poem and the other a film – that have chipped away at the hold that language-borne exemplars exert on history. The works are Bernard de Mandeville’s famous narrative poem ‘The Grumbling Hive,’ from the early

¹ Daniel Smith provides an introduction to the Critique et Clinique project initiated by Deleuze, in (Smith, 1998).
eighteenth century; and *Microcosmos*, by Claude Nuridsany and Marie Pérennou, a non-narrative film from the cinema of the 1990s. I discuss how the Mandeville poem and the film, separately and in concert, destabilise exemplarity. Also, each work eases its audience along a path that runs counter to common sense. In the case of the film, one of the outcomes is an improved capacity for handling the actual and the virtual as complementary facets of the real.

Section 2.4 presents constituent power, highlighting its links with the critique of exemplarity. This section introduces the concept of a fluidly organic whole, and presents the related concepts of a subjugated group and a subject-group. A concluding section then draws out the main points from the chapter.

Connections with the rest of the thesis are as follows. Constituent power was important in working for a democratic society during the nineties, discussed in chapters five and six. By looking at the link between immanent critique and constituent power, this chapter is also preparing for chapters seven and eight, which discuss cinema in relation to constituent power, in the late twentieth century.

### 2.2 What public storytelling can do

**Exemplarity**

It is a decade, the nineties, that unleashes a remarkable duo, in the movie protagonists Truman and Bateman. Man, television serial fodder; or man, the inflatable enviable-lifestyle, with a craving for flesh: could Truman or Bateman be a particular man that stands in for a universal? Is this a character that exhibits the spirit of the decade, with lineaments tweaked, and plot elements hyped, only to enhance our shock of recognition? In like manner, one could select as an exemplar the protagonist, D-fens, in *Falling Down*. Or the eponymous Mrs Doubtfire. A teen protagonist from *Clerks*, or *Kids*, or *eXistenZ*. One of the foursome in *Kalifornia*, where bourgeois and trailer-trash life, each of them impelled toward violence, shadow one another. The youthful protagonist-narrator in *Fight Club*. The man who is business success personified, in *The Game*. The list could go on.²

Such a list is useful, at this point, if it does no more than signal a difficulty with exemplarity. The idea of exemplars, while once taken seriously, is now a curiosity from a past era. Exemplars still have currency and traction, however, in tabloid journalism. Thus, current affairs shows on tabloid television put to air exposés of ‘the’ bank and the battler; ‘the’ dole bludger; ‘the’ grateful new non-Anglophone settler as opposed to ‘the’ bad unassimilated immigrant; ‘the’ natural born criminal offender, and so forth.

The sensationalism in tabloids helps to entertain the large audience. Peel back the hype, and there is less of a gulf between the tabloid exposé and some respected forms of public storytelling. All manner of public relations and marketing campaigns work from the premise

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² Truman is the protagonist in *The Truman Show* (1998), a film by Peter Weir. Bateman is the protagonist in *American Psycho* (2000), a film by Mary Harron, based on *American Psycho: A Novel* (1991) by Bret Easton Ellis. All films mentioned in the dissertation are listed in the filmography.
that everyone identifies as belonging to one of the market researchers’ categories, the
‘demographics.’ Major political parties have turned to that style of publicity campaign,
combined with the tabloid radio talkback shows, to market their brand to voters. The tabloid
exposé can also claim a relationship to a certain method of research in sociology, known as
the inductive method. The inductive method ‘discovers’ natural kinds and names them, often
identifying the kind through a persona with a proper name and a personal story. At its peak in
the 1930s, the inductive method, which helped to make the Chicago school of sociology
famous, was instrumental in discovering and naming a dozen or so human types. The types
were not far removed from the ones now routinely displayed in tabloid journalism.

To speak in terms of natural kinds is to pass for a naive or trusting speaker of the classical
mother tongue, the language that ‘carves nature at its joints.’ It is probably fair to say that we
are all of us naïve speakers of that language, a situation that is likely to change only in
generations to come, if at all. Fortunately, we are not locked into being naïve speakers of the
language. In fact, by the late twentieth century, marketing and political spin may have begun
to overreach themselves. They had caused a segment of the general public to start
transforming the joint-carving language into an idiom that is routinely spoken tongue in
cheek. A frequently used figure of speech in that idiom is the rejoinder, ‘Yeah. Right.’
Another mark of the idiom is a speaker’s inclusion, in her own assertion, of the tell-tale coda –
the appended ‘As if.’ or ‘Not.’ – that exposes a falsehood, transforming the assertion into an
‘assertion.’ (Echoing through those turns of phrase in today’s vernacular, is Galileo’s ‘Eppur’
si muove.’)

