

**After affirmation, or, being a loser.**

**On vitalism, sacrifice, and cinders.**

**Abstract.**

What could it mean to hesitate before life? To be unwilling or unable to affirm existence? And who or what would suggest such a thing? What type of monster would embrace sadness over joy, despair over hope, failure over success? And yet this is what is proposed. The paper starts from a suspicion, a suspicion that, contemporary claims to the contrary, life is not innocent, that any affirmation always contains a disavowal, and that we are, whether we like it or not, always bound up in structures of sacrifice. More formally, the claim will be that with the maturation of Nietzsche's legacy in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and the rise of new forms of vitalism, a new conception of life has taken root, one with far-reaching implications for thinking about politics, ethics, and existence as such; this is a rapidly unfolding 'onto-bio-political framework'. The paper offers an alternative account, one in which life is always already involved with loss, always the life of survival, always life-death.

*affirmation, Cioran, Nietzsche, sacrifice, survival*

For all of life's evils come from a 'conception of life'.

E. M. Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, 1975 p.5

Only one thing matters: learning to be a loser.

E. M. Cioran, *The Trouble With Being Born*, 2012b p.121

## 1. Introduction.

What could it mean to hesitate before life? Or, less portentously, what could it mean to ask this question today, at a moment when theories of life, of vitality, and of affirmation, are in the ascendant? Indeed the affirmation of life, and the life of affirmation, form the keystone of many contemporary accounts of ontology, ethics, and politics. Affirmation is the glue that binds these accounts into a project or a program. Indicatively, we could think of the work of writers such as Jane Bennett (2001), Rosi Braidotti (2010), and William Connolly (2011), all of who espouse the necessity of and demand for - at once conceptual and dispositional, intellectual and existential - the affirmation of life. Of course, such work does not come from nowhere. The inheritance of Nietzsche, more often than not mediated via Deleuze, is key to this work's core ontological claims concerning life *qua* immanence and to the espoused ethico-existential stance. The avowal of affirmation holds these moments together, a double yes - 'yes', 'yes' - forming a particular alliance between the ontological and the ethical. In Anglophone Human Geography we can witness a similar movement, sometimes overtly connected, sometimes not, in much recent work.<sup>1</sup> While tempted by

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Anderson (2006, 2011), Anderson and Wylie (2009), Braun (2008), Curti, Atkin, Bosco, and Georisch (2011), Dawney (2011, 2013), Dewsbury (2000, 2010), Dewsbury, Harrison, Rose, and Wylie (2002), Greenhough (2010), Lim (2010), Harrison (2000), Haynes and Sharpe (2010), Marston, Jones, and Woodward (2005), McCormack (2013), Roe (2010), Saldanha (2006), Ruddick (2010, 2012), Swanton (2010), Thrift (2008), Whatmore (2002), Woodyer and Geoghagon (2014). Obviously this is a far from exhaustive and somewhat motley list, and I would

such affirmation, I hesitate. While sympathetic to such work and supporting many of its aspirations - for who could in all good conscience be against calls for “a less repressed, more cheerful way of engaging with the geographies of the world” (Woodyer and Geoghagon 2014 p.196)? Who would not support the need to “challenge extant habits of masterful knowing and moralistic judgement” (ibid. p.206)? Who could be opposed to “a generosity of spirit that renders the self more open to the surprise of other selves and bodies” (ibid. p.208)? And yet, I still hesitate.

I am unsure, as I suspect - call it a prey animal’s intuition - that something or someone may be getting lost in this affirmation. That for the good it promises, this affirmation contains a disavowal.

To affirm and moreover to *choose* to affirm, to affirm affirmation, to double it - ‘yes’, ‘yes’ - is to resolve to go forward thus, in such a manner, and to judge such an affirmation as good. It is to decide on a certain vision, concept, or thought of life, and to set-off from this decision. And yet all such decisions come at a cost. To make such a decision is *necessarily* to decide instead of, against, or over an other. Further, such decisions do not simply decide against one other course of action, or one figure, or one thought, but against a potentially infinite number of others. I hesitate then, over the invitation to affirm life, over the nature of this affirmation, over what is being affirmed, and what could be being forgotten therein. Indeed, as we shall see, forgetting, the necessity of forgetting, plays an important role in the work with which I am concerned. In a passage near the start of *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, Jane Bennett suggests the need for “controlled doses” of a “certain forgetfulness” as “ethically indispensable” (2001 p.10). This is a crucial passage, as it is precisely through such forgetting that moments of enchantment - the touchtone of her analysis - emerge as such: “Occasions during which one’s critical faculties are suspended and

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not want to give the impression that those on it do not differ significantly, and continue to do so, in their various interests, approaches, and claims. However, I do want to suggest is that all the work listed has been significantly influenced by Deleuze’s vitalism and his ‘ethics of affirmation’. Further, I want to emphasise that this list is far from exhaustive, especially if one were to try to take account of the *indirect* influence of Deleuze’s thought.

one is caught up in the moment can produce a kind of enjoyment - a sense of adequacy and fullness” (ibid.). It is from these moments that Bennett will weave her ethico-aesthetic account.

There is a risk here, a risk common to all philosophies of life, neo-vitalist and otherwise; the risk of forgetting dying, or of forgetting finitude, and forgetting the give and take of living. The risk that without a memory of finitude, without being haunted by “what it has lost in the past and what may be lost in the future, there would be nothing that could cause concern for justice” (Hägglund 2008 p.140). Hence, Derrida asks if “absolute evil” is not the same as “absolute life, fully present life, the one that does not know death and does not want to hear about it” (1994 p.175). The threat of ‘absolute evil’ follows from an understanding of life as something which is external to and so unscathed by death, (be it metaphysically, virtually, materially, spiritually or otherwise); life as a ‘radically immanent’ force, where death and dying are framed as contingent rather than intrinsic occurrences. For Derrida, insofar as ‘absolute life’ is constituted through the exclusion of finitude it coincides with ‘absolute evil’, for if life is rendered immune to death, if life is not haunted “by what has been and what may be - there would be no reason to care about life” (Hägglund 2011 p.133). Or, to return the question of the decision, there could be no decision worthy of the name, insofar as there can be no judgement of worth or value, no affirmation, outside of mortality (see Derrida 1994 p.87, 2011a).

However, resisting or deferring affirmation is not as straightforward a task as you may think. It requires a certain disposition. It requires that we are or become, if only for a moment - perhaps during a night of insomnia or over decades of despairs - useless. That we treat our ‘talents’, should we have any, with a mixture of cynicism and irony, and so maximise our incompatibilities with life. To be, or learn to be, if only for a moment, sterile, “irrelevant, eccentric, derisory” (Adorno 1974 p.151): to fail outstandingly, to learn to be a loser.<sup>2</sup> To resist or defer affirmation one must find or

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<sup>2</sup> To place Adorno’s comments in context, for reasons that will become clearer as we go on, and to acknowledge his perspicuity on this matter, it is worth quoting him at length; “knowledge must indeed present the fatally rectilinear succession of victory and defeat, but should also address itself to those things which were not embraced by this

place oneself at the limits of its economy, with what lives-on in as its waste products and in its blind-spots. Why is this necessary? In order to make affirmation's machinations, ruses, and traps apparent. Section two discusses this unprofitable move, this move into unprofitability, in more detail, emphasising its methodological functions. Section three develops this apparently negative position by drawing on the writings of E.M. Cioran. Cioran becomes our anti-Nietzsche, an acerbic pessimist who, while accepting much of Nietzsche's diagnosis, refuses to be taken in by the German philosopher's tales of joy. Section four gives a brief account of exactly why it is so difficult to resist affirmation, and how the generosity and openness of affirmation is underpinned by a ruthless streak. Putting everything discussed to work, section five questions the definition of life at play in the debate so far and asks what exactly is being affirmed and what disavowed in the 'yes', 'yes' of affirmation. The suggestion is that life is always already involved with loss, just as fire requires fuel, so there is always a cost to affirmation. Section six concludes the paper, examining this 'sacrificial structure' via a reading of Jacques Derrida's essay *Cinders*.

## **2. Thinking like a loser, or, methodological confessions of a no-hoper.**

The pile of debris before him grows skyward.

