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Repetition, he said, she said

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—Of course, she said, we're talking about the idea of infinity.
—And of doubles, he replied.
—Okay, you follow your series of doubles, I'll follow my infinity row and we'll see where we meet.
—I suspect already, he added, that we're talking about the same thing, with the difference that may only be that between you and me.
—Yes, the difference between points of view!
—Or the predilection for genres, so to speak, genres of thought that are no different than literary forms.
—Literature would be the easy way out, she admonished. We have to be careful that language doesn't carry us away. You may talk of genres but I'll be talking of concepts. Of course, none of this makes sense unless it transpires through language, that is to say, in writing. So literature after all might as well be the way.
—I reserve the right to talk through genres, he insisted, but I think that we'll be on the same wavelength. Being carried away by language seems to be the issue, though.
—Undoubtedly. There's no *real* difference between you and me, I suspect.
—Only the difference that difference makes!
—That's what we're talking about: repetition.

—It's not contradictory, she continued, to compare the double and infinity, although one is a closed system and the other is open, just as it's misleading to imply a contradiction—between you and me—that is, between concepts and genres. Because, after all, we said we'd talk about the idea of repetition and the double as productive of a *writing machine* detached from its author. And, to keep the examples pertinent to writing,

I suggest that we only discuss what we're currently reading.
 —Very well. Good idea. Even though this has nothing to do with you and me as individuals—with taste and habit—but with the production of the subject in reading, as they used to say. (It's hard, lover, to get away from this old language, which can only be departed from in the future of writing itself.)
 —Don't call me lover, lover-boy.
 —*Ouch!*
 —You have to admit that I've given you the advantage.
 —Yes, I'm the reader and you're the writer who, always writing, never has time to read—except the same books again and again to the effect that your books seem to repeat each of the others.
 —You've done me the honor, at least, of reading more than one of my books then. Apparently, I've transposed the problem of my youth of always reading and never writing currently to always writing and never reading. Well, then, what have you in your hand?
 —Thomas Bernhard's *Wittgenstein's Nephew* ... subtitled *A Friendship*.
 —Hmph!
 —Needless to say, it got me thinking of the double and the literary machine.
 —How so? His novels remain uncracked on my bookshelf.
 —Too bad. He's wicked, and unjustly unloved in Austria.
 —Oh, just my type, you mean.
 —Well, he is a bit repetitive in this regard lambasting Austria from book to book. Nevertheless, ... ah, here are our drinks, finally ... Cheers!
 —Cin-cin.
 —To continue, he said, perhaps the title, *Wittgenstein's Nephew*,

refers to Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*. Yet Bernhard's book is a monologue while Diderot's is a dialogue, but what starts off monologically in *Wittgenstein's Nephew* as a "one" becomes a two and the two otherwise another disguised couple. The book plays out these mirrored and bifurcating series to produce the narrative as if it developed by the logic of $1 + [1 + 1]$.
 —Okay, bright boy, don't be so abstract here.
 —You're one to talk, language-girl, with your mention of concepts!
 —I want you to see it and say it in language.
 —In language, I would call this not "one plus one plus one" but "repetition plus or minus one" as in the title *Not so Subtle Subtitle*. This is when language writes itself to the delight of the author. In preparation for our conversation, I've written down some examples in my notebook from recent reading. Both are lifted from *Disassembling the Archive*, which I just reviewed for the *Journal of the Felix Fénéon Anarcho-Hermetic Society*. The first is a simple reversal or *chiasmus*: "But now that we have arrived at the photographic image, 'correspondence' takes on the meaning of identity as if it were the very identity of meaning"; while the second rhetorically is a more complex *chiasmatic* variation of *syllipsis* (as well as being an example otherwise of *antistrophe*): "Locked away in an archive, sealed by a book, can a photograph still disturb? Can a still photograph disturb?" One complicates the reading of the sentence by means of the very terms of the sentence while the other produces the next sentence but as a disturbance or, perhaps, a dissimulation—as if an inverted mirror that dissimulates what it reflects. Hence, to spell it out, the dissembling mirror as a repetition plus or minus one.

—Still disturbances run deep, dear, as in the obscure *class*-icism of your cherished private school education.