Still, professional category-boosters – people in the marketing industry, and producers of
tabloid fare – get by quite well in their imagined community of naïve speakers of the
language. The same applies to the present cohort of users of the inductive method in
sociology. Category-boosters may one day see a need to question the categories they are
‘discovering’ and/or using. Until then, they remain uncritical speakers of the language: they
remain blind, or so it seems, to the category of the fabricator, that is, blind to the massive
fiction-machine of which they are cogs. Those weaknesses led the inductive method, from
the late 1930s on, into misconnecting with its subject matter. As a result, it failed to see
changes that were afoot, especially in African-American society where the black nationalist
movement was beginning to gather strength.3

The failures of the inductive method, and the successes of tabloid journalism, show that
public storytelling can lead to unsatisfactory ends. In the academy, there have been missed
connections, dead ends. Much worse, in society, there is the mass media’s daily dishing up of
the same bones for ressentiment to gnaw upon. Ressentiment is part of the subject-hood that
stems from Oedipal conditioning: it preys on oedipalised man (male and female).
Ressentiment presents itself as a sense of frustration, envy and hostility; and at times, these
are vented communally. Thus, minority groups are vilified, and made scapegoats, because

3 (D’Eramo, 2002: pp 255-268). Results produced by the inductive method, albeit now in a more prudent
scientific garb than was used in the thirties, continue to find a serious niche audience. For instance, political
party campaign development and policy marketing have of late been influenced by a sociologist and writer,
Catherine Hakim, who has discovered, using preference theory, the three natural kinds of ‘female work-
lifestyle’ ((Hakim, 2002); an expanded account appears in Hakim’s Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st
Century, Oxford University Press, 2000).
they are supposedly being given some benefit which is not theirs by right. When a nation is
unified by politicians who exploit *resentment*, life reaches a low ebb.

**The positive side of public storytelling**

No one has ordained that public storytelling leads to dead ends and bad or ignoble ends. As previously noted, people can be critical users of their native tongue (the one that carves
nature at its joints, evoking a transcendent order). In the academy, both in the humanities and
in the sciences, uncritical speaking and writing may already be on the way out. Added to that,
people at large are becoming more sensitised to how their own utterances are implicated in
the fiction-machine; people are eager, and increasingly able, to avoid being just its cogs.

Being critical users of their native language does not oblige people to dismiss all talk and
writing that evokes a transcendent order. It simply makes people expect something more of
such discourse. One expects that what is said and written will somehow hint at the problem
that evoking the transcendent order poses. Where a work relies on exemplars, for instance,
one expects that it will call attention to the duplicity of those constructs.

Take *The Truman Show*. The film’s saving grace is its fractal gesture, or as the
narratologists say, the *mise en abyme*. Director Peter Weir gives us a film that fabricates, via
the actual screen and its actual viewers, an everyman character, Truman. And the Truman
character is, within the fiction – as he is in reality – a screen-built everyman character. That
is a quirk, which signposts something; the critical spectator can ponder what it signposts.
Moreover, in using *mise en abyme*, Weir’s film (perhaps unintentionally) invites comparison
with the cyberpunk classic, *Videodrome*, by David Cronenberg. That adds another line of
mirroring, with inflections, to the puzzle of what work each of the films is doing.

*The Truman Show* is so constructed that once seen, there is, in a manner of speaking, no
escaping it. Its having played in ‘cinemas everywhere’ raises immediate questions about the
hold of screens everywhere. Which resurfaces the question of how thought and action can
best proceed, in a barrage of spectacle.

**2.3 Antigen for exemplars**

*Machines for working outside language-games*

*The Truman Show* goes some way toward provoking critical thinking about
representation, and in particular about exemplars. Its pulling of the spectator, as it were, into
the film’s story, and in a troubling manner, is something it shares with several other popular
movies from the nineties, for instance *The Player* and *The Sixth Sense*. But it suits my
purpose at this point to set aside box-office hits, and turn to a movie with its own devotees, as

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4 Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan defines *mise en abyme* as follows: ‘Sometimes the relations between narrative levels
are those of analogy, that is, similarity and contrast. An analogy that verges on identity, making one level a
kind of mirror or reduplication of another, is known by the term *mise en abyme.*’ ((Rimmon-Kenan, 1996: p
133)).
opposed to a popular release – a cult movie – namely, Microcosmos. Microcosmos is unusual, in that it is a feature-length, non-narrative film, with no dialogue, and no voice-over except for a few words. With crevices and sockets in the insect world playing host to the cine-eye, the film bathes its viewer in a flow of sound, song, and movement.

Through its suspension of narrative, indeed its prolonged suspension of meaning, Microcosmos widens the space for critical thinking. In that regard, the film has something in common with serious nonsense verse, and with all the other machines that have been devised down the years, for working outside language-games. There is an obstacle that necessitates the inventing of such machines, and that obstacle is a deep-rooted fiction in the sign systems (systems of signification) on which all language-games are built. There are many sign systems, but each of them claims to be self-sufficient. Each system purports to distribute Being into matter-of-fact categories, where beings take up their respective shares in the whole and, by the same token, receive names, predicates, and predicables. There are two problems with that linguistic fiction. First, it places beings in a relational order that is not of their own making, a transcendent relational order – this denies univocity and beats down life. Second, the fiction, even after being exposed, does not simply go away.

The machines I am discussing – inventions that work outside language-games – obviously do more than just suspend meaning (otherwise, they would produce gibberish). In the case of Microcosmos, it is clear that human artistry of a high order, dedication, and a prodigious amount of time and effort went into the making of the film. Because of that, there is a palpable intensity produced by the encounter of the film-making with the insect beings around which the film-making revolves.