Walter Benjamin, 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations*, 1992 p.249

I have few qualms in admitting it now, but I have almost always thought like a loser. With one published exception, my thought, academic and otherwise, has always been hesitant, unsure, and indecisive. However, it is only recently that I have been able to formalise what thinking like a loser could possibly be and do. The inspiration for this crystallisation was Martin Bull's book *Anti-*

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dynamic, which fell by the wayside – what might be called the waste products and blind spots that have escaped the dialectic. It is the nature of the defeated to appear, in their impotence, irrelevant, eccentric, derisory. What transcends the ruling society is not only the potentiality it develops but also all that which did not fit properly into the laws of historical movement" (1974 p.151).

*Nietzsche*. Specifically, the opening sections where he outlines the differences between ‘reading for victory’ and ‘reading like a loser’ (2014 p.31-43). Bull suggests that one of the reasons Nietzsche provokes such loyalty in his readers is that they, in a way that Nietzsche cultivates, read him for victory, that they read him in the *hope* of being winners. Following Nietzsche’s words they feel themselves to be distinguished from the herd, in learning the evils of pity they come to identify with the will-to-power, in knowing how to forget the harm the world has done them they become noble, in cultivating their aesthetic sensibilities they invent superior orders of value.<sup>3</sup> Bull does not read Nietzsche in this way. Instead of aiming for victory he reads Nietzsche from a position of weakness, as one who will never be able to accede to the philosopher’s demands, never have the strength or courage to meet the challenge. To read like a loser means, Bull suggests, “assimilating a text in such a way that it is incompatible with the self” (2014 p.36), in a way that we begin to feel “powerless and vulnerable” (ibid. p.37), “interpreting the possibilities offered by the text to one’s own disadvantage” (2009 p.69). To read like a loser is to see but to not be able to go where a text is leading. It is to see road ahead and slump down by the side. Not through ignorance of the final destination, though that may play a part, but rather through infirmity, self-doubt, fatigue, hesitation. Bull gives an example;

“So, rather than thinking of ourselves as dynamite, we will immediately think (as we might if someone said this in real life) that there may be explosion; that we might get hurt; that we are too close to someone who could harm us” (2014 p.37).

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<sup>3</sup> This line provides a whistle-stop tour of a number of tasks imposed upon us as Nietzsche’s followers; to not be determined by common morality, to understand the bankruptcy of such morality, to overcome *ressentiment*, and in the absence of transcendental recourse, to develop our own mode valuation and so values, (see Nietzsche 1968, 1969, 1996, see also Bull 2014, Heidegger 1977, Waite 1996). We will consider the implications of these tasks in more detail as the article progresses.

Perhaps the key methodological point of reading like a loser is that, as a strategy or a disposition, it does not aim at demonstrating one's mastery, or countering the prior argument through a riposte (ibid. p.33). As Bull puts it, "In order to read like a loser you have to accept the argument, but turn its consequences against yourself" (ibid. p.29). This is not a typical critical strategy, it is not *Critique*, it does not intervene from outside, it does not seek to overturn an opposing point of view or series of claims, but rather work within them, but on their far-side. Thus, as losers, when reading texts which extol the virtues and rewards of affirmation, stoicism, vitality, joy, enchantment or becoming, and which enthusiastically embrace the limitless possibilities of the world, we will only be reminded "of our own weakness and mediocrity" (ibid. p.37).

Bull outlines the consequence of adopting this method; "Reading like a loser, in its consistent exclusion of the reader from shared value, is a willingness to exchange an exclusive communality for an inclusive and indiscriminate sociality" (ibid p.51). That is to say, when reading like a loser we do not seek to develop the distinguishing attribute, trait or strength that would set us apart from others. To be a loser is to lack such attributes, to never be quite X or Y enough. Thus, losers do not undertake a critique, and so attempt to assert or extend a superior set of values to those proffered by the text or argument in question. Critique is a strategy to turn losers into winners and so one that ultimately affirms the centrality of the will-to-power and the decisive role of valuation therein (ibid. p.47-48). The loser is always failing to keep-up with such plans and ambitions, either because they are excluded, damaged, exploited or defeated by circumstances, or through an inherent vulnerability, weakness, indecisiveness or fatigue. Or both. Hence losers can find no common cause with this or that group as they are - insofar as they are at all - the indifferent mass by and upon which such identifications, differences and hierarchies are established, the residual background against which 'heroic', 'healthier', 'beautiful', 'valuable', or 'superior' endeavours are judged.

It is from the supine position of being a loser that we may begin to recognise the seductive coercion in the invitation to affirm life. Leaving aside for now the content of that affirmation, I want

to consider the *form* of the offer. The set-up of the deck, as it were. To do so I turn first to Bennett and then to Braidotti.

Setting out her claim, Bennett suggests that we should re-found our socio-ethico-political commitments on wonder, enchantment, and joy; on the affirmation of life. “I will tell my alter tale”, she writes,

“because it seems to me that presumptive generosity as well as the will to social justice are sustained by periodic bouts of being enamoured with existence, and that it is way too hard to love a disenchanted world” (2001 p.12).

Bennett characterises the “generic human condition” as being “tragic”, “absurd”, “impossible”, and “incomplete”, however, and following Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, she suggests that we can and, quite explicitly, should overcome this intrinsic “victimisation” (ibid.) of the human. That we should unlearn our old critical habits through the cultivation of an active and “energetic love of the world” (ibid. p.10); “my story suggests that you have to love life before you can care about anything” (ibid. p.9). We find a similar choice and a similar exhortation to love life in the writings of Braidotti (2006, 2010).

Braidotti sets out her position as expressing “a profound love for Life as cosmic force” (2010 p.210).<sup>4</sup> Life, for Braidotti, is an intrinsically creative process. A process in which death, as the “ultimate subtraction is after all only another phase in a generative process” (ibid. p.212). In a similar way to Bennett, Braidotti (ibid. p.214 *passim*) does not deny that life hurts, indeed she

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<sup>4</sup> Below I will follow Braidotti in capitalising the term ‘Life’ where contextually appropriate. It is worth pausing to note this capitalisation, a gesture that can only indicate the sovereignty of the thing or process termed ‘Life’, its difference from life, and its priority over death, which does not receive the same benediction. This capitalisation is the inscription of the decision noted above, and, as we shall explore below, signifies a wider onto-bio-political framework.



insists upon it, however she contends that such pains are intrinsically meaningless (ibid.).<sup>5</sup> Braidotti comes to this conclusion from her avowed post-humanist approach to ‘Life itself’, that is, Life understood as a non-anthropomorphic indeed non-organic force, immanent only to itself and expressed as “difference-at-work” (ibid. p.215). Hence she suggests that a progressive or healthy attitude to harm is to be achieved through the “depersonalisation of the event” (ibid. p.213). Our mistake, according to Braidotti - who is following Nietzsche (1996) almost to the letter at this point - is in becoming enamoured with suffering, and so being trapped in ‘rage’ and ‘anguish’ at one’s fate. Rather, harms are to be trans-valued and so transcended through the cultivation of a stoic love of fate;

“This is not fatalism, and even less resignation, but rather a Nietzschean ethics of overturning the negative. Let us call it: *amor fati*: we have to be worthy of what happens to us and rework it” (Braidotti 2014 p.214).

The effect of such trans-valuation, Braidotti maintains, is the “affirmation of hope” (ibid.). Released from the resentment of our all too human condition we are free to “take on the future affirmatively” (ibid. p.216), to ‘dream forward’ in a gesture of “deep and careless generosity” (ibid. p.217).

The terms of the offer then. On the one hand, life denying ‘rage’, ‘absurdity’, ‘revenge’, ‘anguish’, ‘victimisation’; everything that burdens and weighs down, the ‘Spirit of Gravity’ binding us to the past and the present - *ressentiment*. On the other, affirmative ‘hope’, ‘generosity’, ‘love’, ‘creativity’; the overcoming of fatalism and cynicism via lightness and openness to the future - *joy*.