—Well, actually, I learned it all at the movies. In night school you might say: the school of noir. But before this, I promise to say to you in language—as you insist—Bernhard’s devices. The narrator is reminiscing twenty years back when he was in a sanatorium for chest ailments. He says, for instance, “my friend Paul [Wittgenstein] had described his uncle alternately as a genius and a murderer, and every time I saw the Professor [a surgeon not the philosopher Ludwig] entering or emerging from the operating theatre, I wondered whether I was seeing a genius or a murderer entering, a murderer or a genius emerging.” There you have, entering and emerging, genius and murderer, the crossover structure of the chiasmus. The story evolves through the crossover symmetry of the serially divergent bifurcating double: of the two friends, of Paul and his uncle Ludwig, the wives, etc. By “coincidence,” his friend Paul is invalidated in the adjoining mental sanatorium. The narrator fantasizes the improbable crossover visit of each to the other (“I recall that every day there would be mental patients in the chest patients’ area and chest patients in the mental patients’ area”). “We were alike yet completely different,” says the narrator, and in the process of this differentiation of the same, there is a remarkable passage where one comparative sentence structure repeats itself with variations for nearly three pages. This is a compelling example of a writing machine where the strict repetition of a device propels the narrative along. But I want to read you another like passage, which is just as illustrative, but which now invaginates fiction in history.... Here it is: “For a whole century the Wittgensteins had produced weapons

and machines, until finally they produced Ludwig and Paul—the famous, epoch-making philosopher and the madman who, in Vienna at least, was equally famous and possibly more so. Paul the madman was just as philosophical as his uncle Ludwig, while Ludwig the philosopher was just as mad as his nephew Paul. Ludwig became famous through his philosophy, Paul through his madness. The one was *possibly* more philosophical, the other *possibly* more mad. But it may well be that the philosophical Wittgenstein is regarded as a philosopher merely because he set his philosophy down on paper and not his madness, and that Paul is regarded as a madman because he suppressed his philosophy instead of publishing it, and displayed only his madness.”

—I can see where this is going.

—Of course you do, but whereas in film noir we find a strict dichotomy and chance passage between normalcy and deviancy or sanity and madness, here we witness the constantly vacillating intersection where the binary emphasis is on two types of madness. Although Bernhard is not noir per se ... uhm, sorry, where was I?

—You had a case of the wandering eye. *Noir*. Noir is your genre, though it’s *not* necessarily Bernhard’s ...

—Right. So, uhm, ...this constantly vacillating intersection is not common in film noir but is, for instance, in the noir-based work of Douglas Gordon, which our mutual friend has written about in *Double-Cross: The Hollywood Films of Douglas Gordon*.

—Our *so-called* mutual friend.

—Not only in sentence structure, this book is written and designed as a mirror. The first half of the book repeats in the second as a dissemblance, but the second half reveals that the

first also was a lie.

—Another uncommunicative artist, I hear, for having a book written on him.

—Well, I can understand. In the end, the book suggests that Douglas Gordon is a femme fatale. But I can see why you're also interested in the book.

—I distrust writing—I'm talking judgemental art writing here—that doesn't apparently lie or fictionalize itself in the arc of its narrative, that is, delay the apparatus of truth-telling. But, contrary to you, I also distrust noir as a genre.

—Hold that distrust a moment. There's a philosophical fallacy that thought is benign and that philosophers have good will towards the truth. But it is especially in philosophical dialogues, invented by Plato, that the obverse is realized in animosity towards one's rivals. Plato attacks and ridicules the Sophists and *Rameau's Nephew* is full of obscene cracks against Diderot's real enemies, whom he names in this fictional dialogue.

—Shall we proceed likewise again for our mutual friend?... Wha ... what's happening?

—Duck! It's Matthew Brannon with Glenn Lowry, the two people in New York I've pissed off the most.

—Christ. Get me another drink!

—I'd be tempted—for a drink as well—but I'm not sure of this attack tactic you're suggesting. At the least, it breaks fiction.

—Why not? What do we have to lose? We don't belong to this system.

—What the fuck. You're right. I presume you're thinking of our friend's *Spirit Hunter: The Haunting of American Culture by Myths of Violence/Speculations on Jeremy Blake's Winchester Trilogy*—that

sad suicide. If ever there was a book that was ghost written, that is, by some haunted writing machine, this is the one. But our friend has always warned us that ghosts don't follow protocol. Perhaps this is why, our friend speculates, that Blake didn't like the book because the poll numbers for Bush and the Iraq war were then too high—even though the book naturally brought the most current example pertinent to Blake's thesis to the fore.

—Yes, then the polls changed, support for the war and Bush drastically went down, and Jeremy and Theresa *suddenly* were vehemently anti-war. Patriotic sales were no longer threatened! But the book still seemed suppressed—at least, in their interest in it. As the book says, repression is the inheritance of original guilt.

—The book was a participant in this tragedy, though no one recognized it so. Unfortunately, writing no longer counts, although all we're doing in this discussion of it here is counting. Which makes you wonder about numerology and fate! Genres, ghost stories, noir: what a tangled tale art writing has become—and all the more exciting for that. But back to your mistrust, which seems to extend even to me.

—Of noir, you mean?

—Uh-huh, yes. Let's leave it at that.

