To write a living:
the ordinary and life as a project in F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1930s work

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Introduction

There's little in taking or giving,
There's little in water or wine;
This living, this living, this living,
Was never a project of mine.
Oh, hard is the struggle, and sparse is
The gain of the one at the top,
For art is a form of catharsis,
And love is a permanent flop,
And work is the province of cattle,
And rest's for a clam in a shell,
So I'm thinking of throwing the battle-
Would you kindly direct me to hell?

(Parker, "Coda". *Sunset Gun*, 1928)

Everyday life is a life lived on the level of surging affects, impacts suffered or barely avoided. It takes everything we have. (Stewart 2007, 9)

We begin on an unhappy note. Life is futile, cruel, above all hard: happiness and success are difficult to achieve, and when we grasp them they either escape us or bore us. The third and fourth lines of this irritable poem are arresting, yet seductive in their musicality: "this living,

this living, this living/was never a project of mine". This seems cynical at best, and suicidal at worst. As they follow a list of things that no longer give the author pleasure- taking, giving, water and wine- the lines seem to indicate that Parker is done with being *alive*. Yet I start from this poem because it articulates not just the concepts this thesis will develop, but the attitude I hope to carry throughout: an unruly dissatisfaction with life as it is, a frustration that comes from simply being alive in the world. This frustration can be a form of revolt, a warning sign in the body that *something* in the way we live is not right. It can also be a literary revolt: an encounter, within a narrative structure or genre, with an element of living that resists narration, that refuses to be organized.

By keeping this in mind we can find another way to read the poem, which is to say another way to read life. The poet is tired of life as *a project*, as a plan with which she no longer identifies. It is not all living, but specifically "*this* living" that she rejects. She never envisioned it that way yet she is stuck on an uphill climb, signposted by unreachable or tedious goals. The repetition of "living" in the third line carries with it the heaviness of routine, the continued disbelief of waking up every day and knowing the list of things to be accomplished increases endlessly. In a different poem, "The Flaw in Paganism", Parker seems to exhort the reader to "drink and dance and lie", before adding "For tomorrow we shall die!/(But, alas, we never do.)" (Parker 1931, 35). If we drink, dance or lie in order to lose ourselves, to seek euphoric moments that take us away from experiencing life as a "muscular organization" (Fitzgerald 1932, 37), tomorrow we will still be compelled to move towards some goal or other. There is something dangerous and wild in rejecting this narrative, something fundamentally anarchic in asking: why must life be a project, a plan?

Parker (friendly acquaintance of Fitzgerald, posthumous editor of his work) is so desperate for options that she wants to go to hell. What is hell if not, quite literally, a place other than where she is? Perhaps hell might do things differently, and why not find out. She is indeed "thinking of throwing the battle"; this is not the battle of living, but of living life as a project.

This thesis will reflect on what it means to live life as a social and literary project, and what happens when the narratives we build around this project start to unravel. My central topic will be the ordinary, as a daily, repetitive experience of being in the world, and as the ongoing *necessity* to live in the world. The ordinary can be, as in this poem, the cause of unhappiness, of a foundational discontent towards the narratives of our living. This sort of ordinary unhappiness will be analysed as a powerful tool to question the structure of our living. Yet the ordinary can also be what qualifies unhappiness, or tampers with it: it is a site of unpredictable ongoingness, of conflicting pressures that force us to continue showing up and live nonetheless. My central question will revolve on the relation between the ordinary and the Event, and between the ordinary and literature. I will discuss how a philosophical framework of the Event (defined as a recognizable, traumatic occurrence that destabilizes subjectivity) struggles to grasp the ordinary as a messy, sticky dimension of living in which *things happen* without a definable genre. I will consider how literature attempts to approach this space through an exploration of negative, unruly feelings that refuse to be organized.

I will explore these topics through 1930s writings by F. Scott Fitzgerald, which will be in dialogue with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. My readings will also be supported by recent works in affect theory and cultural studies of emotion: Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects*

(2007), Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) . These works consider, from different angles, the question of living as a narrative project. They explore specific stories about life: that certain choices will grant us the "good life", that we should strive to be happy, that success is better than failure. Far from being just ideological superstructures, these narratives are intimately woven in the way we speak, write and feel. They make the ordinary, in all its intricacies. The stories we tell about how we live *are* how we live and the question of living is, therefore, an inherently literary one.

The next four chapters will consider writing that explores moments when living can no longer be subsumed in a project. Times of instability or failure can bring us to feel that our living does not correspond to the narrative structures with which we are familiar: their wearing out frustrates us, and at times makes us unable to formulate new goals. Yet these unsettling moments can also open us to an experience of living that is other from the norm, tentative and approximate. This essay will explore what it means to write this otherness within living; it will also reflect on whether writing can build an alternative to life as a project. I will consider four core questions. The first is Parker's: why must life be a project? The second question is Fitzgerald with Deleuze: how does life crack us? Or in a different formulation, how does the self collide with an Event? The third is original to Fitzgerald: what happens *after* the collision? The final one concerns all of them: is it possible to find another living?

The first and second chapter will examine these topics through the genre of autobiographical nonfiction, or life writing. Autobiography assigns a meaningful narrative of progress to life, a

project. In the 1930s Fitzgerald, a prolific author of nonfiction and autobiographical pieces, grows increasingly unsatisfied with the conditions of his living. This has profound consequences on his style: as he begins to problematize the project of living he also starts to question the genre of life writing as a narrative attempt to organize life. In the first chapter I will track this process in nonfiction published between 1931 and 1936, up to and including the first installment of "The Crack-Up" series. While Fitzgerald was largely successful for most of the 1920s, the 1930s see him in a state of financial failure. This, accompanied by worsening alcoholism and a crumbling marriage, leads him to a nervous breakdown in 1936. That year he writes "The Crack-Up", a series of essays articulating a discourse very different to his previous work and profoundly alien to American literature of the time. The second chapter will focus on the rest of the series, where Fitzgerald describes his sadness as a crack both residing in him and inherent to life itself. This is where he is met by Gilles Deleuze: writing about "The Crack-Up*"* in both *The Logic of Sense* (1990) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze sees in the crack an affinity to his notion of the incorporeal Event. Using his framework, I will show how the series investigates a specific philosophical question: what happens when we collide with an Event that undoes our very identity, that disables our capacity to see life as a project? My aim is both to explore how Deleuze's ideas reveal something new in Fitzgerald, and to show how his writing complicates and problematizes Deleuze's philosophy.

The third and fourth chapter will turn to fiction, analysing in detail three short stories: "Three Acts of Music" (1936), "Three Hours Between Planes" (1941) and "The Lost Decade" (1939). Fitzgerald's late stories feature characters navigating a difficult everyday: they have

crashed financially, suffered physical hurt, endured heartbreak, or simply lost their emotional strength. This writing expands the reflection on Events to explore what happens after we have cracked, but must carry on living. In the third chapter I will show how "Three Acts of Music" and "Three Hours Between Planes" develop the question of *what happens after* both thematically and stylistically, and I will introduce a way of experiencing life that runs counter to living-as-project: the coda. Musically, a coda is not just the closing section of a piece but its continuation in a different shape, in another inclination. In the context of Dorothy Parker's poem, the coda she is seeking not the end of life, but a different space. Similarly, after losing all conventional markers of success, Fitzgerald finds a new variation in his writing, something *other*. He attempts to articulate a different approach to narrating and moves his writing into a zone of uncertainty and impermanence where we wade after, or in between, the cracks of our life. I will relate this to Lauren Berlant's concept of the impasse, and open a productive debate between these two experiences of living and Deleuze's framework of the Event.