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<sup>5</sup> To preempt possible misunderstandings; I have myself written about the ‘uselessness’ of suffering elsewhere, however the concern there, (as, to a certain extent, here), was to show how this inertia or inoperability of suffering does not mean it can or should be forgotten, discarded or that it simply goes away. Rather, it returns in and as the absence of meaning, and does so in and through many forms, including hesitation, deformation, aporia, and demand, (see Harrison 2008, see also 2010a, forthcoming)

Given these options, I cannot help feeling the deck has been stacked before the game has begun, for what monster would ever choose anguish over generosity, fatalism over love, the past over the future, *ressentiment* over joy? Who - or what - would ever say 'no' to Bennett's or Braidotti's or Connolly's - which are all Nietzsche's - 'yes'? What is a loser to do?<sup>6</sup> Perhaps, hesitatingly, we would wonder about the lack of choice within this choice, as we can only come out of it badly. With the undifferentiated mob, we would blink and realise that this discourse was never meant for us. Perhaps we could never hear it quite right and wonder what will happen to us, the remainders, circumstantially or congenitally unable to forget the past and accede to the state of *amor fati*.<sup>7</sup> Standing about in the market place we would think, well that's us fucked then.

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<sup>6</sup> Again, it is worth emphasising that the method being presented here is not one of Critique. No doubt many have said and continue to say 'no' in interesting and fulsome ways, be it the resolute 'no' of existential refusal, the 'no' of the revolutionary or insurrectionist, the 'no' of the righteous spiritual leader, the 'no' of the engaged cultural analyst. Following Nietzsche's (1968, 1996) schematics, all such refusals are still too *active* for a loser, insofar as they refuse the world as it is for the sake of what it ought to be, an imagined, projected or presupposed better order of value to come. Each of these 'no's' is for the sake of a 'yes', however deferred or delayed. Weary and wary, the loser's 'no' has a different tone, there is little heroic or hopeful about it; it is a 'no' to both, to the world as it is and the world as it ought to be, (see Bull 2014 p.57-64). I have discussed this tone of 'no' in different context elsewhere, see Harrison (2010b).

<sup>7</sup> "With the new morning, however came me to a new truth: then I learned to say: 'What are the market-place and mob and the mob's confusion and the mob's long ears to me!'"

You Higher Men, learn this from me: In the market place no one believes in Higher Men. And if you want to speak there, very well, do so! But the mod will blink and say: 'We are all equal'" (Nietzsche 1969 p.296-297).

Which raises the question, put to me by my colleague Rachel Colls, 'does one have to be a feminist to be a loser?' (see also Colls 2012). My answer, insofar as it is one, is both yes and no. Being a loser clearly has a lot in common with figures such as Sara Ahmed's 'Feminist Killjoy'. Further, in the depiction of the loser given above as the constitutive outside of any defined self-asserting position or identity, the loser overlaps significantly with that of the feminine Other and / or the abject; with that which must be excluded for masculine or sovereign self-assertion (see Irigaray 1985, Kristeva 1983, Rose 1993). Similarly, the loser is one who is constantly failing to gain a defined position, always coming up short in the economies of identity, position, and assertion. However, losers are those who cannot, for whatever reason, claim a position, sovereign, fluid, relational, or otherwise. While they may occasionally flail, losers

“Thus spoke Zarathustra. And then the shouting and laughter of the Higher Men again came from the cave [...]

‘They are biting, my bait is effective, before them too their enemy, the Spirit of Gravity, is wavering. Already they are learning to laugh at themselves; do I hear aright?’

‘My man’s fare, my succulent and strengthening discourse, is effective: and truly, I did not feed them with distending vegetables! But with warriors’ food, with conquerors’ food: I awaken new desires.

‘There are new hopes in their arms and legs, their hearts are strengthening themselves. They are discovering new words, soon their spirits will breath wantonness.

‘To be sure, such food may not be for children, or for fond little women, old or young. Their stomachs are persuaded otherwise: I am not their teacher and physician’” (1969 p.320)

Perhaps it is time to become a little more monstrous. To think about life from Nietzsche, but when he does not care what becomes of us, and when we cannot stomach him. To aid me in this step I turn to the writing of that most uncompromising pessimist, E.M. Cioran.

### **3. The monstrous loser.**

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are defined by the fact they fail. Losers are an eternal ‘they’, a scattered uncoordinated herd, the ambivalent ‘disintegrated mass’ of the lumpenproletariat perhaps, or, better, *Das Man* - “The ‘they’, which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum” (Heidegger 1962 p.164). However, I cite *Das Man* (‘the they’ or ‘the one’), and have left unemphasised, hopefully glaringly so, the gendered pronoun uses in the authors cited, in part to emphasis its unresolved and incessantly problematic neutrality and unthought generalisation, (for example, in the mobs’ claim to the Higher Men that ‘we are all equal’). A hesitant feminist then, one constantly unsure of what this avowal could mean, and always being caught out by it, undergoing it as failure rather than success. A form of auto-immune or auto-deconstructive feminism, perhaps. We will return to the question of sexual difference briefly in section six. For more on Zarathustra’s diet, which is, it seems to me, closely related to sexual difference, see footnote 22.

I'm a loser baby, so why don't you kill me?

Beck, 'Loser', *Mellow Gold*, 1994

In her introduction to the collection of Cioran's essay *The Temptation to Exist*, Susan Sontag writes that "What's missing in Cioran's work is anything parallel to Nietzsche's heroic effort to surmount nihilism" (1968 p.26). While praising Cioran as "the most distinguished figure" in 'anti-systematic philosophising' "writing today" (ibid. p.11) – placing him in a lineage within which she lists Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein – Sontag is disappointed. Her disappointment concerns the unavoidable fact that Cioran "comes after Nietzsche, who set down almost all of Cioran's position almost a century ago", and wonders why a writer of Cioran's talents would "consent to say what has, for the most part, already been said?" (ibid. p.14). For Sontag, without a moment of trans-valuation, without *amor fati* and the trial of the eternal return, without an *übermensch* to save him, and us, it would seem the only task left to the acerbic aphorist is busy work; "He must tighten the screws, make the [Nietzsche's] argument denser" (ibid. p.14). And yet, what Sontag sees as Cioran's main failing is what I most admire about his work.

Cioran had been an all too enthusiastic advocate of Nietzsche in his youth, as well as wider life philosophies. As Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston (2009) charts, Cioran's personal, cultural, social, and intellectual development through the nineteen-twenties and most of the thirties set him on the course which would culminate in a form of political vitalism and mystical-nationalism, as expressed in the polemical *Romania's Transfiguration (Schimbarea la față a României)*, published in Romania in nineteen-thirty-six, to his support for extreme right-wing Romanian nationalism, and his brief allegiance the fascistic Iron Guard.<sup>8</sup> However, as Zarifopol-Johnston goes on to examine,

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<sup>8</sup> It is not the aim of this section, or this article, to provide anything like an overview of Cioran's life or work, however some basic biographical information is useful. Cioran was born in 1911 in the village of Rășinari, Transylvania, which was, at the time, part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. He attended high-school in Sibiu, then the University of Bucharest, followed by graduate study and occasional right-wing journalistic writing in Berlin between 1933-35. He

in many respects this period in Cioran's life and writing became the openly acknowledged disaster against which he would define the direction of much of the rest of his life and work. After nineteen-thirty-seven he does not publish a new work in Romanian again and, after moving to Paris permanently in nineteen-fourty-one, rarely speaks it. He takes on a self-imposed exile and a hermetic-ascetic existence from which he attempts to come to terms with his young, proud, active, enthusiastic, delirious, self. Not that Cioran's work after the move to France and to French constitutes one long apology or attempt to set things aright.<sup>9</sup> In part as a subtle work of confession, he relentlessly undermines the basis of *all* beliefs and values, however this sabotage is primarily turned against the self. 'Thinking against oneself' becomes his practice *par excellence*, but, and crucially, one without direction, aim, or *telos*. He becomes metaphysical sapper, tasked with the gradual and precise demolition of the self, identity, belonging and value. There are no intrepid attempts at self-mastery or absolution, but rather a deftness of style, tone, and mood that allow for ceaseless acts of renunciation. For Peter Sloterdijk (2013), Cioran's abandonment and subsequent extreme skepticism of the 'language of commitment' that characterised his 'Romanian days' mark the emergence of Cioran as an 'anti-prophet'; one who maps the violent desires contained in all dedication and aspirations to redeem existence. A deflationary, skeptical and astringent counter to

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continued his studies in Paris between 1937-1940, before moving there permanently in 1941. The last five years of his life were marked by the progression of Alzheimer's disease, from which he died 1995, One important point to note is that from 1937 onwards Cioran's main mode of writing becomes the aphorism. While he does write essays, (see for example Cioran 1968, 2015), and while his first book in French, *A Short History of Decay* (1975), is mainly composed of short lyrical, multiple paragraph entires, (in a style he would later criticise), it is with the aphorism that he perfects his style. Given this, it can be quite difficult to give a sense of Cioran's style, of his savage, melancholic, often deeply humorous tone, as, due to the works' fragmentary nature, extended quotation can be difficult.

