

## 8

## Whitman

With much confidence and tranquility, Whitman states that writing is fragmentary, and that the *American* writer has to devote himself to writing in fragments. This is precisely what disturbs us—assigning this task to America, as if Europe had not progressed along this same path. But perhaps we should recall the difference Hölderlin discovered between the Greeks and the Europeans: what is natal or innate in the first must be acquired or conquered by the second, and vice-versa.<sup>1</sup> In a different manner, this is how things stand with the Europeans and the Americans. Europeans have an innate sense of organic totality, or composition, but they have to acquire the sense of the fragment, and can do so only through a tragic reflection or an experience of disaster. Americans, on the contrary, have a natural sense for the fragment, and what they have to conquer is the feel for the totality, for beautiful composition. The fragment already exists in a nonreflective manner, preceding any effort: we make plans, but when the time comes to act, we “tumble the thing together, letting hurry and crudeness tell the story better than fine work.”<sup>2</sup> What is characteristic of America is therefore not the fragmentary, but the spontaneity of the fragmentary: “Spontaneous, fragmentary,” says Whitman.<sup>3</sup> In America, literature is naturally *convulsive*: “they are but parts of the actual distraction, heat, smoke, and excitement of those times.” But “convulsiveness,” as Whitman makes clear, characterizes the epoch and the country as much as the writing.<sup>4</sup> If the fragment is innately American, it is because America itself is made up of federated states and various immigrant peoples (minorities)—everywhere a collection of fragments, haunted

by the menace of secession, that is to say, by war. The experience of the American writer is inseparable from the American experience, even when the writer does not speak of America.

This is what gives the fragmentary work the immediate value of a collective statement. Kafka said that in a minor literature, that is, in the literature of a minority, there is no private history that is not immediately public, political, and popular: all literature becomes an “affair of the people,” and not of exceptional individuals.<sup>5</sup> Is not American literature the minor literature par excellence, insofar as America claims to federate the most diverse minorities, “a Nation swarming with nations”? America brings together extracts, it presents samples from all ages, all lands, and all nations.<sup>6</sup> The simplest love story brings into play states, peoples, and tribes; the most personal autobiography is necessarily collective, as can still be seen in Wolfe or Miller. It is a popular literature created by the people, by the “average bulk,” like the creation of America, and not by “great individuals.”<sup>7</sup> And from this point of view, the Self [*Moi*] of the Anglo-Saxons, always splintered, fragmentary, and relative, is opposed to the substantial, total, and solipsistic I [*Je*] of the Europeans.

The world as a collection of heterogenous parts: an infinite patchwork, or an endless wall of dry stones (a cemented wall, or the pieces of a puzzle, would reconstitute a totality). The world as a *sampling*: the samples (“specimens”) are singularities, remarkable and nontotalizable parts extracted from a series of ordinary parts. Samples of days, *specimen days*, says Whitman. Specimens of cases, specimens of scenes or views (*scenes, shows, or sights*). Sometimes the specimens are cases, in which coexistent parts are separated by intervals of space (the wounded in the hospitals), and sometimes they are specimens of views, in which the successive phases of a movement are separated by intervals of time (the moments of an uncertain battle). In both instances, the law is that of fragmentation. The fragments are grains, “granulations.” Selecting singular cases and minor scenes is more important than any consideration of the whole. It is in the fragments that the hidden background appears, be it celestial or demonic. The fragment is “a reflection afar off” of a bloody or peaceful reality.<sup>8</sup> But the fragments—the remarkable parts, cases, or views—must still be extracted by means of a special act, an act that consists, precisely, in writing. For Whitman, fragmentary writing is not defined by the aphorism or through separation, but by a particular type of sentence that modu-

lates the interval. It is as if the syntax that composes the sentence, which makes it a totality capable of referring back to itself, tends to disappear by setting free an infinite *asyntactic* sentence, which prolongs itself or sprouts dashes in order to create spatiotemporal intervals. Sometimes it appears as an occasional enumerative sentence, an enumeration of cases as in a catalog (the wounded in the hospital, the trees in a certain locale), sometimes it is a processionary sentence, like a protocol of phases or moments (a battle, convoys of cattle, successive swarms of bumblebees). It is an almost mad sentence, with its changes in direction, its bifurcations, its ruptures and leaps, its prolongations, its sproutings, its parentheses. Melville notes that "no American writer should write like an Englishman."<sup>9</sup> They have to dismantle the English language and send it racing along a line of flight, thereby rendering the language convulsive.