The fourth chapter will elaborate on this theoretical debate while considering whether life can be lived, and written, in a different way. I will consider Deleuze's concept of the plane of immanence, a proposed alternative to transcendent structures. The form of living Parker opposes in "Coda" is exactly life as a transcendent, hierarchical plan. The plane of immanence is instead a plan of composition where everything is contained in itself and must be apprehended as it arises. For Deleuze it is possible to construct this plane of immanence, but only by questioning our fundamental notions of subjectivity and consciousness. While philosophy can provide a structural account of immanence, literature occupies a more

ambiguous space. Fitzgerald's late fiction circles around the possibility of another living without ever reaching it, raising fundamental questions on the nature of literature itself. To write another living is to bring into language something that insistently refuses to be narrated, something pre-theoretical and prephilosophical. This ineffable *something* can be found in the ordinary, a space of intimacy and unpredictable interaction that, while conceptual, also evades conceptualization. I will explore this by analysing "The Lost Decade", the story of a meeting between a man who believes in life as a project and one who has been permanently cracked by life.

I will make two final methodological notes, one on the literature analysed by this work and one on the philosophy. Why specifically Fitzgerald, whose novels seem fascinated by the American dream as the ultimate project of living? Biographer Matthew Bruccoli characterizes him as a man who believed in the "quest of heroism" (Bruccoli 1981, xx), in life as dream and purpose. That is exactly what makes the writing considered here so intriguing: it is remarkably different from Fitzgerald's other work. It significantly expands Fitzgerald's artistic range, giving us a new perspective on a well-known author. Perhaps because they are so incongruous, the essays and stories I will analyse have not received much critical attention. Though the "Crack-Up" essays have recently been re-evaluated, the short stories are often seen as a coda to Fitzgerald's career: an afterthought of his talent and an aftermath to dramatic events in his own life. The essays and stories both belong to his more commercial output, which of his own admission he published "to live" (Bruccoli 2004, 85). Driven by the pressures of affording everyday life, these works are most apt to consider

Fitzgerald's complicated relation to living in a capitalist society, which, as we will see, naturally configures life as an exhausting project.

As for the theory employed, this essay is both deeply Deleuzian and at odds with certain turns of his thought. Deleuze's analysis of "The Crack-Up" provided an essential starting point for my own reading, and a foundational theoretical framework for our relation to Events. A closer analysis of Fitzgerald's works revealed, however, the shortcomings of this framework, and some alternative ways of experiencing the world that were not considered by Deleuze himself. The thesis is not aiming, however, at providing a philosophical commentary of Deleuze or at building an overall critique of his thought. I am instead hoping that in its small way the essay will be able to provide an original framework, in which the literary analysis is also philosophical exploration. Through his essays and stories I will position Fitzgerald as both an artist and a thinker, engaged in a complex reflection on living and narrative that involves both his work and his life. In this context, then, Deleuze will be employed not as an authority on Fitzgerald, but as a partner for his ideas. The essay will move from literature to philosophy and back, infiltrating larger theoretical problems with the messiness of living. It is important to keep in mind what drives this exercise: a productive dissatisfaction towards life, a laugh brimming with anger, an explosive sadness.

Futile effort, necessary struggle:

autobiography, Events and the project of living

Dorothy Parker's "Coda" perfectly captures Fitzgerald's condition in 1936. His marriage has permanently flopped, he is strangled by debt, and his alcoholism causes him increasing health problems. After receiving a discouraging tuberculosis prognosis, he finds himself not caring much whether he lives or dies (Fitzgerald 1936, 70). He retires away for six months to see no one; then "suddenly, surprisingly, I got better. -And cracked like an old plate as soon as I heard the news" (72). This nervous breakdown is the setting for " The Crack-Up" essay series, published in *Esquire* in three installments: "The Crack-Up" (February 1936), "Pasting It Together" (March 1936) and "Handle With Care" (April 1936). Half autobiography and half essay, the pieces detail Fitzgerald's breakdown and reflect on the conditions that caused the crack. They are powerfully negative, uncomfortable, and at times frustrating. Their tone is complex and ambiguous: Fitzgerald is at once angered and sad, self-pitying and self-aware. His crack is not an inspiring failure or a stopover to success, and it is inherent to life itself. He used to think that "life was something you dominated if you were any good" (69), but he now sees it as "a process of breaking down" (69), "a varying offensive" (71). It is the prospect of going back to "this living", to life as a list of goals, that cracks him.

It is through his 1930s nonfiction that Fitzgerald begins to problematize life as a socioeconomic project, and life *writing* as a narrative project. The chapter will chart this process through the 1933 essay "Ring" and the first part of "The Crack-Up" series. In "Ring"

Fitzgerald describes life, for the first time, as an unsustainable project that prevents us from understanding ourselves. In the latter piece he articulates the sheer exhaustion of living life as this project, and the way it leads him to break down. Yet "The Crack-Up" also implicitly asks some insistent questions: how does life crack us? What happens to us when it does? My reading of the series will take cue from Deleuze's framework of the Event, but move in a different direction. In his *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze finds in Fitzgerald's reflection a moment of possibility: by understanding how we crack we could find another living, one that resists living as a project. His own analysis captures something powerful in Fitzgerald's writing, but it configures the crack as a point of no return. I will argue instead that the crack is part of a long-standing reflection on living that begins with the early 1930s essays and continues after "The Crack-Up" series. Deleuze also suggests that the only way to grasp an Event fully is through a nomadic and impersonal subjectivity. My own reading will show that this option is not open to Fitzgerald, an author intensely concerned with the personal and often unable to look beyond his own perspective. This is an element of stubborn individuality that Deleuze overlooks, and that I will consider as an alternative philosophical position. Through Fitzgerald I will ultimately conclude that, while a crack or traumatic Event might momentarily unsettle subjectivity, the ordinary necessity of living always requires an attempt to return to the self, to negotiate between Event and the everyday. This alternative space of reflection will occupy the rest of the thesis.

Fitzgerald's crack begins during the financial boom. In "Echoes of the Jazz Age", published two years into the Depression, he recalls a growing uneasiness about New York in the second half of the 1920s. He remarks that "a wide-spread neurosis began to be evident [...] like a

nervous beating of the feet" (1931, 19); then the crash brought an abrupt end to "the most expensive orgy in history" (21). We could see "Echoes of the Jazz Age", and all of the essays Fitzgerald publishes until 1936, as an attempt to rationalize this orgy and show to readers he has outgrown it. Yet already in 1927 he worries about Americans' mistaken sense of superiority because they have "the most money", remarking "wait until this wave of prosperity is over!" (Bruccoli 2004, 87). Already while working on *The Great Gatsby* in 1924, he writes to his editor that he feels he has wasted precious years of his career (Bruccoli 1981, 152). He perceives this neurosis, then, as both present in himself and in New York society, identifying larger economic conditions with his own personal accidents. This fundamental identification of personal and public, of what happens in the world with his feelings about what occurs, is central to Fitzgerald's nonfiction style and had important consequences on his status as an author. It made him incredibly porous to the mood of the times, able to capture shifting feelings in the public and portray them intimately, but it also had a limiting effect on his public perception. Fitzgerald was both an artist and a celebrity, a "spokesman for the time" and "the typical product of the same moment" (Fitzgerald 1932, 27). Like all celebrities he personified a certain image, specifically the *image of his own characters*. Writing about frivolous rich people meant that the press frequently treated Fitzgerald as such, and suspected him of not being able to write about anything but himself and people like him. In 1921, a journalist described him as having "the agreeable countenance of a person who regards himself as the center of everything" (Bruccoli 2004, 8). While he was praised for his excellent technique, his authorial voice was considered to be fully centred and limited to his *self*. This exposed his work to accusations of superficiality and cheapness during his lifetime, a perception he both humorously leaned into and resisted.