<sup>9</sup> 'Thinking Against Oneself' is the title of an important essay by Cioran, collected in *The Temptation to Exist* ([1956] 1968), wherein he develops his thinking on non-action, and the apparent futility and bad faith of such thinking (and writing) in the face of a world composed by acts. It is one of key places, but there are many, where he confronts the spring-loaded double bind which lies in wait for those who say 'no' to Life, a topic we will turn to in the next section.

Zarathustra's magnificence emerges; Cioran as "the first master of not-getting-anywhere" (ibid. p.78). As Cioran writes in his first book in French, *A Short History of Decay (Précis de décomposition)*, in the first section, notably entitled 'Genealogy of Fanaticism'; "The longing to become a source of *events* afflicts each man like a mental disorder or malediction" (1975 [1949] p.5 original emphasis).

We can, in part, chart the mutation that Cioran undergoes from earlier to later through his growing disillusionment with the 'author of *Zarathustra*'. For example, in *All Gall is Divided*, the second book of his French existence, Cioran sees *Zarathustra* as a "mystical clown show", the product of Nietzsche's "idolatry of power" ([1952] 2012a p.36). Later, in *The Trouble With Being Born*, a mid-period work first published in nineteen-seventy-three, Cioran describes Nietzsche as 'naïve', of setting up as many idols as he destroyed, and the 'superman' as a "preposterous, laughable, even grotesque chimera" (2012b p.85). As Sloterdijk puts it; "For Cioran, the *Übermensch* is a puerile figure, a puffed up caretaker who hangs his flag out of the window while the world is as unacceptable as it always has been" (2013 p.75 original emphasis). In such a context, Cioran's failure to surmount nihilism, heroically or otherwise, becomes his greatest success. Indeed, the entirety of Cioran's 'mature' or post-Romanian thought could be understood as, as Sloterdijk observes, "a complaint about the imposition of requiring salvation" (2013 p.77). And it is here that the divergence from Nietzsche and from his affirmation is felt most strongly. For Nietzsche - or at least a certain Nietzsche - wanted nothing more than to *redeem* existence; it had to be worth something, if only those that followed could incorporate the right disposition, the right attitudes, the right attunments, the right *styles*.

And so, against the energetics of enthusiasm preoccupied with dreams of harnessing chaos and 'giving birth to a dancing star' (Nietzsche 1969 p.46), Cioran prefers to imagine "*the universe transformed into a Sunday afternoon*" (1975 p.23 original emphasis). While he pays as much if not more attention to the body than Nietzsche, Cioran's moods, gestures and figures are those of the dissolute. Bodies which lie at right angles to those of vitalism; "History is the product of a race that

*stands*” (2012b p.50 original emphasis), the future a creation of an erect two-footed animal and, for Cioran, they are welcome to it. In distinction to the more or less committed French and German existentialism of the time, left or right - Sartre, Camus, Heidegger - Cioran performs *lassitude* as existential revolt; “Indolence invariably reveals a psychological incapacity to adhere to the myths of the City” (ibid. 1975 p.116). Cioran’s figures are skivers not strivers. “To a friend that tells me he is bored because he cannot work, I answer that boredom is the *higher* state, and that we debase it by relating it to the notion of work” (ibid. 2012c p.78 original emphasis). “Sloth”, he suggests, “is a somatic skepticism, the way flesh doubts” (2012c p.24). Hence Cioran’s deep suspicion of peons to health, particularly when envisaged as a, or even worse, *the* definition of the ‘good’. Raised to such a status health, according to Cioran, becomes a second-order illness, a capitulation with the world caused by credulity or wilful self-delusion. Either way, it is a disavowal which, in forgetting that “*negation is the mind’s [and body’s] first freedom*” (ibid. 1968 p.207 emphasis added), constantly risks running unchecked, willing to sacrifice any and all for its own perpetuation.

A striking example of such capitulation and this risk may be found in Braidotti’s advocacy of the stoic stance of *amor fati*. As noted above, according to Braidotti harms occur “For no reason at all. Reason has nothing to do with it” (2010 p.214). For Braidotti, the world is composed of unforeseeable events beyond our control, and we must adapt ourselves to this reality by acknowledging “the meaninglessness of pain and the futility of compensation” (ibid.). Thus, she claims, an ‘adequate’ ethical response to this situation is to cast off negativity and embrace “‘Life’, motion, change, and transformation” (ibid. p.215). Leaving aside the way in which Braidotti runs together many different forms of harm, (from systematic and genocidal political violence (the Holocaust), relatively indiscriminate spectacular political violence, (the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York), and an individual’s death in a tram incident (specifically, Freda Kahlo’s)), and the possibility for many different and equally legitimate emotional, existential and analytic responses to such events, the core problem here is that *amor fati* only concerns *my* relationship with *my* suffering, with what happens to *me*. As Béatrice Han-Pile (2009 p.246) lays out in her

exemplary reading of the place of *amor fati* in Nietzsche's writing, *amor fati* is an existential state of grace, an understanding that poses two problems for those who recommend it as the appropriate ethical stance. First, *amor fati* cannot be willed into existence, one cannot *choose* to take up a stance of *amor fati*. If we understand *amor fati* as an outcome of choice we fundamentally mistake its nature insofar as it depends on *agapic* and not *erotic* love (ibid. p.231 *passim*). Simply put, I cannot will myself to love what I do not, just as I may not choose what I do love, thus while *amor fati* "requires our participation", it "does not fully depend on us" (ibid. p.241). Second, insofar as *amor fati* concerns *my* fate it is simply not 'scalable' to a generalised social disposition. Thus, as Han-Pile (ibid, p246) points out, while you may exceed to a state of *amor fati* in relation to your own wounds, it does not follow that you should love the harms that others undergo, or the powerlessness you may feel in the face of their harms. As with so much stoicism, (and indeed Epicureanism), the take home message can all too easily become 'let the dead bury the dead'. Concluding on the question of the relationship between *amor fati* and the sufferings of others, Han-Pile wonders if others' suffering and our potential aversion to it should not act as a "safeguard against the dangers of the potential excesses of love" (ibid. p.247). Which is to say that our *incapacity* to love certain things and events may not be simply a sign of our failures and weaknesses in the face of events, but also contain a "moral advantage" (ibid.), one which may make us hesitate before capitulating to events and which may question the 'excesses of love' where such excesses risk legitimating harms and violence via a more or less explicit cosmody. That is, a failure to be able to love Life can introduce a moment of reflexive or evaluative judgement, even in its most minimal forms as hesitation or indecision.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Braidotti's ontology and her commitment to *amor fati* cannot admit such a position, so ruling out in advance any subject position from or within which equivocation is possible. The claim which I am making here is drawn from Alastair Morgan's (2007) discussion of the loss of even the *possibility* of reflexive judgement in Deleuze's account of immanence and Life. It is worth quoting Morgan on this topic, if only in a footnote:



Unable or unwilling to love their or others' fate, losers live in the impasse. Unable or unwilling of attaining a state of grace, losers are unserviceable (Cioran 2012a p.95). Hence, Cioran's writing are deeply anti-stoic. Where stoicism, both modern and classical, "does everything in its power to get in shape for the universe" (Sloterdijk 2013 p.79), to bring our practices and senses of self - and of reason, aesthetics, ethics, politics - in line with a putative diagnosis of the ontological nature of the cosmos, Cioran abjures. Cuttingly, Cioran describes those who turn their life into "a series of acceptances", who "accept the universe and are not ashamed to say so", as wanting to be nothing more than "a *good audience*" (1968 p.206 original emphasis). Here we could think of the core argument of William Connolly's *A World of Becoming* (2011), the persistent claim of which is that we must embrace time as becoming, make our stoic accord with it, in order to live, think, and act 'well'. As with Bennett and Braidotti, the choice Connolly presents us with is not really a choice at all. Either we become worthy of a 'world of becoming', or, consciously or not, we remain beholden to a Life-denying transcendentalism and the consequent social and existential 'evils' of *ressentiment*. Cioran refuses this 'cosmic thesis':

"On this point, our differences explode: you walk in step with Time, while I precede or drag after it, never adopting its manners, unable to think of it without experiencing something like a *speculative sorrow*" (Cioran 2012c p.98 original emphasis).