One of the effects of that intensity is to nudge the spectator toward posing the question, ‘If I doubt that thinking is present in the insect repertoire of behaviours, what makes me sure of my own thinking?’ When voice-over cuts in: ‘Nothing will stop what’s now in motion […]’, the thought occurs that if thinking is provoked by some primal irritant, that itch is not knowing what is now in motion. And the irritant is appreciated, insofar as one knows that one does not know. Part of the problem is that thinking alters how the thinker is implicated in life’s overall commotion. Thinking takes part in that incessant flux, or spilling, which enables the real to become different from itself.

It is thanks to the uncertainty about what is now in motion, that there can be machinic activity, that is, gesture sustained in active mode, eluding the mechanical forms of the passive and the reactive. Machinic activity keeps sidestepping the knowledge that there is no stopping what is now in motion. And thinking is a machinic activity. The machinic part of thinking, is the part that carries out experiments in auto-critique. To think is not just a matter

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5 In Wittgenstein’s (now widely accepted) account of language and its speakers and writers, the use of language is a matter of making sequential moves in ‘language-games,’ games where a move may be an utterance and/or a non-verbal action. Each language-game has its own rules applying to the continuation of sequences of moves, and to the termination of sequences. To understand is literally to follow, which is to share in the collective knowledge of what moves can come next, according to the customarily accepted rules of the language-game one is playing. A group of persons who play a large enough number of the same language-games constitutes a ‘form of life’ (Wittgenstein, 1958/1953Ger: especially ss 65-71). The interesting thing about language-games is the scope for the making of moves that retroactively change the rules.
of bearing in mind a given public, and searching for better means of representing to that public, and harnessing for the public’s use, whatever is now in motion.

Any apparatus that works purely in reactive mode is mechanical, as opposed to machinic. In a social setting, consider some assemblage operating in the name of justice or morality. Suppose the assemblage comes armed with common sense. The assemblage comes equipped also with time-honoured procedures for refining and updating judgments about what is fair or good: procedures such as those for appointments to the judiciary, or to the church hierarchy. The assemblage applies its powers to preventing or resisting violations of fairness or goodness. It sets about exposing and striking down the unfair, or working on the redemption of the not good.

How can we be sure we are discussing an assemblage whose use of power is not mechanical? The assemblage has human parts, but it is also reminiscent of a hive of bees. In that respect, it recalls the hive of a quite different persuasion, celebrated in Mandeville’s poem, the fable of the bees. Mandevillian bees exhibit a steadfast pursuit of individual self-interest, coupled with matter-of-fact hypocrisy with regard to fairness, the social good, and morality. Those antisocial and immoral traits secure the hive, and make it prosper. As is well known, the Mandevillian bees were soon buzzing around in many bonnets, where they helped bring about the world’s passage into the era of market democracy (to give the era the name it presently enjoys). Thus, the invention of those bees met its mark: it did violence to exemplarity, fracturing that linguistic fiction of a secure morality as it was deployed in the discourse of the day, and opening language to a transverse use.

A look under the bonnet

Mandeville’s poem works in part by turning upon and mocking its own genre, the fable, a form of storytelling for the supposed moral improvement of the public. True to the conventions of the form, the poem’s ‘moral’ is expounded in the closing stanza, which seals the tour de force. The moral is that moralising in order to shore up the (Christian) virtues, including justice and morality, is at best futile, and at worst, harmful to society. What is more, principles of upright conduct must in general be honoured in the breach, otherwise they damage society. The spreading of virtue simply isn’t feasible, because virtue isn’t businesslike: virtue erodes wealth, and as if that in itself were not enough, it makes the nation vulnerable to attack by foreign powers.

In mocking the genre of fable, the poem aligns itself with the so-called beast epic, or cycle of animal tales, which was part of the vernacular oral tradition of Europe’s late medieval period. The beast epic, with its comic animal heroes, mocked morally instructive fables. The effect was to let the mass audience in on the secret of how moral storytelling, in the earlier period when it used to work, had boosted exemplars. Mandeville’s poem piggybacked on that comic insight. It cleverly insinuated that moralising (other than tongue in cheek) functioned

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6 The poem’s title is ‘The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves Turn’d Honest’ (Mandeville, 1705). It was republished with a preface, an accompanying essay, and remarks on the poem, all written by Mandeville, as The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits (1714).
to the advantage of hierarchs, and that these were foolish men, or in any event, not to be trusted. It exposed hierarchs as parasites on society.

‘The Grumbling Hive’ has done its primary work, and is now nothing more than a museum exhibit, albeit a priceless one. The film Microcosmos strikes me as an attempt at repeating the trope of Mandeville’s poem today. Repetition in art, as in life, is never the dull replication of the self-same thing. So, in its manner of targeting the dangers of exemplarity today, Microcosmos reinvents the machine, fable-of-the-bees. The screen invites the spectator to think of social insects, as it enfolds her in an experience that has nothing to do with narrative or meaning. The filmmakers take a staple of fable, the world of the bee and its tiny ground- and water-dwelling cousins, and revolutionise the human attitude to it. The film lets the eye wander, lets it fly off at a tangent to the moral tale and parody, and at a tangent to history as history stands, or stood. The work invites history to move with it: the step may be ever so small, but this is part of a dalliance with history, an attempted move of seduction or abduction. Microcosmos itself strays: it doesn’t just drop narrative, it veers away from satire, using a new method of deconstruction that destabilises Mandeville’s own ‘moral’.