A writer who constantly blurs personal and public events and puts himself at the centre of everything appears tailor-made for autobiography. The autobiographical essay is in itself an ambiguous third element between history and fiction, a porous membrane standing between a private life and the world. What does autobiography do? Is it a narrative of *my* events, of me *in* certain events, or an encounter between myself and events that were separate from me? Usually, it interweaves "personal" and "public" accidents in order to tease out a meaning supposedly common to both. In a way it is an Event in itself, an exploration of *what is really expressed within things that happen*. Any autobiography contains the retelling of painful cracks, but they are subsumed under a linear and often teleological narrative. Life is reconstructed to have a goal, a message. Yet as Fitzgerald's own life begins to crack, a subtle shift occurs in his essays: a slow problematizing of autobiography as a genre, of life as a narrative project.

This shift is most visible in the 1933 piece "Ring", ostensibly written for the death of writer and friend Ring Lardner. Fitzgerald qualifies Lardner as a man both seemingly full of "quiet vitality" and dogged by "impenetrable despair" (34), a writer with extensive abilities who was unable to sound the depths of his talent because of a lack of self-knowledge. Lardner's formative experiences were in sports writing and Fitzgerald notes, somewhat disdainfully, that his artistic material could only ever be the size of a baseball diamond. "So long as he wrote within that enclosure the result was magnificent [...]. But when, inevitably, he outgrew his interest in it, what was Ring left with?" (36). The essay is animated by an existential melancholy, a resentment towards his friend's unwillingness to truly explore his art. It reads

uncharacteristically bitter as a eulogy, unusually questioning as biography. In this passage, Fitzgerald actually takes flight from anything resembling a biographical piece:

> Imagine life conceived as *a business of beautiful muscular organization*- an arising, an effort, a good break, a sweat, a bath, a meal, a love, a sleep- imagine it achieved; then imagine to apply that standard to the horribly complicated mess of living, where nothing, *even the greatest conceptions and workings and achievements,* is else but messy, spotty, tortuous- and then one can imagine the confusion that Ring faced on coming out of the ballpark (37, my emphasis)

The simplest form of conceiving life as a project is to imagine it as a daily list of small gestures that must be realized correctly and beautifully: a neat, expurgated version of the ordinary. What all these actions have in common is that they are directed outwardly. To live life as a project is to be directed outside of the self, towards some object or other, with no respite. Fitzgerald's list is slightly *too* long, enough to suggest a feeling of everyday exhaustion. This living is designed to leave little time for self-reflection, and Lardner decided to limit himself (both as a person and an artist) to what could be achieved by avoiding whatever was "messy" and "tortuous", including his own thoughts and desires. From Fitzgerald's perspective, this attempt was futile: the "horribly complicated mess of living" intervenes on all of us, as it did on his friend. Later in the essay he remarks that he never fully knew Lardner, because Lardner did not know himself: "due to some inadequacy in one's self, one had not penetrated to something unsolved, new and unsaid" (39). This means he will

never know, and go on wondering, "what did Ring want, how did he want things to be, how did he think things were?" (40).

One can detect a certain anxiety and frustration here as Fitzgerald is beginning to wonder whether living, including his own, should be examined in a different way. The piece is key to our reflection, because it is his first attempt to question the organising of a life from within a genre that *requires* this organising. The last sentence of the essay is a brusque return to form: Lardner "made no enemies, because he was kind, and to many millions he gave release and delight" (40). On the heels of the previous paragraphs this feels like an overcompensation, a hurried attempt to bring the writing back within bounds. This piece begins as a biography only to undermine the idea of organizing life in the simplest way; yet the "muscular organization" of life into a narrative *is* the fundamental operation of biography and autobiography. Fitzgerald instead suggests that organizing life actively prevents us from understanding ourselves, and that in Lardner's case this seemingly perfect ordinary was a kind of defense mechanism, of "habituated gestures that stretch the present out so that enjoyment is possible" (Berlant 2011, 63). This reflection is animated by Fitzgerald's experiences of failure and discord. As his own living becomes increasingly disorganized, his writing becomes an examination of what drives the organizing impulse in the first place. "The Crack-Up" series is then not the end product of a breakdown, but part of a long-standing elaboration that begins with an unhappiness towards living itself.

In the context of this elaboration we can consider the opening sentence of the series, one that resonates "in our heads with such a hammer blow" (Deleuze 1990, 154): "of course, all life is

a process of breaking down" (Fitzgerald 1936, 69). The *of course* is what strikes the reader most, as it contains the necessary tragedy of living, its relentless process of undoing. Yet this matter-of-fact beginning already contains an insistent question: all life is a process of breaking down, but *why* must it be so? The first part of this essay series aims at identifying the crack and pinpointing the moment when Fitzgerald becomes aware of it, but it also becomes an examination of what makes the crack possible, of the increasingly unsustainable conditions of living life as a project. The *of course* is also Deleuze's starting point for his analysis of the piece, included in *The Logic of Sense*. *Of course* indicates a process already in movement, a becoming: the possibility of a breaking that produces difference. Deleuze's priority is not to investigate why we crack, but whether it is possible for us to encounter a crack or Event without permanently shattering, whether we can follow life's process of breaking without making our own life "a demolition job" (157). It is important that we maintain these two diverging questions (how do we crack? How can we crack without destroying ourselves?) in mind as we consider their encounter, that we hold in consideration the constructivist effort of philosophy with the open dispute of literature.

In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze finds in Fitzgerald's crack his own notion of the Event: a third term between words and bodies, "hovering" over everyday states of affairs. A battle is actualized in a specific time and place, but *the battle* is an incorporeal Event impassible to its outcome (100). While the Event is explicated into certain states of affairs or appears as their effect, "it is not what occurs" (149). However it is also far from being a Platonic form. Though it is not identical to what is actualized, the Event does not belong to a transcendent dimension. It is part of what Deleuze defines as the plane of immanence, the field of

composition of all there is: *life* itself, as the impersonal vitality that is the world. In this anonymous plane forces emerge, collide and sometimes converge into a recognizable Event, made possible by but not equal to physical states. Death is the most easily recognizable Event, in that "it has an extreme and definite relation to me [...] but it also has no relation to me at all" (151). Fitzgerald is adamant that the crack is very much his own, located in his "nervous reflexes" (71); but while the crack is in him, the source of the crack is located in the very structure of living. It manifests as a feeling of hollowing out, as an ordinary that proves illusory: he wakes up to discover that for a long time "[he] had not liked people and things, but only followed the rickety old pretense of liking" (72). He has been following the same list of actions as Ring Lardner, and the mess of living has caught up with him.