For Cioran our existence does not need tuning in order to resonant with the music of the spheres, rather its discordance is proof that the universe is a failure; that it is our *incompatibilities* with life

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"In the virtual there is no actuality, there is only connection with the real, which is uninterrupted continual creativity of life itself. Life is never actualized but only occurs and can be intuited through a process of subjective dissolution. Such a subjective dissolution installs the individual within a process of becoming that always differs and creates [...] such a philosophy of life destroys any prospect of reflective thinking, because it destroys any subject position in which to think" (2007 p.126).

which define us (ibid. 1975, Sloterdijk 2013 p.79). Our existence does not need to be remodelled to welcome a divine saviour or the Heraclitian world of coming and going, it does not need the supplementation of ‘good news’, be it Christ’s *or* Nietzsche’s, (or indeed anyone else’s). A loser from the get-go, Cioran is and remains an “invalid of duration” (1968 p.45). Declining both transcendence and immanence, he combines Judas with the Buddha (ibid. 1975 p.59).<sup>11</sup>

We are now approaching the key question concerning Cioran and, by extension, our figure of the loser. How does Cioran survive, how does he live-on with and within such a *negative* existence?

Cioran (ibid. p.58) freely admits that he is the ‘model traitor’, a new paragon of betrayal. He goes beyond Judas and Nietzsche as he takes no particular subject or object as his target, not even a God, but existence as such, “not the fruit, but the very sap of the universe” (ibid. p.59); “I have killed no one, I have done better: I have killed the Possible” (2012b p.26). For Cioran there is nothing “viler than to say *yes* to the world”, even though “we keep multiplying that consent, that trivial repetition, that loyalty oath to life” (1975 p.63 original emphasis) every moment we keep-on keeping-on. Sloterdijk confirms our potential concerns when reading such lines; “It was only with Cioran that the thing Nietzsche had sought to expose was fulfilled as if the phenomena had existed from time immemorial: a philosophy of *pure ressentiment*” (2013 p.77 original emphasis). So, our question, *how* does Cioran live-on? Why doesn’t his spleen or bad faith rise up and choke him?

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<sup>11</sup> Cioran had begun studying Buddhism while in Berlin between 1933-1935, and it remains a constant presence in his writing after this date. He would later claim that he did so “so as not to let myself become intoxicated or contaminated by hitlerism” (quoted in Zarifopol-Johnston 2009 p.87). Such is the influence on his thought that Sloterdijk (2013) titles his commentary on Cioran ‘Parisian Buddhism’. While having a clear admiration for Buddhist thought and teaching - placing, for example, Lao Tse’s *Tao Te Ching* above both Rimbaud’s *A Season in Hell* and Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* - Cioran, typically, maintains his distance. He is never quite able or willing to give up on his pride, or to accept an end to disappointment and dissolution, which could amount to the same thing (see 1968 p.45 *passim*); “To go still further than the Buddha, to raise oneself above nirvana, to learn to do without it..., to be stopped by nothing, not even by the notion of deliverance, regarding it as a mere way-station, an embarrassment, an eclipse...” (2012b p.207 ellipses in original).

Asking this question we can, with a prey animal's instinctive cunning, sense the trap that lies in wait for those who remain incapable of, or would seek to, defer or decline the offer of affirmation.<sup>12</sup> As it is with this question that affirmation shows its teeth, for, let's be blunt, in asking it we are asking, 'why doesn't Cioran kill himself?'. Snap go the jaws of affirmation.

#### **4. First catch your loser, or, the trap of Life.**

To the rhythm of my whip you shall shriek and trot! Did I forget my whip? - I did not!

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1969 p.242

Fortunately, for us losers at least, Cioran spent a great deal of time considering this question. Before turning to his thoughts on the matter however, it is worth describing the framework of the trap in question in a little more detail, as it is this trap which has been waiting for us all along. It is simply

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<sup>12</sup> As Burnham helpfully records, Nietzsche uses the term cunning (*List, Schlaueheit*) in two ways. First, when describing Zarathustra's 'cunning' in using honey to 'bait' the Higher Men to his cause, and second, when he describes 'cunning' as a way to preserve a 'diseased or decadent' life. As Burnham notes, somewhat ominously, "These two uses are not in contradiction, but are a recognition of the amoral truth that not all battles can be fought in the open, with displays of force" (2015 p.89). Similarly, in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze (1983 p.61) notes that 'cunning', along with 'subtly' and 'wit', are not reactive powers, but serves to demonstrate that forces cannot be judged on their success in overt conflict. However, Deleuze is fairly explicit about his view on the matter, commenting a line later that "For, once again, it is a fact that the weak triumph: it is even the essence of fact" (ibid.), Deleuze's irony placing invisible inverted commas around the words essence and fact. This raises a question: is cunning a weapon by which losers may become winners? Does, as Nick Berry maintained, every loser really win? And, if so, is this article an exercise in *faux* loserdom, an underhand tactic aspiring to victory all along? It is perhaps worth leaving this question hanging for now, (like an animal in a snare perhaps). But it is worth noting how, when caught up in this philo-ethico-existential discursive framework, one which so often resembles a hall of mirrors, the options narrow very quickly into winning and losing, as, in many respects, this is Nietzsche's end game all along (see Waite 1996 p.17 *passim*, see also the quote from Adorno in footnote 2 above); a polarising of for us or against us, yay or nay, eagles or sheep, nobility or mob, active or reactive, wave or particle, life or death.

but artfully designed. It is one Deleuze knew well, the one that hobbles you so that Nietzsche can “[get] up up to all sorts of things behind *your* back” (1995 p.6 original emphasis). It is the same one which prevented Derrida from ever really engaging Nietzsche in quite the way he did so many other writers. I imagine it as a type of snare; bait, trigger, and a loop of wire attached to a kill pole.<sup>13</sup> Douglas Burnham neatly summarises the operation of the parts. First, the noose;

“saying ‘no’ is predicted upon a prior ‘yes’; one accepts the existence of that which is rejected. Indeed, insofar as rejecting it is part of my identity - ‘I affirm myself as the one who in this case says no’ - I am *grateful* for its existence although I reject it” (2015 p.13 original emphasis).

And thus triggered, the snap of the kill pole: any “‘no’ is the expression of an evaluation that belongs within the system of power relations and perspective that make up life” (ibid. p.14). Noose and pole, these are the elements of the affirmative double bind. Even as a loser you have always already ‘agreed’ to play the game, you have always already taken the bait, and it is only on the *credit* extended by this action that you can say ‘no’. Any attempt to escape just compounds the problem, as escape would mean prevailing over the trap. Any such ploy would, in itself, “exemplify the will to power”, and so, even in absconding, we would have “demonstrated just those qualities of ruthlessness and ambition” (Bull 2014 p.25) that Nietzsche seeks to inculcate. We would become, in our own small way, ‘a master of something’. Now the mechanism is laid out before us, we may come to realise that Bennet, Braidotti, and Connolly had our best interests at heart all along. In shepherding us towards a ‘yes’ they are trying to save us, as they believe that any struggle against

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<sup>13</sup> The type of trap which A.R. Harding describes in Chapter XV of his book *Deadfalls and Snares* as being able to “take small game such as mink, opossum, skunk, etc., or can be made large and strong enough to catch mountain lion or black bear” (1907 np).

Life can only tighten the noose. As Cioran observes, “*To be* is to be cornered”, (2012c p.93 original emphasis).

## 5. The life and death of a loser.

It’s not worth the bother of killing yourself, since you always kill yourself *too late*.