Microcosmos hints, at least to this spectator, that exemplars, and through them transcendent relational order, are still a menace to life. They have recovered from the upset of the late medieval and early modern period, and are gaining (have gained) a fresh hold on history. And outside the film, it is not necessary to look very far to see one major indication of that hold: the manifest pull of the marketing and the tabloid fare that are pitched non-stop at consumers and at voters. As previously noted, both marketing and tabloid fare work by getting people to identify as natural kinds. In fact, they relentlessly exploit people’s repressed anxieties about being a misfit or a borderline case. Hence the grim presence in society of the politics of ressentiment.

In sum, Microcosmos shows that what seems to be a ubiquitous torrent of narrative and representation, can be switched off at will. The film imparts a fresh respect for the enigma of thought, such that any viewer who harbours a belief in the ontology of the Cogito, soon sloughs off that attachment. The film also steps into place within the sequence that begins with morally instructive fables, and passes through medieval beast epics, and Mandeville’s fable of the bees. The business of morally instructive fables was to identify human traits, good and evil; this sustained in society a certain relational order, which happened to suit particular castes. The satires that appropriated the morality genre made it their business to send cracks through that relational order. Send-ups featuring animals were a form of public entertainment, but that was not their primary purpose. The wit in those send-ups made a difference to lessons in virtue. Microcosmos marks a return of that difference. On this occasion, the machine that cracks relational order is working within a different object. Its host is not the old god-given relational order, but that order’s mutant offspring, a secular construct that still keeps people from making their own relational order. The mutation of the host explains why the metamorphosis machine switches gear – out of satire, and into a kinetically intense and drawn-out occluding of meaning.

We are not quite done with Microcosmos as an illustration of immanent critique. As already noted, in one brief passage of voice-over – ‘Nothing will stop what’s now in motion’
– there is a clue that the film sunders the ontology of the *Cogito*. Another brief passage says, ‘Time passes differently here’; this points to a different aspect of the film’s work, within the continuum of immanent critique.

**Rethinking continuity**

The sequence that begins with morally instructive fables is an instance of fluidity in repetition.⁷ A fluid pattern of repetition is a sequence that is marked by the return of a style of evading mechanical extension of the sequence. In other words, the thread of continuity is the sequence’s style of differing from itself, when it is led to differ by some encounter with an obstacle or problem. The sequence is a succession of drawdowns or a drip-feed, across intervals of time and/or space, from some latent, omnipresent excess of inflection. Now and again, the excess of inflection reveals itself, bringing to life what Walter Benjamin called ‘time filled by the presence of the now’.⁸

Cultural expression, through the humanities and through the sciences, thrives on fluidity in repetition; the term ‘cross-pollination’ gives only a hint, and a poor hint at that, of the work done by fluidity in repetition. A sequence – that is, an instance of continuity – can have an enduring freshness, when the next return retroactively alters what the continuing is a continuing of. Such sequences give time and space a ruched quality. They are means of affirming that relational order is immanent; they flirt with paradigm shifts.

Granted, even mundane works, in writing and in film, put into effect ‘time passes differently here’, in that they transport the reader or spectator out of wristwatch time. What sets *Microcosmos* apart, is that it goes a step further. This film shows how odd it is, and yet how natural it is too, that ‘time passes differently’ in many of life’s different, but connected, niches and folds. Thus, the quality of power in the film is suited to the purpose of helping to take history off on a different path. As to the quantity of power, that depends on how the film interacts, over time, with other works, other currents and tides. It may, or may not, be lucky in that regard.

Visiting folds upon time is not the sole preserve of art. Science does it too, as in the recent realisation that the solar system of nine planets never existed. (The Pluto-like Quaoar reveals Pluto as a Kuiper-belt body; Pluto never was a planet, though it looked deceptively like one.) Thomas Kuhn’s account of normal science, punctuated by paradigm shifts, bears ample witness to the ruching of time by scientific practice.⁹ History too visits folds on time, like the folds in the wake of civil wars, folds which shut out memories of the losing side qua claimant to the nationality prized by the victors. Benedict Anderson’s expression for that social amnesia is ‘the reassurance of fratricide’. In unifying a nation after strife, the losing side is not physically wiped out, but that side’s ethos goes through a forced self-obliteration

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⁷ My discussion of the continuity that is attained as fluidity in repetition, stems from a passage in *Difference and Repetition* ((Deleuze, 1994 /1968 Fr: pp 1-2). One of the points made in that passage is that ‘repetition interiorizes and thereby reverses itself.’

⁸ ‘Time filled by the presence of the now’ is the English equivalent given by Harry Zohn, for Benjamin’s ‘Jetztzeit’ ((Benjamin, 1992 /1950 Ger: pp 252-253).