In the second paragraph of the essay, after confessing he has cracked like a plate, Fitzgerald explains how in his early career he turned the failed draft of *This Side of Paradise* into a success by means of endless revisions, determination and sheer effort. This made him believe that "life was something you dominated if you were any good" (69). This belief is both a promise of future happiness and an attachment to the striving required to guarantee that happiness. It is a belief that becomes its own plan: life must be a project in order for him to succeed at it. This is described with admirable precision in the following passage:

> I must hold in balance the sense of futility of effort and the sense of the necessity to struggle; the conviction of the inevitability of failure and still the determination to "succeed" [...]. If I could do this [...] then the ego would continue as an arrow shot from nothingness to nothingness (70).

There is perhaps no better definition of life as a project than a "sense of futility of effort" matched with an attachment to "the necessity to struggle", and this definition is already enough to answer the question of how life cracks us. This is a rigid ordinary, a site of strained and limited living that the narrative of life-as-project flattens into exhausting repetition. This process proves to be ultimately unsustainable, something Fitzgerald realises only when his physical illness recedes and he is faced with the prospect of going back to "this living". On one hand, his body and his self have cracked. On the other, the crack is *already present* in the unbearable way life is lived. This gives more layers of the notion that "all life is a process of breaking down". All life, lived in this way, is a process of breaking ourselves down; and if all life is necessarily a struggle, then it is also an inevitable process of breaking down as we slowly lose our physical strength and become unable to struggle further.

The crack is, then, in him and outside of him. However the very process of reflecting on the crack also reveals it as an Event, an accumulation of singular forces into a constructive concept both realised in the body and hovering on it. Deleuze correctly sees a vitality in the deep sadness of "The Crack-Up" because he understands that Fitzgerald is *investigating* his own abyss in the way of a philosopher, looking for what is "unsolved, new and unsaid" (1932, 39). Understanding how we crack means involving the possibility that the crack might open another living, one that resists living as a project. *The Logic of Sense* suggests in fact that any painful Event actualized in us always offers the possibility of a counter-actualization. Yet if Fitzgerald's reflection seems to partly match this philosophical aim, Deleuze also requires a fundamental rethinking of the subject that is unavailable to our writer.

The same plane of composition from which singularities and Events emerge also produces, in fact, individual affects. In Deleuze's view, life is not a series of Events that I encounter but a plane of forces that *constantly produce and individuate the I*. The subjectivity Deleuze envisions is a "free, anonymous, and nomadic singularity which traverses men as well as plants and animals independently of the matter of their individuation" (107), rather than a singularity already individuated in a person. This is central to the question of whether we can encounter more than just pain and failure in a crack. To fully grasp the possibilities of another living offered by the Event it is necessary that "we dissipate ourselves a little" (72), that we begin to understand ourselves as looser, nomadic subjectivities. The painful Event breaks apart the rigid or "molar" segments of our identity, forcing us to see the self in a different way. It is then that we can become "the actor and dancer" (161) of our life rather than the individual, and "will the Event" (157) to traverse us. This seems difficult to achieve in ordinary life, for reasons that will be explored in the next chapters. It seems *particularly* difficult for an author who, as we have established, was criticised for being mired in self-centredness and whose artistic style partly depends on a profound identification of events and their perception. This should not be seen as a limitation of Fitzgerald's art, but as a helpful tool to think differently. If Deleuze's scenario is not available to him, what alternative space will open instead? What happens if we crack under the pressure of living life as a project, but cannot afford to question our subjectivity because we simply have to keep living? The last page of "The Crack-Up" arrives at similar questions after Fitzgerald relays his suffering to a friend, who gives him some poetic advice:

> "Listen. Suppose this wasn't a crack in you—suppose it was a crack in the Grand Canyon."
>
> "The crack's in me," I said heroically.
>
> "Listen! The world only exists in your eyes—your conception of it. You can make it as big or as small as you want to. And you're trying to be a little puny individual." (1936, 74)

Deleuze quotes this dialogue to claim it is a form of projection "*a l'americaine"* (155), but he omits Fitzgerald's claim that the crack is firmly planted in him. This omission pastes over an obvious difficulty in reconciling the impersonal subjectivity offered by the philosopher with Fitzgerald's stubborn sense of individuality. Yet what Fitzgerald claims can be its own philosophical position. "Heroically" is both a self-deprecating joke and a form of defiance in defeat, a strength in recognizing that he is not the Grand Canyon but "a little puny individual". What would happen if we considered the full import of this remark? I would argue it suggests the impossibility of encountering an Event without some return to individuality, made necessary by the overwhelming ongoingness of our bodies in ordinary living. After meeting his friend Fitzgerald realises that while she had the best intentions, vitality is incommunicable: "I might have asked some of it from her, neatly wrapped and ready for home cooking and digestion, but I could never have got it" (74). Vitality is a quality so inherent in the self that the only way to obtain it would be to eat it and absorb it: the only way to feel it is to live.

The crack might break apart the individual, and it might be aided by a momentary loss of personal certainty. However after that moment there is always a movement of return to the self, a negotiation between the crack and the self brought on by the necessity of living. This necessity is both constraining and unpredictable. The ordinary participates in the narratives of our living, and contributes to their rigid formation; but, as I will consider later, it can also displace them, throwing us in undefinable encounters and situations. Deleuze does maintain that we do not need to be irreparably cracked by a traumatic Event, but to avoid a recourse to individuality he must introduce anonymous figures like the actor/dancer, who can counter-actualize the painful cracking of a body by not truly adhering to the everyday. To be the actor of our life is to intensify the possibilities of the present without being subjected to them: but who of us can afford such a distance from the accidents of living? Through the "Crack-Up" series Fitzgerald demonstrates that he is, much like any of us, deep in the "sodden-dark" (81) thickness of life, and in a sense Deleuze *must* minimize this in favour of a vitalistic impersonality. The only perspective available to Fitzgerald, however, is the one of his specific individuality, constantly negotiating with a troubled everyday. This is a relation too sticky to escape, as he will discover in the second and third part of "The Crack-Up" series, where he breaks out of the conventions of autobiography for something more complex, irritable and ambiguous.

A cracked plate speaks:

disorganized living, cruel optimism and qualified unhappiness

The second part of the "Crack-Up" series, titled "Pasting It Together", opens on Fitzgerald summarizing the previous installment for his readers, in the third person: "the writer" realised "that what he had before him was not the dish that he had ordered for his forties" (75). "Sometimes", however, the plate "has to be retained in the pantry"; hence "this sequel- a cracked plate's further history" (75). Where "The Crack-Up" was solemn and urgent, this installment immediately calls attention to its own genre and to its temporal form. There are other nods to this scattered through the piece: at the end of a long paragraph on his perceived loss of faith in the novel, he opens a parenthesis to acknowledge "I have the sense of lecturing now" (78), and in the next page, "the watch is past the hour and I have barely reached my thesis" (79). "Pasting It Together" and "Handle With Care" continue the problematizing of autobiography that started with "Ring", while still critiquing the harsh conditions of living-as-project: a cruel attachment to struggle, a constant pursuit of happiness. The chapter will chart the slow unraveling of autobiography in both pieces, with particular attention to "Handle With Care". The last installment of the series shifts to a bitter, sarcastic tone intended to frustrate readers and ultimately undermine the possibility of a life that can be organised. I will consider Deleuze's analysis of this piece, which crucially misses its sarcasm and misunderstands Fitzgerald's position. Finally, I will indicate the new space of possibility and artistic exploration emerging from this reflection: one that comes after the good life, in the ordinary unhappiness of being alive.