E.M. Cioran, *The Trouble With Being Born*, 2012b p.32 original emphasis

And yet, and yet, and at the risk of sounding like a bad loser, why should I be ‘*grateful*’? It is an interesting word for Burnham to use, not least due to its theological implications. And Burnham isn’t alone in this. We can find such a direction to gratitude across all affirmative work. Be grateful or be sorry, another affirmative ultimatum. The attitude of gratitude implies that I have something to be grateful for, that I have received some kind of gift for which I am indebted, and for which I should offer thanks. Cioran rejects this view of life outright. As he writes on the first page of *The Trouble With Being Born*, the text where, unsurprisingly, he deals with this issue most directly; “‘Ever since I was born’ - that *since* has a resonance so dreadful to my ears it becomes unbearable” (2012b p.3 original emphasis). He is uncompromising on this issue:

“We are reluctant, of course, to treat birth as a scourge: has it not been inculcated as the sovereign good - have we not been told that the worst comes at the end, not at the outset of our lives? Yet evil, the real evil, is *behind*, not ahead of us. What escaped Jesus did not escape Buddha ‘If three things did not exist in the world, O disciples, the Perfect One would not appear in the world...’ And ahead of old age and death he places the fact of birth, source of every infirmity, every disaster” (ibid. p.4 original emphasis).

Whether we agree with Cioran on this matter or not, his underlying message is clear: *life is always a mortal life*. Mortality is not something that befalls us one sad day, but something at play from the beginning. Life is only life insofar as it is living-on, insofar as it is “finitude, the chance and threat of finitude” (Derrida 2011a p.130). A strange gift then, as it will always (already) be the gift of death as much as life, of sadness as much as joy. Further, doesn’t such gratitude express a certain narcissism, the narcissism of the elect? (see Krell 2013 p.45). Against the presumption of gratitude, against this wonderful opportunity to be wrong or right, happy or sad, as if to be picked out by providence, for Cioran thinking “does not mean thanking [...] it means taking revenge” (Sloterdijk 2013 p.77). What can Cioran’s antipathy to affirmation tell us about the trap? Well, he is, and we are, still noosed - “For you were born to hang yourself” (1975 p.157) - but perhaps the design of the trap is somewhat motivated, not quite as dependable as it may appear. It reveals itself a mechanism of some kind, less a desiring machine and more something for machining desire, a lathe for shaping incorporation and gratitude in particular ways.<sup>14</sup> There may be some wriggle room after all. Some other way of twisting.

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<sup>14</sup> As Waite notes, “Incorporation,’ *Einverleibung*, and its several cognates was a key term for Nietzsche in his attempt to disseminate what he called ‘my thought’” (1994 p.8 original emphasis). Waite turns to Heidegger to outline the strategy at work: “The incorporation or embodiment of [Nietzsche's] thought means in this regard: to complete the thinking of the thought in such a way that it becomes *in advance the fundamental* position with regard to beings *in their totality* and as such is hegemonic [durchherrscht] *in every individual thought*. Only when the thought has become *fundamental* stance of all thinking is it then, in *conformity* with its essence, taken into *possession*, in-corporated” (Heidegger quoted in *ibid.* p.11 original emphasis). For Wait this is nothing but a totalitarian strategy and project, and Waite makes a strong case for the unacknowledged incorporation of Nietzsche’s thought into what we could call contemporary Western subjectivity, culture and politics. It is what we could call an onto-bio-political move. However, I do not for a moment want to accuse contemporary theories of affirmation of totalitarian aspirations. Still, a question remains, as is being asked above and throughout this article, about the implications (and affects) of incorporating a certain vision or version of life - i.e., Life - and, in particular, of the fate of losers inevitably produced therein.

For example; Derrida (2007) is clear that his thinking begins from an unconditional affirmation of life, however this affirmation is made on the basis that the life being affirmed is understood as “synonymous with mortality” (Hägglund 2008 p.33). And not contingently so. For Derrida a life is always an alliance between life and death, the living and the dead, an alliance which is, in fact, *prior to their separation*. This alliance is finitude, or as Derrida occasionally calls it, *survivance*: “Survivance in a sense of survival that is neither life nor death pure and simple, a sense that is not thinkable on the basis of the opposition between life and death” (2011a p.130). That is to say, any definition or demarcation of what counts as life, for example Life as determined by neo-vitalism, is always made *from* and *within* the situation of survivance.

Derrida is keen to emphasise that *survivance* is *neither* active nor passive.<sup>15</sup> Which is to say, survivance is not

“*above* life, like something sovereign (*superanus*) can be above everything, a survival that is not more alive, nor indeed less alive, than life, or more or less dead than death [...] It does not add something extra to life, any more than it cuts something from it, any more than it cuts anything from the inevitable death or attenuates its rigour or necessity” (ibid. p.131 original emphasis).

Survivance, than, as a “groundless ground”, a “universal structure”, a “quasi-transcendental” (ibid. p.131-132), on, within, and from which all determinations of life and death are made. “A weave of survival, like death in life or life in death”, always at (un)work; a “weave that does not come along to clothe a more originary existence, a life or a body or a soul that would be supposed to exist naked under this clothing” (ibid. p.132). Hence, for Derrida, life by itself, life immanent only to itself, in alliance with itself, cannot *give* anything. Just as death, taken as the sole possible impossibility, cannot *give* anything: “Neither death nor immortal life can ever give anything, only a singular

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<sup>15</sup> Which is why the substantive ‘survival’ or the active ‘to survive’ do not quite capture Derrida’s deployment of *survivance*.

*surviving* [*survivance*] can give” (1992 p.102 original emphasis, see also 2011a p.168 *passim*). Equally, outside of time and space, having nothing to gain or lose, Gods or God are incapable of such exchange. That which is unscathed cannot give or take. Only that which is capable of ruination, and so only that which is mortal, can give gifts, and can receive them.

Two questions then. First, where, if not from some *élan vital*, does the energy of vitalism come from? And second, to who or what should I be grateful? My suspicion; there is a hidden economy here, all but forgotten or disavowed, but one of which losers are all too aware, as lambs are of eagles; that they are or will be the fuel to Life’s fire. Still, before elaborating on these suspicions and responding to these questions, before we gather the suspects around the fireplace, a little more backstory is necessary. A flashback perhaps...

For ‘affirmative philosophies’, that is, for philosophies of Life, immanence and becoming always come first. All good and well, however, as described by the trap, this ontological claim to the priority of change is meaningless, nihilistic, without a parallel ethico-existential claim. Hence the ontological affirmation of immanence must be accompanied by an ethico-existential affirmation of that affirmation; the affirmation of the being of becoming. Or, as Deleuze puts it, “affirmation demands another affirmation which takes it as its object” (1983 p.187). The affirmation, the ‘yes’, must be double - ‘yes’, ‘yes’ - as without the “synthesis of double affirmation” (ibid. p.48), immanence remains dumb and inchoate; change without sufficient reason and so without justification. Without this doubling down “Fire and Dike [Justice], as Physis and Logos” (ibid. p.23) remain unallied, and it is only in their alliance that immanence can be radical, i.e. immanent only *to* itself.<sup>16</sup> And yet, this is precisely where the vertigo begins, and where I begin to worm, as

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<sup>16</sup> We should be clear; true to his later formulation of the will-to-power, here, in Nietzsche’s reading of Heraclitus which we are glossing, this is justice (Dike) as strife. While Nietzsche does (2001 p.64) invoke Hesiod’s ‘good Eris’ to characterise this strife, (that is, ‘healthy’ competition amongst equals or peers), such a communal-agonistic interpretation quickly gives way to less homely, more cosmic imagery. Not justice in the service of a greater communal good, rather it is justice as *polemos*. justice as perpetual war, war as the true harmony of the universe. Nietzsche quotes



why does another, second, apparently voluntary, ‘yes’ *need* or *desire* to catch up with the first? Why does my - or your - being here, or being there, need or demand *another* affirmation? And what of the delay, the interval, which separates one ‘yes’ from the next?

This interval, this detour or suspension, between one ‘yes’ and the next, is, I think, the interval of living-on, the impasse of a ‘singular *surviving*’, as Life *qua* immanence can only be witnessed by mortal beings, can only be noted, affirmed or negated from, in and as survival. As Derrida observes; “our thoughts of death [and life] are always, structurally, thoughts of survival” (2011a p.117).<sup>17</sup> This interval then would be the detour of living-on, restless, uncanny, homeless.