⁹ (Kuhn, 1962).
from the citizenry’s own remembered past. Language and custom are unlearned, ethos and animus are forgotten, in order to have fitted in all along, and never have constituted a problem.10

Sequences, as styles of differing, are often an effect of acts of replication, of perceiving, of altering or absorbing, of recognition and referencing. In each of those acts, the act takes as its object something whose pose – either as nothing, or as some uncontaminated and actual thing-in-itself – is thereby exposed as a blind. Mimesis, for instance, works as follows. To have been ‘imitated’ is to have been all along the burgeoning target or mark of the imitator’s replicative act, and as such to have belonged with the act in its moment of execution. The act exposes the supposedly pre-imitation and pristine item, as a blind. Thus, the highbrow work of art is, by another name, embryonic kitsch. ‘The’ Mona Lisa is not a highbrow work of art, but a ‘highbrow’ one, and an exposure of that kind makes all highbrow merely ‘highbrow.’11 Things are continually being jostled, or prompted, by their own futures, futures that include their replication/alteration and their (re)naming or unnaming. More generally, things are continually being squared away with respect to their actual and possible transpositions, with attendant inflections – transpositions in purely spatial, purely temporal, and spatio-temporal dimensions. A thing thus ‘has no stable identity but differs from itself ([the realm of things is] what Deleuze and Derrida call a simulacrum, something that defies the logic of model and copy).’12

If presences, and pasts, do not exist in a settled state, it is because of the open-ended playing-out of relational order. Virtual structure is the openness that punctuates the ongoing expression of relational order. Through virtual structure, anything and everything that subsists as it were genetically, has some capacity, in its time or season, to transit to points of actualisation, which is to say, points where it may knit onto, or take up, some predicates. After each taking-up of predicates, there will be feedback to the relational order. Thus, the virtual and the actual work in tandem to compose the real. (According to the conventions of grammar, one speaks of a ‘subject’ that ‘governs’ predicates; it might be more helpful to think in terms of gerunds, leaving the subject term open. We are lumbered with a grammar


Or, l’essence d’une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses. [...] Tout citoyen français doit avoir oublié la Saint-Barthélemy, les massacres du Midi au XVe siècle.

Now, the essential thing in a nation is that all the individuals have many things in common and also that all of them have properly forgotten certain things. [...] It is possible to be a French citizen only by having forgotten Saint Barthélemy, and the massacres of the Midi in the thirteenth century.


11 Besides kitsch, there is ‘the eloquence of the vulgar,’ in which a vernacular or schlock style in gesture and speech, and a lowbrow medium of expression, are vital elements in works of serious culture. Instances include Dante’s Divine Comedy, the novels of Kafka, Andy Warhol’s paintings; also the cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini, Mike Leigh, Ken Loach, Spike Lee, Larry Clark. Colin MacCabe, in a public lecture that was inspired by Raymond Williams’s The Long Revolution (1961), points out how the eloquence of the vulgar is a factor in the constituting of new audiences (MacCabe, 1992).

12 (Bogue, 1989: p 157). Here is as good a point as any to cite not one but three masterful essays on time and repetition: (Deleuze, 1990/1983); (Massumi, 1987); and (Patton, 1994). Had I read the three essays earlier, I should probably have written this section of the thesis differently. But I am not so unhappy with it as it is, that I would wish to go back and change it.
that is attuned to the fiction of transcendent relational order, whereas with a grammar attuned to the actual-virtual, there would be a freer strewing of speech with gerunds.)

The world, then, is perceived as a ceaseless and shoreless surging, or a rallying time and time again. It is a surging of formlessness, provoked by forces that repeatedly lose the holds of physical and semiotic order. The figure of the world as a surging or flux – of openness across predicables – owes much to Deleuze’s remarks on Spinozism, in the closing pages of *Difference and Repetition*.13

2.4 Characterising constituent power

Biopower as a matter of temper

The chapter up to this point has looked at possibilities for living with systems of meaning, and using them, while avoiding capture by those systems’ inbuilt fictions. Early in the chapter, there was a nod toward the need for such an approach to language, but now that the discussion has touched on the metaphysics of difference, the need for critical use of language can be made clearer.

The use of language, as a means of representation, has to do with the two kinds of biopower, which were introduced in chapter one. On the one hand, there is sovereignty, or constituted power, which is biopower as originally conceived by Foucault (biopower (from above)). On the other, there is constituent power (biopower at large). Both constituent power and constituted power can be viewed as tempers of the surging or flux of openness across predicables.

Constituent power, an affirmative temper, attests to the univocity of being.14 In other words, it attests that the surging can be perceived, known, spoken of, ordered, and governed only by immanent powers. As well as affirming the univocity of being, constituent power attests to the equivocal, labile quality of ‘that of which being is said.’ That too is an affirmative gesture. The affirming of anything can proceed, in the first instance, only from the affirming of individual difference. An individual difference (*haecceitas*, to use a term that goes back to Duns Scotus, in the early fourteenth century) is, by definition, *sui generis*. It cannot be captured in a relational order or net, such as that of meaningful language, that ties things together by likeness and analogy, and cuts them off from one another by prior either/or dividing lines. There may be times when the capture of an individual difference can be finessed. But that is ‘capture,’ and leaves room for manoeuvre.

The affirmative temper has a reactive foil in constituted power, which is a shrinking from the univocity of being. Constituted power’s inclination is to impose another mode of being, ‘which is distributed among the categories and allocates a fixed part to beings.’ In recoiling

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14 As foreshadowed above, this paragraph and the next owe much to the closing pages of *Difference and Repetition* (idem.). The two expressions in quotation marks are from that source.
from the univocity of being, constituted power evokes a transcendent plane of being. The effect is to separate embodiments of active power from the fulness of what those bodies can do.