The law of the fragment is as valid for Nature as it is for History, for the Earth as for War, for good as for evil. For War and Nature indeed share a common cause: Nature moves forward in procession, by sections, like the corps of an army.<sup>10</sup> A "procession" of crows or bumblebees. But if it is true that the fragment is given everywhere, in the most spontaneous manner, we have seen that the whole, or an analogue of the whole, nonetheless has to be conquered and even invented. Yet Whitman sometimes places the Idea of the Whole *beforehand*, invoking a cosmos that beckons us to a kind of fusion; in a particularly "convulsive" meditation, he calls himself a "Hegelian," he asserts that only America "realizes" Hegel, and posits the primary rights of an organic totality.<sup>11</sup> He is then expressing himself like a European, who finds in pantheism a reason to inflate his own ego. But when Whitman speaks in his own manner and his own style, it turns out that a kind of whole must be constructed, a whole that is all the more paradoxical in that it only comes *after* the fragments and leaves them intact, making no attempt to totalize them.<sup>12</sup>

This complex idea depends on a principle dear to English philosophy, to which the Americans would give a new meaning and new developments: *relations are external to their terms*. Relations will consequently be posited as something that can and must be instituted or invented. Parts are fragments that cannot be totalized, but we can at least invent nonpreexisting relations between them, which testify to a progress in History as much as to an evolution in Nature. Whitman's poetry offers as many meanings as there are relations with its various

interlocutors: the masses, the reader, States, the Ocean . . .<sup>13</sup> The object of American literature is to establish relations between the most diverse aspects of the United States' geography—the Mississippi, the Rockies, the Prairies—as well as its history, struggles, loves, and evolution.<sup>14</sup> Relations in ever greater numbers and of increasingly subtle quality: this is, as it were, the motor that drives both Nature and History. War is just the opposite: its acts of destruction affect every relation, and have as their consequence the Hospital, the generalized hospital, that is, the place where brothers are strangers to each other, and where the dying parts, fragments of mutilated men, coexist absolutely solitary and without relation.<sup>15</sup>

The relations between colors are made up of contrasts and complementarities, never given but always new, and Whitman no doubt fabricated one of the most coloristic of literatures that could ever have existed. The relations between sounds or bird songs, which Whitman describes in marvelous ways, are made up of counterpoints and responses, constantly renewed and invented. Nature is not a form, but rather the process of establishing relations. It invents a polyphony: it is not a totality but an assembly, a "conclave," a "plenary session." Nature is inseparable from processes of companionship and conviviality, which are not preexistent givens but are elaborated between heterogeneous living beings in such a way that they create a tissue of shifting relations, in which the melody of one part intervenes as a motif in the melody of another (the bee and the flower). Relations are not internal to a Whole; rather, the Whole is derived from the external relations of a given moment, and varies with them. Relations of counterpoint must be invented everywhere, and are the very condition of evolution.