(*ibid.*). The constitutive gap between the ‘yesses’ marking out the dis-jointed or out-of-joint time of *auto-hetero-affection* of life-death (*ibid.* p.83, see 1994). For Leonard Lawlor, this spacing remarks

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Heraclitus, Fragment 80; “It should be understood that war is the common condition, that strife is justice, and that all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife” (quoted in *ibid.* p.64). This, Nietzsche declares, is “one of the most magnificent notions: the working out of strife as the continuous working out of a unified, lawful, reasonable justice” (*ibid.* p.64). Importantly, for our discussion at least, as Whitlock (2001 p.206) points out and as Deleuze (1983) emphasises, Nietzsche’s understanding of justice here is not dialectically dependent upon its opposite, injustice, for definition. Force may split and so forces may fight each other, but there is no moment of sublation, any appearance of stability is simply a moment of advantage gained by one element of force over another (*ibid.*, Kofman 1987). That the world may appear as a mixture of the just and the unjust is simply an effect of an all too human perspective; “from the perspective of the [Heraclitian-Nietzschian] Logos - the world is justice, lawfulness, through and through” (Whitlock 2001 p.206). As Kofman writes; for “Heraclitus, there is no room for even a drop of injustice, for any kind of flaw” (1987 p.48). The idea of Justice as something apart from Logos or Fire - fire standing here for Life or becoming - would act as a check upon immanence, a reaction.

<sup>17</sup> The need, or the demand, (or the desire), for a first person avowal when speaking of life - be it Braidotti’s, Bennett’s, Connolly’s or Cioran’s, or mine, or your’s - already suspends the aspirations affirmation and immanence. As Derrida (2011b p.106, see also 2005) notes, the first person is necessary to a discussion of what life is (or is not), the self-citation marking at once the circuit of auto-affection and at the same time, the circuit’s interruption. As Derrida writes in *Speech and Phenomenon* “My death is structurally necessary to the pronouncing of the I” (1973 p.8). And, in ‘Rams’, “This self reference in no way suspends the reference to the inappropriable” (2005 p.147). As if all speech contained a prayer, ‘O hear me, heed what I say!’ (see *ibid.* 2011a, Krell 2013)

the 'écart of death'; a 'teaming presence of death in life', "a blind spot in the middle of life" (2006 p.130, see Derrida 1973, 1993). Thus, not life as only immanent to itself, i.e. not life as immune to death, not life defined as outside or in the exclusion of death, (that is not dialectically *or* immanently), and so as immortal living; not Life. Rather, life as always already inhabited by its other, life thought in such a way that does not put death to death, life thought as life-death, before or beyond the opposition of life and death, or the sublation of the latter into the former.

Further, it is not just or not only a matter of death to-come (mortality), or of death at work in life (finitude), but also of the dead *from which* we live. As Hägglund avers, "The affirmation of survival is never innocent [...] since the movement of survival always entails the obliteration or eradication of what does *not* survive" (2008 p.139 original emphasis). Not only in terms of paths not taken, alternative futures never actualised which haunt survival, that is, not just Connolly's (2011) 'powers of the false', but also and inseparably, in the fact that to live-on, to survive, is intrinsically bound up in and to a *sacrificial structure*.<sup>18</sup> A sacrificial structure, *because life is never given without also being taken*. Knowingly or not, survival is always engaged in sacrifice and this situation, this scandal, while it can be disavowed, cannot be evaded (see Derrida 1995, 2005, 2008). Outlining this structure is the concern of the final section, however to move towards it, and to start to respond to the question above concerning where the energy of vitalism comes from, we may return to the forgetting with which we started, Bennett's 'ethically indispensable' forgetting, a move which itself lives from Nietzsche's corpus and the place of 'active forgetting' therein.

Nietzsche's forgetting is forgetting as liberation, as "a positive-inhibiting capacity" (Nietzsche 1996 p.39). Active forgetting as part of the health of the individual, as selective repression, a digestive and metabolic incorporation, and a voiding of what cannot be assimilated. As Nietzsche writes;

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<sup>18</sup> Outlining this structure, or at least one way of representing it, is the task of the next section - though, of course, the question of the structure as such, and so of sacrifice, is both always and never the question of representation as such, of replacement in the first place, if such a first place weren't already already a stand-in or a set-up, a fall guy, another loser.

“Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic. A man who wanted to feel historically through and through would be like one forcibly deprived of sleep, or an animal that had to live only by rumination and ever repeated rumination. Thus: it is possible to live almost without memory, and to live happily moreover, as the animal demonstrates; but it is altogether impossible to *live* at all without forgetting” (ibid. 1997 p.62).

On the one hand, this is the forgetting of the organism, a forgetting which closes down the multitude of the sensate to open a space for consciousness; “the temporary shutting of doors and windows of consciousness” from the “underworld of obedient organs” (ibid. 1996 p.39). On the other, it is the forgetting of the past *qua* history, of the ‘historical sense’ which threatens to overwhelm and atrophy all becoming, ‘oversaturating’ the present and turning the future into an after effect of the past, leaving room only for the repetitive, mechanical gestures of a hollowed-out age, and the ‘twilight moods’ of irony and cynicism (ibid. 1997). Nietzschean active forgetting is, therefore, a curative flame, it opens the space for the willful individual, the noble subject, and germinates the *unhistorical*. This is what, according to Nietzsche, active forgetting seeks to recall, the time of *life*; “Insofar as it stands in the service of life, history stands in the service of an unhistorical power” (ibid. p.67).

And yet, the questions remain; how and what to forget? How to decide? Who or what is to be the subject or object of such constitutive amnesia? Who or what will have burnt for the Phoenix, as one can only feed on one’s own entrails for so long? Active forgetting selects and sieves and has always done so, under the rule of health and the will’s perpetuation. Such forgetfulness, “guilty or innocent, it matters little here” (Derrida 1994 p.87), in enacting a foreclosure, in *deciding* what to forget, in sieving thus via ‘conscious will’, gut-wall or otherwise, will have always done violence. An other or others will always have been consumed in this action. Here, as Lawlor (2006 p.122-

127, see Heidegger 1977) points out, life envisaged as will-to-power reveals itself as *bio-will-to-power*, both insofar active forgetting evaluates and appraises and, moreover, within this evaluation makes the defining bio-political move; *deciding what can be dispatched without consequence*. And so, the subject may well only be able to begin *from* forgetting but this *from* is also, unavoidably so, an action of sacrifice. And each forgetting will also be a remembering, of a kind, each will “engender new ghosts. It will do so by choosing already among the ghosts, its own from among its own, thus by killing the dead” (Derrida 1994 p.87). Indeed, Derrida suggests that the more intensely we think life,

“the more life there is, the graver the spectre of the other becomes, the heavier its imposition. And the more the living have to answer for it. *To answer for the dead, to respond to the dead*. [...] The spectre weighs [*pèse*], it thinks [*pense*], it intensifies and coincidences itself within the very inside of life” (ibid. p.109 original emphasis).

The more one thinks about life outside death, the more the ghosts multiply.

Why, then, to return to our question, does this second ‘yes’ need or desire to close the gap on the first? Why does it appear so imperative, as always the only choice? Why this *compulsion*? Perhaps it is because something is interred between the two ‘yeses’ - ‘yes’, ‘yes’ - which, together, form the ‘wedding ring’ of the eternal return and the avowal of *amor fati* - something or someone has been forgotten, disavowed, sacrificed. Perhaps, though we will never be sure, the rush of the second ‘yes’ to catch up with the first, this affirmation of life, already knows this, and in rushing to catch up with itself it is incessantly circling the scene of the crime. Every return, every annual ring, being an act of lament as much as celebration. This double ‘yes’, which must always be redoubled, each and every time, as some kind of strange witness to the immemorial (see Harrison forthcoming a). Though we could never be sure, the double affirmation may, in fact, be a paradoxical moment in

the work of mourning (Derrida 2011b. p.112 *passim*).<sup>19</sup> The triumph *of* life which the ‘yes, yes’ announces and enacts being, in the same moment, a triumph *over* life, as each time the affirmation is made, each time it is avowed, each time it is cited, read, or performed, the interval, the *écart* takes-place, and the sacrifice dis/appears - yes, yes. The trap itself - ‘why doesn’t Cioran kill himself?’ - being inseparable from, while designed to encircle or foreclose, another (or an other) (or an other’s) need or desire. A regular murder mystery. My “fatal *yes*” (Cioran 1988 p.218 original emphasis). Where, then, does the debit, and the gratitude, fall?