"Pasting It Together" aims at estimating "what has been sheared away and what is left" (76) of his life. The title refers both to recollections and to a temporary gluing of the cracked plate to which he compares himself. So far, this adheres to conventions of autobiographical storytelling- however in the first few paragraphs, Fitzgerald quickly discards a number of "standard cure[s]" for those who have fallen into depression, making it clear that this process of recollection is something he arrives to only after he has exhausted all other possibilities. He is unable to make himself feel better by considering "those in actual destitution or physical suffering", and though he tries his best to "refuse to face things" (75) for as long as possible, "this phase too comes to a dead-end" (76). There is no other option but to self-reflect; the autobiographical process is thrust upon him by necessity. Later in the essay, in fact, he admits he was "forced into a measure that no one ever adopts voluntarily. I was impelled to think. God, was it difficult!" (78). Stylistically the tone moves to something closer to Dorothy Parker's "Coda", a melancholy that both attracts self-pity and laughs at it. Thematically, it already reveals a more complex relation to the Event and to the crack: not something we either undergo passively or grasp head on, but something we compromise with in the everyday through contradictory and sometimes unflattering positions.

Fitzgerald's recollection begins with two early failures that first defined him: losing presidency of the Triangle Theatre Club at Princeton, through illness and poor academic effort, and Zelda breaking off their engagement before he managed to publish *This Side of Paradise*. Looking back at these experiences he sees a thread to his nervous breakdown: "a call upon physical resources that I did not command, like a man over-drawing at his bank" (77). These small misfortunes proved that the only way to win was to direct the self towards

external goals, and that any difficulty could be overcome by sheer striving. This is a kind of optimism towards life that Lauren Berlant would qualify as cruel, that occurs when "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant 2011, 1). In her book *Cruel Optimism*, she qualifies all forms of attachment as inherently optimistic. Optimism is the force that moves one outside oneself and into the world "in order to bring closer the satisfying something that you cannot generate on your own" (1). We can see how living life as a project is inherently optimistic: in the previous chapter I described it as being endlessly directed outside of the self, towards various objects of desire. Some forms of optimism "are crueler than others" (24), and the form of optimism that causes us most pain is arguably our attachment to "a collectively invested form of life, the good life (10)".

It is not simply that the conventional fantasy of a good life (upward social mobility, permanent housing, financial stability) might be unreachable, but that the sheer effort required to maintain this fantasy, the fatigue and dread it can provoke, inherently bars us from experiencing the positive effects that the good life promised us in the first place. Yet the effort is also deemed as *necessary* to obtaining the good life, leading us to feel that if we fail we must not have struggled enough. This is exactly the feeling Dorothy Parker evokes in "Coda": it is not simply that "hard is the struggle", but that "sparse is/ the gain of the one at the top". The line break suggests both the expectation of fulfillment of the good life and the sheer disappointment of arriving at the top and realising one is too tired, broken down or compromised to enjoy it. Berlant is particularly concerned with our present socioeconomic conditions as scenes of fraught investment in the good life, but a feeling of cruel optimism already pervades Fitzgerald's 1930s work as it pervades Dorothy Parker's poetry. This is

perhaps a response to the 1929 market crash, a specific broken promise of capitalism. Yet as Scott Sandage brilliantly chronicles in *Born Losers* (2005), the United States had been dealing with fast cycles of financial panics since the beginning of the 1800s, with the establishment of the New York Stock Exchange. Why must life be a project, a plan? Because the structures of modern capitalism naturally configures it as such. Striving and failing are essential elements of American culture: there is no happiness without pursuit, but the pursuit of happiness involves a necessary element of cruel optimism. The texts considered in this paper are therefore part of a larger archive of American writing, that deals with living as a relation of cruel optimism to the world.

The chase of life-as-project is, then, an endless toil that Fitzgerald undertakes incessantly for fifteen years, attempting to balance the sense of "futility of effort" with the "necessity to struggle" (70). He realises that in order to keep "overextending the flank" (75) he mortgaged parts of himself to other people: one man, Edmund Wilson, has been his "intellectual conscience" (79); one was the model he copied in all relations; another represented what the good life should look like; yet another, presumably his friend/enemy Ernest Hemingway, was his "artistic conscience" (79)[1]. After his nervous breakdown he finds himself "not an "I" any more- not a basis on which I could organize myself" (79). This is not the liberating process of becoming which Deleuze identifies in the crack, the dissipating of the self necessary to truly grasp the Event's potential. It is the loss of the possibility of organizing the self *into a narrative, a genre*. Fitzgerald goes on to say that "having no self" in this context is to be "like a little boy left alone in a big house, who knew that now he could do anything he wanted to do, but found that there was nothing that he wanted to do" (79). The freedom of a cracked

[1] Notably, his wife and supposed muse does not make the list.

self is illusory: what is felt in the body is the lack of direction, the impossibility of moving on to a new achievement. His self was displaced so that he could occupy himself with external goals, and now that failure has barred those goals he feels emptied out, fractured. However, the self is not lost. Fitzgerald has not become an Everyman, an actor of his life. Just as he realizes he has lost his own self he begins to paste it back: the pieces of the plate are simply misplaced. In fact the simple act of *announcing* the displacement appeals to a sense of identity in hindsight. This is an operation of distancing from the events of a life that is required by autobiography. Yet declaring he no longer has a self that can be organised also undermines the viability of autobiography, and pushes against the very perspective from which he is writing. "Pasting It Together" attempts to broadly follow the conventions of autobiography but already tugs at something else, a dissatisfaction towards itself and towards a certain narrative of living. The third part of the series, "Handle With Care", takes this process further.

The third piece opens on another summarizing paragraph that switches between first and third person with uneasiness: "I have spoken in these pages of how an exceptionally optimistic young man experienced a crack-up", and later "I had had a heart but that was about all I was sure of" (80). It is from this heart that Fitzgerald seems to find "a starting place out of the morass"; "I felt- therefore I was" (80). His first step away from abject depression is to remember *what feeling feels like*. This suggests, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, a process of re-individuation, an attempt to retrieve the self. Though this seems remarkably different from the subjectivity figured in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze returns to "The Crack-Up" series in *A Thousand Plateaus*, specifically mentioning "Handle With Care". *A*

Thousand Plateaus identifies three cracks, or lines, contained in the same Event. The first is the molar line, defining large rigid segments of one's identity. Occupation, economic class, marital status: these are molarities defining subjectivity, and their loss or failure constitute what Fitzgerald calls "the big blows" (69) in our lives. The second crack is molecular: like the incorporeal Event, it is imperceptible until after it has occurred. It is a subtle shift in capacity or in desire, such that "you reach a degree, a quantum, an intensity beyond which you cannot go" (Deleuze 1987, 198). This is the feeling of emotional over-drawing Fitzgerald experiences in "Pasting It Together", while struggling to achieve the good life. The third line is the rupture or line of flight marking "the exploding of the other two, their shake-up" (199). Here Deleuze quotes from "Handle With Care": "this led me to the idea that the ones who had survived had made some sort of clean break. This is a big word and is no parallel to a jailbreak". (81) The line of flight breaks apart both lines: it is not a movement to a different place from the past, but an explosion that makes the past stop existing, such that "one has become like everybody/the whole world (tout le monde)" (200).