The remainder of this section examines the working of the affirmative and the reactive temper, in the coming together of parts as wholes. The affirmative temper, as long as it remains at work in the assembling of wholes, holds promise that a certain kind of whole, known as a qualitative multiplicity, has an ongoing place in the world. It is here that the critical use of language, the use that tweaks the fiction of a Being that is ontologically prior to beings, connects with constituent power.

**Fluidly organic wholes**

The discussion of relational order needs to be pushed a little further, so that biopower can be seen at work, and the relevance of cinema to biopower can be better appreciated. Already, this much is clear: to say that relational order exists is to make an assertion having to do with predicates. It is to say that predicates (and their forerunners, predicables) form in some sense a field of attractants. Predicates have a cluster-inducing property: they work like the poles in a magnetic field, or like vortices in water or air. A dictionary is all that is needed to show that predicates sustain nodality, that they attract matter and imagined properties and things into clusters. It suffices to cite some of the glaringly obvious instances here. ‘Is fair’ and ‘is unthreatening’ are aspects of one pole; ‘is dark’ and ‘is sombre’ and ‘is evil’ are aspects of another pole. ‘Walks like a duck; ‘quacks like a duck; and ‘is a duck’ help to form the pole of stable polarity and common sense. ‘Is a chimera’ and ‘is a fire-breathing monster and the mark of a troubled brain’ help to form the pole of wobbly polarity and mental instability.

I have just referred to a dictum about ducks; and yet, the world has long had fellows known as quacks who make it their business to duck that dictum. And as to the chimera, it can be an everyday conversation partner; that’s why netiquette covers flaming. My puns elicit groans, but their point is to show in a flash that relational order is neither set in stone, nor is it transcendent: relational order’s poles can migrate, and not just on the days set aside for the ritual of carnival. (There is obviously much of substance that can be said about relational order and predicates, under the headings of where predicates come from, how to become aware of the subject-positions they induce, and how those subject-positions can get altered. A magisterial work covering such matters is Foucault’s *The Order of Things*. The book also deals with the counterpart issues that arise in visual representation. Works by Brian Massumi and by William E Connolly serve as guides or handbooks in the opening of subject-positions to possible shifts. Measured against those paragons, my brief and breezy

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15 In speaking of parts and multiplicity, I avoid certain terms and examples used by Deleuze and Guattari (and translators of their writings into English). I am venturing a small lexical shift, one that is prompted by the popularising, in the late 1980s, of chaos theory, with its handy concept of fractals. Fractals have properties that are present regardless of the scale at which the fractal is examined: for example, the graph of the Mandelbrot set is a fractal, as are the Sierpinski curve, von Koch’s snowflake curve, the edges of clouds, and stretches of natural shoreline.

16 ([Foucault, 1970](https://doi.org/10.7200/1966Fr).)

17 (Massumi, 1992), (Massumi, 2002), and (Connolly, 2004).
Admittedly, when constituted power is dealing with parts, and makes them into a whole, the whole and each of its parts bond firmly to ‘their’ particular polar configuration of predicates. The word generally used in English to describe that kind of whole is ‘organic.’ An organic whole is one of those instances of wholeness, in which every part must stay in its proper place, in relation to other parts, and in relation to the whole. In psychology, it is conjectured that visual perception has a natural tendency to pick out organic wholes, or gestalts. (Translated literally from the German, a Gestalt is what is gestellt, or what is placed, assembled.) The brain thereby organises, so it is said, the perceptual stimuli that the eye receives. That process results in a perception that wholes come in two natural kinds. Thus, there are the wholes that are organic – for instance, a tree, or the body of a living thing, or an organised collectivity of living beings. All other wholes, so it is said, are wholes of the second kind, whose assembled plurality is that of a tract of wheat or of pine trees, or a gross of matches, say, or a heap of sand, or five thousand battery hens, or twenty thousand quarter-chickens on their way out of a processing plant.

Pace those psychologists who subscribe to the view from Gestalt theory, there exist many instances of fluidly organic wholeness, which is a wholeness that splits the gestalt. Wholes abound in which the relations among parts, and the relations of parts to the whole, are ambiguous. An example will clarify the point.

Consider a ship’s crew, with the deck hands moonlighting as an amateur opera company. Already, in the word ‘hand,’ a body part slots in as a surrogate for its organic whole (the person of the manual worker). On top of that, in this instance, the hands considered together form more than a team of persons assigned to work on deck. Together the hands form an ambiguous whole that is not exhausted by the organic whole of the work team, since the arrangement as a work team fails to account for the opera company. It is as if there are two transverse ‘cuts’ of the whole, two quite different ways of joining the parts together. The effect is that of a hologram, presenting two disparate and complete images on the one surface, when looked at from different angles. In fact, there may be multiple images that are discernable, some of them complete images and some incomplete.

The ship’s crew example, contrived as it is, still connects with practical and serious politics. In industrial relations, it is precisely through fluidly organic wholes that politics comes into some of the hard work of organising labour. Thus, if it were not for fluidly organic wholes, the choice between collective awards versus individual contracts would be a purely technical issue. The same goes for job demarcation and multi-skilling; performance pay; work-family compatibility; and the plight of the ‘precariat’ (workers in insecure casual and/or part-time employment).