It is the same with the relationship between man and Nature. Whitman enters into a gymnastic relationship with young oak trees, a kind of hand-to-hand combat. He neither grounds himself in them nor merges with them; rather, he makes something pass between the human body and the tree, in both directions, the body receiving "some of its elastic fibre and clear sap," but the tree for its part receiving a little consciousness ("may-be we interchange").<sup>16</sup> It is the same, finally, in the relationships between man and man. Here again, man must invent his relation with the other. "Camaraderie" is the great word Whitman uses to designate the highest human relation, not by virtue of the totality of a situation but as a function of particular traits, emotional circumstances, and the "interiority" of the relevant fragments

(in the hospital, for example, a relation of camaraderie must be established with each isolated dying man).<sup>17</sup> In this way is woven a web of variable relations, which are not merged into a whole, but produce the only whole that man is capable of conquering in a given situation. Camaraderie is the variability that implies an encounter with the Outside, a march of souls in the open air, on the "Open Road." It is in America that the relation of camaraderie is supposed to achieve its maximum extension and density, leading to virile and popular loves, all the while acquiring a political and national character—not a totalism or a totalitarianism but, as Whitman says, a "Unionism."<sup>18</sup> Democracy and Art themselves form a whole only in their relationship with Nature (the open air, light, colors, sounds, the night . . .); lacking these, art collapses into morbidity, and democracy, into deception.<sup>19</sup>

The society of comrades is the revolutionary American dream—a dream to which Whitman made a powerful contribution, and which was disappointed and betrayed long before the dream of the Soviet society. But it is also the reality of American literature, under these two aspects: spontaneity or the innate feeling for the fragmentary, and the reflection on living relations that must constantly be acquired and created. Spontaneous fragments constitute the element through which, or in the intervals of which, we attain the great and carefully considered visions and sounds of both Nature and History.

## 9

## What Children Say

Children never stop talking about what they are doing or trying to do: exploring milieus, by means of dynamic trajectories,<sup>1</sup> and drawing up maps of them. The maps of these trajectories are essential to psychic activity. Little Hans wants to leave his family's apartment to spend the night at the little girl's downstairs and return in the morning—the apartment building as milieu. Or again: he wants to leave the building and go to the restaurant to meet with the little rich girl, passing by the horses at the warehouse—the street as milieu. Even Freud deems the intervention of a map to be necessary.<sup>2</sup>

As usual, however, Freud refers everything back to the father-mother: oddly enough, he sees the demand to explore the building as a desire to sleep with the mother. It is as if parents had primary places or functions that exist independently of milieus. But a milieu is made up of qualities, substances, powers, and events: the street, for example, with its materials (paving stones), its noises (the cries of merchants), its animals (harnessed horses) or its dramas (a horse slips, a horse falls down, a horse is beaten . . .). The trajectory merges not only with the subjectivity of those who travel through a milieu, but also with the subjectivity of the milieu itself, insofar as it is reflected in those who travel through it. The map expresses the identity of the journey and what one journeys through. It merges with its object, when the object itself is movement. Nothing is more instructive than the paths of autistic children, such as those whose maps Deligny has revealed and superimposed, with their customary lines, wandering lines, loops, corrections, and turnings back—all their singularities.<sup>3</sup> Parents are themselves

CUNY Graduate Center ILL



ILLiad TN: 654335

**Borrower: PAU**

**Lending String:**

\*ZGM,MYA,LOY,MUB,WWS,NJG,NJM,LAS,LYU,  
MVS,CMZ,LFM,DKC,URS,YCP

**Patron:**

**Journal Title:** Essays critical and clinical /

**Volume: Issue:**

**Month/Year: 1997**Pages: 56-60

**Article Author:** Deleuze, Gilles, 1925-1995.  
Deleuze, Gilles

**Article Title:** Walt Whitman'

**Imprint:** Minneapolis : University of Minnesota  
Press, ©1997.

**ILL Number: 212292654**



**Call #: PN 203 .D46 1997**

**Location: Mina Rees Library Stacks**

**ODYSSEY ENABLED**

**Charge**

**Maxcost: 75.00IFM**

**Shipping Address:**

Van Pelt ILL

Univ. of Pennsylvania Libraries

3420 Walnut Street

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104-6277

United States

**Fax:** 215-898-1471

**Ariel:** 130.91.116.111

**Email:** interlib@pobox.upenn.edu