The third line once again suggests a state that is not available to Fitzgerald or someone like him, like any of us. The line of flight has a similar function to *The Logic of Sense*'s figure of the actor, who can counter-actualize painful Events. It maintains the characteristic of finality, of a state from which there is no coming back. Fitzgerald is instead looking for a way of coming back to the self, and Deleuze's reading significantly overlooks this attempt. This is apparent if we return to the quote from "Handle With Care" that he uses, drawing a parallel between Fitzgerald's "clean break" and the line of flight. The use of this quote is peculiar, because Fitzgerald is almost certainly being sarcastic. The passage finds him seemingly

concerned with a practical problem: a writer cannot be *too* identified with the emotions about which he writes. He quips: "when Wordsworth decided that 'there had passed away a glory from the earth' he felt no compulsion to pass away with it" (81). The only way to move on is to shed all emotions and operate the "clean break" Deleuze focuses on- "I would cease any attempts to be a person- to be kind, just or generous" (82). But this is exaggerated posturing: after this decision, he dramatically tips into a wastebasket all letters from young writers asking for advice, and invitations to "perform this act of thoughtfulness or charity" (82). This pointless act makes him feel like a villainous, "beady-eyed" businessman:

> I was one with them now, one with the smooth articles who said:
> "I'm sorry but business is business". Or:
> "You ought to have thought of that before you got into this trouble". Or:
> "I'm not the person to see about that". (82)

In the context of the whole series, written by a man who two months prior described his "hour of solitary pillow-hugging" (72) and who in the same essay talks of *feelings* as his only starting point, the passage rings as cynical irony. This is confirmed by the following three paragraphs. He claims his next project will be to perfect a fake smile, combining "the best qualities of a hotel manager, an experienced old social weasel" (82). Then he will work on a new voice, to have "that polite acerbity that makes people feel that far from being welcome" (83). Finally, he cautions young writers that he will only acknowledge them if they are related to someone important; if they are starving, he might stick around "till somebody raised a nickel to phone for the ambulance" (83). Smiles, voice and gestures: Fitzgerald is

mimicking the training of an actor, the construction of a mask. This is not the Deleuzian actor who can love every Event without being subdued by any, it is the actor as impostor, who can continue the toil of living as a project by becoming a poor substitute for a person. It is difficult to find in this overstated misanthropy the "absolute deterritorialization" (1987, 200) of subjectivity Deleuze identifies, or even the "despairing tone" (201) he attributes to the end of this piece.

In the final chapter I will consider more closely why, in a sense, Deleuze must necessarily miss the sarcasm of this passage. However he is hardly the only one who sees it that way: as Edward Gillin notes in "Telling Truth Slant in the "Crack-up" Essays", many other critics ignored or failed to notice the "thundering irony" (2002, 160) of "Handle With Care". This critical blind spot reveals our ingrained expectations of what the narrative of a life, and therefore a life itself, should be. The first piece of the series detailed a crisis; its follow-up recounted a moment of recollection after the crisis, of turning to the past to look for causes. The reader expects from the third piece a *lesson*, a movement into the future. This was reinforced by the temporal delay of one month between each installment, which in itself creates expectation. It is encouraged by Fitzgerald's summarizing paragraphs, which have the function of "catching us up" before presenting something *different*. The reader has been set up to receive a specific narrative of progress, but instead the author is regressing: if trying to be a good person makes me unhappy, he appears to say, I might as well be a terrible one. Fitzgerald's problematizing of life writing takes on full force in this piece specifically because it is the last installment, and therefore carries with it everything demanded from an ending. This mean-spirited tonal shift is a conscious refusal of the autobiographical pattern of

crisis and conversion/rebirth (Egan 1984, 137), and it finally rejects the notion of a life that can be neatly organised.

In *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed distinguishes between "bearable" and "unbearable" lives, following Judith Butler's notion of livable/unlivable lives (2004). She defines a bearable life as one that can "hold up" and "keep its shape" (Ahmed 2010, 97) when faced with the accidents of living. Autobiography and biography are concerned with making life bearable: they give the Events of a complex, contradictory living a form, a narrative shape. Fitzgerald, however, realizes that the very effort of maintaining life bearable is what has made it *un*bearable, unable to bear a shape. The unbearable life is a life that has cracked, and also one that cannot hold the narrative structure of autobiography. It is a living that has no genre. The sarcasm of this piece serves to explode the form of autobiography in the whole series, as its presence casts a long shadow on the first and second piece. In its most basic definition sarcasm is a lie, something written or said in a way that suggests the opposite meaning. Ending an autobiographical series in sarcasm suggests that the autobiographical operation is itself a lie, a disingenuous process of rearranging life so that it can hold up a narrative. The tonal shift of the last piece pushes the whole series into an ambiguous space with a much looser form. It is a move designed to make the reader uncomfortable, perhaps even a critique of the readers as a whole: of our voyeuristic desire to learn of others' misfortunes, while demanding that their lives should inspire us through a narrative of progress.

The piece is also a frustration of expectations for readers in an economic recession, who had been looking back at the 1920s as a time of wastefulness. Sandage notes in *Born Losers* that in America the "language of business is applied to the soul" (2005, 5); the debtor is also a moral failure. Yet Fitzgerald, who referred to himself as "a man overdrawing from his bank", ends in a spirit that we could partly characterise as defiance. Rather than excusing himself from the expensive orgy of the 1920s in favour of a more structured outlook on life, he questions the double bind of failure and success that brought him to where he is. The bitter irony of the piece hides a powerful, angry statement: *I did not learn anything*. This is a refusal of hope and positivity, two central tenets of American culture, and a refusal of failure as moral lack. It contains a certain stubborn "stupidity" to progress, but as *The Queer Art of Failure* brilliantly points out, "the naïve or the ignorant may in fact lead to a different set of knowledge practices" (Halberstam 2011, 12). Halberstam notes that we tend to be more forgiving of stupidity and stubbornness in men, especially men in positions of authority. There is certainly a sense in which it is mostly people like Fitzgerald who could, especially at the time, refuse to learn and get angry at anyone who made them. This is part of the undercurrent of narcissism running through his work. However that makes him, if not a more unique artist, one closer to our experience of living: self-focused, self-centred and at times annoyingly self-pitying; full of failed attempts at clean breaks, of apparent ruptures leading nowhere; in short, a constant process of "losing, lacking, bumbling, stumbling" (Halberstam, 68). Rather than discarding it we should perhaps follow this narcissism, recognise the role it plays in life writing, and notice what it can teach us about how we speak of cracks and recovery.

For Deleuze the breakthrough of any true artist is a process of becoming-other, of discovering "beneath apparent persons the power of an impersonal" (1997, 227). He calls for artists to stutter in their own language, and in "The Crack-Up" series Fitzgerald does begin to stutter and move in an unfamiliar space. Yet for an author whose themes fundamentally revolve around the self, the question of becoming-other is negotiated by a different impulse. The cracked plate is not replaced, its use must simply change: "It will not be brought out for company, but it will do to hold crackers late at night or to hold into the ice box under left-overs…" (72). Here we find the doubling movement present in most of Fitzgerald's late writing. First a push into a different direction, cracking, moving outside of the self; then a swing back around, a pasting together, a necessity of returning to the self. While Deleuze privileges the push, the line of flight outside ourselves, Fitzgerald suggests a circular movement. This is not an opposition to Deleuze's interpretation, but a complication of the problem from a different perspective. The matter is not simply whether Events can loosen or break down subjectivity, but how *the loosened subject can live oneself* through and after Events.