In international relations too, it is through fluidly organic wholes that politics comes into play. There are fluidly organic wholes that involve citizen, worker, small farmer, artisan,

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18 ‘Unified’ is another term that could be used here; but ‘organic’ is more precise, and in my view it is the better choice.
student, consumer, ‘dependant,’ saver/pensioner. Those fluidly organic wholes inject not just thought, but sweat and song, marching feet and rains of blows, into the talk and programming of the multilateral institutions that watch over international finance and the terms of trade. They confront those institutions through movements for protection of the environment; movements for reparations in view of past aggression, fraud and theft; and movements for the protection of human rights. (More is said about political movements, as fluidly organic wholes, in chapter six.)

**Unity as a fractal property, and micropolitics**

The wholes I have just been discussing are instances of ambiguous wholeness; and they are instances, too, of ambiguous-whole-ness. In sum, they are instances of *qualitative multiplicity*, to use a term that points to something about the whole’s assembled plurality. The assembled plurality adds up to more than sheer massing together (more than just a throng of similar parts). And it does not stop at organic wholeness; it is *more* than just one of those wholes that amount to more than their parts.

Qualitative multiplicity is the joint occurrence of more than one mode of attaining unity; it is a multiple oneness. The situation is this: the unity that is present, the completeness, is immanent in the whole that attains it. As a result, the whole’s ‘unity’ is ambiguous, and labile. The whole has no unbroken principle of unity. It sports unity as a fractal property, a property of no fixed address, placed like dabs of ochre across assorted sections, or assembly plans, which crisscross each other. That includes the plasm of unexpressed unity (ie virtual unity), and traces of potential and possible attainments of unity, as well as actual attainments. The result is an interference pattern, which is caused by an excess of oneness, spilling through different ways of (dis)assembling the whole. The interference pattern ducks and weaves, in such a way as to fracture any putative transcendent unity of the whole.

Paul Patton’s account of native title jurisprudence in settler states is instructive here.\(^{19}\) The account helps to show how qualitative multiplicity comes into politics, when one looks at what is going on in terms of micropolitics. Patton’s settler state, Australia in the 1990s, is a whole that, if it is not in the throes of attaining an immanent unity, may at least be hesitantly preparing itself for such a transformation. The statehood of this land would metamorphose into something new, should the happening that began with the High Court’s decision of 1993, in the Mabo case, continue and gather strength. The implementing of first nation land rights could usher in a statehood in which ‘there would no longer be just one body of law which holds sway over the same territory but two or more “law ways”’.

Daniel Smith has commented on Patton’s style of engagement with the matter of native title jurisprudence. Smith argues that Patton has shown how concepts which are at the centre of statehood as conceived in liberal thought – the concepts of equality before the law and equality of peoples within the state – could spark a transformation or ‘schiz’ in constitutionalism.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{19}\) (Patton, 2000: pp 125-131).
\(^{20}\) (Smith, 2003).
Subjugated groups and subject-groups

Collectivities of humans are, or we can be, fluidly organic wholes. The same is the case for individual human beings. In closing the present chapter, there is one further point to be made, and I approach it through cinema’s effect on individual human beings’ capacity to be fluidly organic wholes.

Cinema has devices by which to distance the spectator from ‘that of which being is said,’ or, put another way, distancing the spectator from the world of supposed referents of representation. The distancing frees the spectator to edge toward a conscious partaking of univocal being. For instance, the intensity produced in *Microcosmos* gives the spectator a taste of univocal being. In pointing to the virtual’s hidden inflecting of the real, a film can conjure up multiple cuts of the actual.

Throughout history, the actualising of fluidly organic wholeness in the human seems to have happened in large measure subliminally. For barely a century, motion-pictures have been initiating the species of their inventor in a repertoire of styles of cutting, or taking apart and re-splicing, the actual. These are styles of becoming. Spectators now routinely expect motion-pictures to exploit the folding of time and space. Facing a cinema screen, a being that feels itself human, and feels perceptible in the normal way, seeks pleasure in the bodily morph. As cinema spectator, one forgets for a moment (again and again) that one is watching flickering beams of light that make pictures on a screen. One is instead enfolded, at those moments, in a bodily becoming. Often it is a becoming-nonhuman ... often a becoming-imperceptible. Becoming-nonhuman proceeds via the screen in popular as well as art-house cinema, and there are many registers in which it is effected. It proceeds by becoming-one-with-vehicle; becoming-animal/bird; becoming-projectile; becoming-probe; becoming-prehuman; becoming-superhuman or -cyborg or -avatar; becoming-schizophrenic.

Still, there are impediments. Most cinema-release films are inscribed with the image of an ambiguously distinctive kind of spectator, the kind whose speciality is not that it is, but that it is not, special or uncharacteristic for the film. That applies to the general run of films, including the genre films that are addressed specifically to women and to disadvantaged minority audiences (women’s films, ‘chick flicks,’ and ‘blaxploitation’ films). It is a rare film, then, that will lead anybody to experience becoming-woman, or becoming-‘minority.’ In sum, becoming-unmanly. In that register, despite much well-meant effort, the initiation of the human into styles of becoming is stalled.