—Ultimately, men and women are treated differently in noir, that is to say freed and condemned differently. The Law always returns to socially re-ensnare the woman whereas the man is just doomed once the noir crisis hits. (It seems that the genre theoretically is freer than the subject it depicts, for whom an existential punch-clock still operates.) When it comes to women, the temporary freeing of identity is an *assignation* still,

witness — to use a late, Technicolor example — the controlling pervert Hitchcock lurking in the hotel corridor while in her room Marnie shuffles the social security cards of her next identity. One would have to switch levels, which noir apparently cannot do, from the structure of the genre to the genetics of the text to assign identity and individuation differently. This is my interest: not your repetition of structure as a divergent doubling that dissolves the subject but the *generality* of writing as a generative yet *individuating* source. Hence: Gertrude Stein.

— Here we go again: the mother of us all. What a snore! Talk about repetition.

— I'll present a counter-proof that is just as mathematical but that differs from your interest in arithmetic and geometric series — condemning or freeing — that you find in noir through Deleuze. As for Stein's criticism of repetition in favour of emphasis, as her rejoinder to those newspaper men who criticized her verbal repetitiveness, we now realize, thanks to Deleuze's formulations — I can appeal to him, too — that, although she was "inclined to believe that there is no such thing as repetition," she was talking (in *Portraits and Repetition*, for instance) of two types of repetition, bare and disguised, one acting in the other. Insistence, which she opposed to repetition, is only one other type of repetition. Insistence makes repetition into the idiomatic genre of the present. Was it her incredible arrogance to claim, I'm reading here from her lecture *The Gradual Making of The Making of Americans*, "that after all description is explanation, and if I went on and on and on enough I could describe every individual human being that could exist"? Or was this possible? Insistence individuates repetition, and individuation is a product of serial addition. "After all the natural way of

counting," Stein writes, "is not that one and one make two but to go on counting by one and one ... One and one and one and one and one. That is the natural way to go on counting." This talk of possible kinds in serial infinities reminds me of the philosopher Leibniz ...

— Oh, your *little Leibniz* and his most perfect world!

— You know, I'm getting sick of your attitude, pal. Sometimes I wished we lived in impossible worlds. If you will allow me to continue my argument: Listen, here's Deleuze's *Fold*: "If the world is an infinite series, it then constitutes the logical comprehension of a notion or of a concept that can now only be individual. It is therefore enveloped by an infinity of individuated souls of which each retains its irreducible point of view." What counts for concepts also counts for individuals.

— Okay, go on, as they say, "unpack" this in relation to Stein, whom, I believe, Deleuze never mentioned, favoring instead a pantheon of male American writers.

— Right. Fine. Will do. But when Deleuze in your noir touchstone *Difference and Repetition* writes, and I quote here, "We believe in a world in which individuations are impersonal, and singularities are pre-individual: the splendor of the pronoun 'one'," it's hard not to think of Gertrude Stein's someone, anyone, and everyone. Or, when he writes in *The Fold*, "included in the notion as subject is forever an event marked by a verb, or a relation marked by a preposition," once again, it's Stein's writing that is exemplary, with her disinterest in nouns and her lively interest in verbs and adverbs and prepositions and articles and conjunctions for their lively interest being "on the move." The continuous present of her writing is infinite variation that makes insistence of repetition — like thought. Characters are

not substantives but carried by language, says Stein, in “the movements of their thoughts and words endlessly the same and endlessly different,” thought being, according to Deleuze (writing of Leibniz) “not a constant attribute, but a predicate passing endlessly from one thought to another.”

—Yawn. Told you, I’m getting bored already.

—These two thinkers are equally radical and it all comes down to point of view—variation or inflection in Leibniz’s terms, repetition and insistence in Stein’s, each set mutually translatable. These are concepts that determine variable subject identity. “Every point of view is a point of view on variation,” Deleuze writes. The subject that forms a point of view is not pre-given or defined; “to the contrary, a subject will be what comes to the point of view, or rather what remains in point of view.” Both point of view and the subject with it are carried in the *emphasis* of writing; that’s why Stein can carry us forward in the continuous present of her writing, dissolving and reforming the individual in one subject after another, us too, unconsciously in this flow. It’s a writing that is not as crisis oriented as your noir do *and* die, *don’t* and die. Instead of a fracturing double and disconcerting doppelgänger, we have the identity of one and everyone in an infinite series. Your genre structure, my text genetics. Your distrust, my trust. ... You see, your resistance is because I’ve come back to beat you, Punch-and-Judy-like, over your head with *your precious* Deleuze.

—All right, then, enough of my beating. Shall we go? I’ll settle the bill. ... Your place or mine?

—Your repetition or mine? *Forget it*, Johnny Boy, we’re through! *Good night*.