The last page of "Handle With Care" continues the bitter tone of the previous paragraphs:

> So what? This is what I think now: that the natural state of the sentient adult is a qualified unhappiness. I think also that in an adult the desire to be finer in grain than you are, "a constant striving" (as those people say who gain their bread by saying it) only adds to this unhappiness in the end—that end that comes to our youth and hope. (84)

Deleuze sees this as despairing, and while it is certainly not joyful, we should consider more carefully what happiness and unhappiness mean in this context. Happiness is one of the promises of the good life, perhaps the ultimate promise, as all of the other objects of desire attached to it (money, marriage, success) also function as what Sara Ahmed calls "happiness pointers" (28). These goals will make us happy, so we consider them as happy on their own even before we have experienced them. However if obtaining the good life means a constant, exhausting strive, how meaningful is the happiness we achieve? Moreover if both the striving and the achieving are created through our own effort, then happiness too becomes a personal responsibility, its own "redescription of life as a project" (Ahmed 2010, 10). How valuable is happiness if we must exhaust ourselves every day to achieve it, and feel guilty whenever we lose it? How fair is a happiness that asks for constant striving? Fitzgerald goes on to add that his youthful happiness was "unnatural as the Boom" (84). This financial analogy actually exposes the injustice of an economic system built on booms and panics, on inflating the number of financial winners to later create a larger number of losers. To be happy in this system is to be on the winning side, on the side of those who "make their bread" by grinding down those who try to be "finer" grains. Happiness is sometimes predicated on "the localization and containment of misery" (Ahmed, 195). Fitzgerald's parroting of the successful businessman positions winning as an empty, cruel gesture, and confirms the impossibility for him to fully assume that character.

Finally, living life as a project is often so unsustainable that being happy at all is an anomaly. A state of "qualified" or ordinary unhappiness is really the norm: a daily dissatisfaction towards the narratives of our life, matched with the need to still live in the everyday. Yet if

we abandon happiness as a necessity, the space that was previously occupied by the "muscular organization" of trying to be happy is now free to be filled with something else. As Ahmed remarks, removing the necessity of happiness can open our living to more possibility. The unhappiness described here is not absolute but *qualified*, by the ordinary itself: contingent on the nature of our everyday experiences, mediated by unexpected shifts. The ordinary can be the cause of our unhappiness when it forms the daily, incessant struggle of trying to maintain a project. However it also contains something inherently unpredictable, that resists organization and narrative and that can explode our projects at any moment.

This essay does not close with a clean break. Fitzgerald ends "The Crack-Up" series by claiming that, though the sign *Cave Canem* is "hung permanently" by his door, he will try "to be a correct animal, and if you throw me a bone with enough meat on it I may even lick your hand" (84). By way of failure, loss or crisis, life has spilled out into something that has no genre: "a middle without boundaries, edges, a shape" (Berlant 2011, 200). Where are we to go from here? How do we move after we have been cracked by an Event, if we are still pushed by the necessity and urgency of living? The rest of this thesis will explore how these questions are answered through the medium of short stories, the other side of Fitzgerald's so-called minor work. We will begin from 1936, when Arnold Gingrich, the editor of Esquire, suggested to Fitzgerald that to get out of his depression he should write something explaining why he could not write. He received four pieces: the three parts of the "Crack-Up" and a short story, "Three Acts of Music".

The tunes swing the people and the people the tunes:

living as coda and impasse

If "The Crack-Up" asked us to consider how we crack, "Three Acts of Music" poses a new question: what happens after we have cracked and must carry on living? The story shows us a couple through several years, narrated in three vignettes. In the first act they are young, poor and in love; in the second they are becoming successful and unsatisfied; in the third they realise it is too late for them to have children, perhaps to even be happy. All three sections show them dancing to popular music of the time, with portions of the lyrics reported.

The story continues Fitzgerald's reflection on whether living and narrative can be explored in a different way, a reflection he began in his autobiographical essays. I previously referred to this period as the coda of his career. "Handle with Care" ended with Fitzgerald comparing himself to a dog; *coda* is the Italian word for *tail* and "Three Acts of Music" is indeed the dog's tail, a form of otherness that still maintains a connection to the main body. In this chapter I will show how the story can be seen, in relation to "The Crack-Up" series, as Fitzgerald's commentary on his own changing practice. It employs music not just as a theme, but as a different way of engaging with narration: listening is opposed to speaking and meaning, swinging in a circle is opposed to progressing in a line. The story continues to undermine living as a linear narrative project, but also shifts Fitzgerald's writing from an exploration of the Event, or asking "what happened?", to one of living after the Event, or asking "what happens after?". Here I will return to the concept of coda, as an experience of

ordinary living that runs counter to living-as-project: a space of uncertainty and impermanence we navigate after, or in between, the big Events of our life. I will relate this to Lauren Berlant's concept of the "impasse" and consider both further in relation to a different Fitzgerald story, "Three Hours Between Planes" (1941). The previous chapters showed how the unbearable conditions of living-as-project can bring us to crack; this chapter explores two forms of experiencing the world through and after cracks, as the ordinary compels us to live on.

The story at hand opens with this passage:

> They could hardly hear it for a while. It was a slow gleam of pale blue and creamy pink. Then there was a tall room where there were many young people and finally they began to feel and hear it.
> What were they- no. This is about music. (1936, 334)

We begin with listening, or rather the *attempt* to listen. In this opening synesthesia we hear a *slow* light: the *m*'s, *n*'s and *l*'s slow the sentence down further, adding a dream-like sensuousness. We do not see the unnamed characters as they enter the room, it just appears, and we span it from their intimate view point. Only then they "feel *and* hear it" (334). Then the narrator interrupts himself: "what were they"- thinking? Feeling? Wearing? Music here is introduced not just as a theme in the story, but as a different way of developing it. It is not unusual for Fitzgerald to interject narrator's remarks in a third person narrative, but here they are for the most part laconic and focused on music. The second act begins with "This is now

years later but there was still music" (336). The third act seems to suggest a larger reflection: "This is a story about tunes. Perhaps the tunes swing the people or the people the tunes" (337), but this is immediately cut off by an "anyhow" followed by a colon, taking us into more reported direct speech. It appears as if he is acting like a conductor more than a writer: not threading a story but nudging it through quick flashes, letting the players play.

Swinging is the main movement of the story, an emotional and physical to and fro. In the first vignette the young man jokingly says they should "spend the rest of our lives going around and listening to tunes" (335). That is how the story unfolds: the couple continues to go around, dancing year after year. The tunes swing the people yet the people also swing the tunes, circulate the music, let it infiltrate their words. The tunes in the story have a sticky quality, the lyrics interject in the dialogue and add layers of ambiguity. The young man leans over the piano player to see what the band is playing: "'From *No, No, Nanette* by Vincent Youmans'" (335). His girl asks him if he learned who wrote the song and he replies: "*No*!". The joke is of course that he did learn it and that the song is called *No*; but it suggests that the lyrics are contaminating his speech, speaking through him. Later in the scene, the band plays "Tea for Two". The lyrics are reported as the girl hums them:

And you …

… for me

And me …

… for you

Al---o-

o-

n-n… (335)

The music is pictured not just as it is listened, but as it is felt. There is something haunting in the spacing of the letters, in the aloneness of the *o* and *n*; at the same time the reader immediately recognizes its intimate quality of humming. The letters seem to follow an *affective* music sheet, of what we hear as words float or get drowned out.