## 6. The cindered world, or, the loser’s wake.

For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping.

Psalm 102:9, *King James Bible*

*il y a là cendre* - ‘there are cinders’ / ‘cinders there are’.

Jacques Derrida, *Cinders*, 2014 p.3

In the final paragraph of his remarkable essay on Heraclitus, a still young Nietzsche observes that “The highest form of nature is not humanity but fire” (2001 p.74). Fire receives similar praise from Deleuze, when, for example, he writes in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* that “Fire is the element which plays, the element of transformations which has no opposite” (1983 p.29). Here, fire is Life. Fire is the that which changes, which becomes; it is the force of metamorphosis, it transmutes negation into affirmation (ibid. p.176). Deleuze writes of how Nietzsche dreamt of a “fire machine completely different from the steam engine”, a “Heraclitean fire machine” (ibid.

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<sup>19</sup> As Derrida notes in the lower band of his essay ‘Living On’, for Freud, the “mania and melancholia have the same ‘content’, and the states of ‘joy’, ‘jubilation’ and ‘triumph’ [...] that characterise mania require the same ‘economic’ conditions as melancholia” (2011b p.134). For the next sentence, it is perhaps worth noting that Derrida’s essay is, in part, a reading of Shelly’s poem *The Triumph of Life*.

p.30), a perpetual inferno engine, a Phoenix generator; “You must be ready to burn yourself in your own flames; how could you become anew if you had not first been ashes?” (Nietzsche 1969 p.90). The questions of this section, which, slightly modified, are carried over from the previous one, *where does the fuel for this fire come from?* What burns and what is incinerated? And so, where does the debit fall, to what or whom should I be grateful? Questions, then, of sacrifice, because there is no fire with fuel, and there is no fire without ashes.<sup>20</sup>

Life incenses, it is incensed. Desire, passion, jealousy, all burn. Just as much as the fire here, in the hearth of the home, the grill in the oven, the alter in the corner. Whichever pathway is followed, anaerobic or aerobic, fission or fusion, *conatus essendi* or will-to-power; *il y a là cendre*. ‘there are cinders’ / ‘cinders there are’. Despite Nietzsche’s dream - which for me is a nightmare - there can be no burning without something or someone being burnt. From the beginning, as beginning, in the first place, as the taking-place of the first place, as soon as a light is kindled, there are ashes. And so no place without sacrifice. “Cinders there are: Place there is” (2014 p.21); “there are cinders only insofar as there is the hearth” (ibid. p.23). No here, no place, no gathering or clearing, no *lichtung*, and no *autos* or *ipse*, no being-at-home-with-the-self, no *être-soi chez soi* or *l’ipséité même*, no the site of the self, and so no possible site of sovereignty or autonomy, without burning, and so without cinders. To paraphrase Pascal; ‘my place in the sun, here is where usurpation begins’. No coming to place, no emplacement, no here and now, without cinders, there. Each dwelling made out of cinder blocks - “Cinders as the house of being” (ibid. p.25).

In the opening pages of *Cinders*, Derrida asks “Who is the Cinder?” (ibid. p.15), as doesn’t the “homophone *là*, ‘there’, make a feminine phantom tremble deep within the word”? (ibid. p.15). As if for the sake of him, his presence here, his world, she had been incarcerated, there. Cinderella-ed at the household grate, or walled into the flue. The “name ‘cinder’ figures” (ibid. p.53), ghosts assemble. And yet, in burning there is only asymmetry and irreversibility. The cinder can never be

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<sup>20</sup> Some elements of this section come from my book review of Derrida’s *Cinders* published in *cultural geographies* (Harrison forthcoming b).

re-constituted into an economy of recognition or restitution. The cinders re-cinder themselves, “There, *là*, an incineration of the definite article leaves the cinder itself in cinders” (ibid. p.31). However compacted, cinders do not and cannot amount to a totality; “It disperses it [*là* - the definite article] and thereby [*par là*] preserves it, preserves her, in an instant”, “as much to lose the way as to rekindle a memory” (ibid. p.39).

If the cinder is not her, or not quite, what does it recall? Perhaps it recalls a chance, our chance, her’s as much as his, my chance, perhaps. “I understand” - the text says - “that the cinder is nothing that can be in the world, nothing that remains as an entity” (ibid. p.55). The cinder cannot appear without rescinding. Cinders,

“a name of the being that is there but which, giving itself (*es gibt ashes*), is nothing, remains beyond everything that is (*konis epekenia tes ousias*), remains unpronounceable in order to make saying it possible although it is nothing” (ibid. p.55).

In this sense, cinders are not, or not quite; “the cinder in a sentence here no longer is”, “the name ‘cinder’ is still a cinder of the cinder itself” (ibid. p.31). The cinder withdraws, leaving only its trace, multiply intoned, in toner or via a nub of graphite. Still, however iterated, the name of the cinder is lacking - “LA Cinder is there” (ibid. p.57) - it effaces itself and in crumbling makes all naming and recognising possible. Hence ‘nothing that can be in the world’ as, in rescinding, dividing and disseminating itself there, beyond being, it opens the space and time of the world - *konis epekenia tes ousias*, ‘cinder beyond being’, a re-inscription of Plato’s *agathon epekenia tes ousias*, ‘the good beyond being’, and *es gibt ashes*, of Heidegger’s *es gibt*. The cinder, then, has given, its heat has been passed on, absorbed, forgotten, incorporated. Like a cremated placenta, or burning milk.<sup>21</sup> Or the lambs which Zarathustra likes prepared “spicily with sage” (Nietzsche 1969

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<sup>21</sup> On placentas, see the important article by Colls and Fanin (2013), see also Sloterdijk (2011). Similarly, on breast milk see Boyer (2010).

p.295).<sup>22</sup> The debit falls, like atoms, or ashes, or letters. It is the height, or, rather, it is the depth of disavowal and narcissism to be grateful to Life, for in this cindered world “you have mass and volume only when covered with cinders, as one covers one’s head with ashes in a sign of mourning” (Derrida 2014 p.41).

*Il y a là cendre.* A final question, then. Since one must burn, how to burn well? (ibid. p.49, 1995). The all-burning always remains a chance, a probability even. Yet, in this time of the cinder, in this cindered world, there can be a “rebellion against the Phoenix and also the affirmation of fire without place or mourning” (ibid. p.41). A rebellion against the idea of life without death, against the forgetting of the forgotten, against fiery spirits whose only concern is to let it blaze, and so against the jealousy of life only for itself, which would have only burning, here and now, forever and all at once. Against those who would say ‘yes’, ‘yes’ without a pause, without hesitation, and so without thinking about the spectres which these words inter and summon, the ashen tones in which they can be uttered, and the untranslatability of the space between them.

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<sup>22</sup> Much more could be written on Zarathustra’s dietary habits and his overt carno-phallogocentrism. Zarathustra expresses his particular taste, one which accords with his having an “eagle’s stomach”, which “likes lamb’s flesh best of all” (1969 p.210), rather than, for example, the voluntary beggar’s corn and water. Zarathustra’s taste is, as he admits, not for all. It is not only for those with ears to hear, but also only for those who can stomach rich meat. To those noble few, “strong-limbed and nimble-footed”, the “healthy and whole”, all is owed, from the “best food” to the “fairest women” (ibid. p.296). As Bull comments; “Nietzsche does not say whether the Supermen will feast upon their human subordinates, but it is inconceivable that he should have any objection to the practice, save perhaps gastronomic” (2009 p.34). Further, as Waite (1994 p.279 *passim*) observes, the brutality with which Nietzsche will express this view varies across his corpus, sometimes hidden within esoteric fables, sometimes equivocal, and sometimes expressed with ruthless pragmatism, as, for example, in the aphorism “The magnitude of an ‘advance’ can even be *measured* by the mass of things or people that had to be sacrificed to the prosperity of a single *stronger* species of man—now, that *would* be an advance...” (Nietzsche quoted in Waite, ibid. emphasis and ellipses in original). All is owed as it is in their nature to take with impunity. To the predator, sexual or otherwise everything and everyone is fair game. Everyday a feast of losers.



Cinders there are, and we are here only in relation them, marked by them from the outset, on the forehead, the tongue, and the nib.

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