What stalls the initiation process is a standard of the kind that creates a *subjugated group*, a group in which the addition of members does not make the group different from when it was

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21 *MP*: pp 106, 244, 291-309; (Patton, 2000: pp 47-48, 80-83). In the discussion of becoming-minority, I am concerned that a gentrification of crucial words may be setting in. That is why I use the term ‘becoming-unmanly.’ Unlike ‘woman’ and ‘minority,’ the term ‘unmanly’ shakes the tendency among women and among people of other marginalised groups, to take aim at an existing target of becoming. We do *not* have to settle for any aim, or for any end-point that is said to have some cachet; least of all – and not even – the aim of inclusion in the totalised whole that is ‘man.’ (This comment is quite consistent with Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of becoming-minority.)
smaller. Recalling that the virtual is capable of conjuring up multiple cuts of the actual, the kind of standard that creates a subjugated group could be called a ‘one-cut standard’. The group grows without undergoing a qualitative change, because the new members must not disrupt the one-cut standard. Thus, the human family is a group to which one belongs, regardless of gender, skin colour, culture, or minority traits, on condition that one identifies through a relation with man. Not just any man, but man of the ‘European’ kind; duly oedipalised; ‘able’-born, or desirous of appearing so; and ‘modern’.

Man is a one-cut standard: those who attempt to rally the group around some alternative species-ideal, are ostracised – which is not to say that they give up. Fortunately, even though the human family has a one-cut standard, not all human groups follow that template. There exist what Deleuze and Guattari call subject-groups, which continue to become different from themselves as new members are added. The group is primed to explore its multiple personae, its qualitative multiplicity, its ambiguous-whole-ness. One sign of a subject-group is that the group’s ethos lies not in what it means to belong and not-belong, but in the group’s manner of exploring its future becomings.

The activists who style themselves as Zapatistas, for instance, form a worldwide subject-group. There is no Zapatista identity, no head office, leadership, or fixed territory. Participants agree only on a manner of collective decision-making, which values breadth of participation and is biased toward reaching consensus, minimising coercion. The Zapatistas’ mode of collective decision-making tends to encourage self-defence, to block the formation of conventional armies and policing, and to disabuse the group of any aspiration to exercise power over a territory, a people, or an epoch.24 This and other actual examples of activist subject-groups, especially as they functioned in the 1990s, are examined at some length in chapters five and six.

2.5 Conclusion – the writ of biopower

This chapter has dwelt on the writ of biopower: the link that exists between the use of signs and the working of biopower.

The chapter began with a discussion of immanent critique in the use of signs, bringing the matter down to the everyday by looking at a few stock uses of exemplars. The discussion touched on the reactive quality of power that comes into play, in some major uses of exemplars that are seen in tabloid journalism, and in the marketing of consumer goods and political parties. It was also noted that people have a capacity to use language affirmatively, that is, without falling prey to the effects of reactive power.

22 A-Œ: pp 64, 105, and especially 291. Deleuze and Guattari choose Arthur Miller’s novel, Focus, and Joseph Losey’s film, Mr Klein, as instances of works that destabilise a subjugated group by, so to speak, cranking up the engine of becoming-minority. See also (Patton, 2000: p 35); (Bogue, 1989: pp 86-87 and 103); and (Colebrook, 2002a: pp 60-63).

23 Bogue translates groupe sujet as ‘group-subject.’ Regardless of how one names it in English, the groupe sujet cuts transversely across individual selves.

24 (Graeber, 2002).
An affirmative use of language calls for machines that point to language’s inbuilt failings. Such machines generally do make use of language, but they work outside language-games. The motion-picture *Microcosmos* is one instance, and it is notable for its almost complete occluding of language. The chapter has discussed how this film imparts a fresh respect for the enigma of thinking. The film also points to the convoluted quality of time, which in turn leads to an appreciation of the virtual as an openness that punctuates the expression of relational order.

The critique of the film rests in large part on the work’s inventive cine-play upon animal-human species difference. In fact, *Microcosmos* can be read as a continuation of the sequence that runs: medieval fable; beast epic; fable of the bees. The thread of continuity has to do with the use of exemplars to sustain what was at first a god-given relational order, and is now a more diffuse, but still transcendent, secular relational order. It is as if exemplars were a shape-shifter, calling for repeated invention of means of keeping them at bay.

In Deleuze’s metaphysics of difference, all beings are sequences that consist in threads of re-invention. The continuum of time itself takes on a protean quality, when one knows that the next term in a sequence will retroactively change what the sequence is a sequence of. There are no settled presences or pasts. Instead, there is endless surging across predicables, and within that flux, there is immanent relational order. Biopower vents itself in the resulting plane of univocal being. Biopower has two tempers or modes: constituent power, which affirms univocal being; and constituted power, which shrinks from univocal being.

Where constituent power assembles parts to form a whole, the unity of the whole is distributed over different ways of (dis)assembling the whole. The result is a fluidly organic whole, known as a subject-group. Where constituted power forms a whole, the unity of the whole is bottled up, as it were, in just one configuration of the parts. That produces a rigidly organic whole, or what is known as a subjugged group.

This chapter has presented the concepts that are most needed for the thesis. Chapter three completes the presentation of concepts with its outline of universal history, as it is brought to micropolitics in the work of Deleuze and Guattari.