There are few descriptive passages in the story, favouring instead extensive dialogue between the couple. Their conversations also swing around, repeating themselves, giving the reader a sense of strain for a point that never materializes. For the most part the dialogue does not feature the witticisms common to Fitzgerald's early stories, in which young people are always trying to impress each other. It is marked by a stronger realism and intimacy: these are people who have been swinging the same tunes for a long time. The conversations consist of short repeated questions (didn't you? What did you say? Won't you?) and short negative replies: let's forget it, it doesn't matter, let's not go over it. The repetitions become a sort of musical refrain. Like "The Crack-Up" essays, they also amount to a refusal to learn, to acts of looping and forgetting that skirt traditional knowledge (Halberstam 2011). Knowledge and meaning are opposed, in the story, to *listening*, which of course goes for the music as well as the conversation. It is the woman who calls on her husband to listen. She is angry over their success, because of the distance it created in their relationship. It is clear that she is unable to fully convey this to the man, who stumbles on the enormity of it only at the very end of the story. In the second vignette she orders, while they dance:

> "Let's forget it. Your friend Mr [Irving] Berlin can talk better than we can. Listen to him."
>
> "I'm listening."
>
> "No. But *lis*den,[2] I mean."
>
> *Not just for a year but--*
>
> "Why do you say my friend Mr Berlin? I never saw the guy." (337)

Again the lyrics and dialogue interrupt each other, almost as if Irving Berlin himself was being called upon to settle the debate. He is employed so intimately that even the man wonders why he should know him personally. The song that interrupts them, "Always", ironically describes a lover who will always understand, an understanding lacking from the man and wanted, though never explicitly, by the woman. She calls on him to forget, on the heels of an earlier conversation about the beginning of their relationship that occurred while they listened to "Remember", another Berlin song. The singer reminds his lover of times in their relationship and how they vowed to remember them, but the lover forgot to remember. Paradoxically, the woman wants her husband to remember to forget. The characters are unconsciously inhabiting the music, swinging its pattern in their own lives. In the final act she again says "'let's not go over it. Listen to what they're playing'" (339). "Going over it", talking to move forward, is ineffective. Listening becomes an alternative and preferable mode of knowledge. Language is insufficient as a form of communication unless it comes from song lyrics that do not talk to us, but *through* us. The story does not have a resolution, nor a reflection on universal themes that sometimes accompanies Fitzgerald's stories. It closes on the woman's thoughts as the couple silently dances on, listening.

[2] The misspelling of 'listen' is to suggest the woman's lower class background.

This brings us back to the notion of coda, which I first outlined in the introduction. Musically the coda is not just the ending to a piece: it is its continuation in a different inclination. In this first sense we can see the story as a continuation of the "Crack-Up" themes (failure, the hollowness of success, a dissatisfaction with living) with variations in genre and tone. The story is also structured as a variation of its own theme, as all the vignettes feature dancing and listening in different moods. Yet the concept of coda can also be employed to describe an experience of being in the world, one that runs counter to living as a project. If ordinary unhappiness is the way we feel towards the narratives of our living, the coda is the tentative form of being in the world that this feeling takes when the project of living unravels. I mentioned that in "Coda" Dorothy Parker is looking for a different cadence and space. The coda is an *extended* cadence, where the cadence is a melody designed to create a sense of finality and resolution. In moments where we face failure, loss and uncertainty, living can feel like an endless coda: a repeated variation of our themes that *should* take us towards resolution but instead continues to extend, so much that we lose the ability to configure goals and must live *in* the uncertain extension. "Three Acts of Music" marks a time during which Fitzgerald attempts to approach, through his writing, a kind of living that persists in this extended moment. If the first act of the story (two people in love about to get married) opens to life as a project, the second act shows the consuming labour of maintaining it. The third is the understanding of what has been lost, but there is no clean break. Rather than moving forward the couple goes on swinging, as we all do.

An argument could be made that the three scenes of the story mirror the three parts of "The Crack-Up", and there is some evidence for this in the choice of songs for each act. The first part is a promise of living that will be broken: "Tea for Two" actually begins with the economic statement "I'm discontented/With homes that are rented", and goes on to describe an ideal elsewhere for the couple to escape social obligations. The second part is a realization of how much they have changed, similar to the pasting together of memories in the second part of "The Crack-Up"; it is accompanied by a song that decries a lack of remembrance. The third has a bitterness similar to "Handle With Care", something exemplified by the juxtaposition of two very different songs: "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" is about being blinded and hurt by love, while "Lovely to Look At" maintains exactly that idealized picture of the loved one. However I would argue that Fitzgerald is also making a statement on his own changing practice, portraying himself as a writer of *lyrics* and locating his pieces as musical movements. The story revolves around an argument the couple keeps having over songwriters: the woman insistently asks if her husband has met Berlin or Kern in Vienna, where he practices medicine. She is bitter because in her effort to make an independent living, she had to remain in New York and "met nobody" (339). Hers is the melancholia of a life not lived. For that reason when she hears that Irving Berlin has just married "a society girl" (336), she insistently wonders if they are happy; if *she* would have been happy as that girl, not needing to work, able to live and die for a man's art. In the final scene she reaches a realization:

> "We've had all that anyhow, haven't we?" she asked him. "All those people - that Youmans, that Berlin, that Kern. They must have been through hell to be able to write like that. And we sort of listened to them, didn't we?"
> "But my God, that's so little-" he began but her mood changed and she said:
> "Let's not say anything about it. It was all we had - everything we'll ever know about life." (339)

Fitzgerald is aligning himself with Youmans, Berlin and Kern as someone who has been to hell in order to produce a simple tune. Curiously, that would mean that his writing is equivalent to the lyrics in the story: effaced as direct authorial voice, he reappears in the sticky words that infiltrate the dialogue. We could see the three parts of the story as musical movements in themselves, describing a certain mood: not acts of language and meaning, but of affect and music. This is visible in the title itself. Why is the story not called Three Acts *in* Music, or *to* music? It is not simply that the three acts are *about* music, they are also actions themselves. In "The Literary Soundtrack", Austin Graham notes that contemporary musicologists refer to music as an activity involving affects and perception, a "musicking" act (2009, 525). Fitzgerald is interested in musicking more than writing. He is disavowing his own practice as a project or transcendent plan, and instead envisioning it as a coda: a space of immanence and impermanence, of an approximate and improvised ordinary. For that reason he compares himself to writers of popular tunes. Like his short stories the tunes are commercial, ephemeral and might soon be forgotten.

To live in the coda is to ask: what happens after? The art Fitzgerald produces after "The Crack-Up" is an extended meditation of this question. This is opposed to asking "what happened?", which Deleuze identifies as the key question of "The Crack-Up" (1987, 192). Asking what happened leads us to a close, while asking what happens *after* opens us to possibility. Fitzgerald's later stories suggest that after an Event we are consigned to the present, a present that becomes almost overwhelming and felt in excess. Barred from designing a linear narrative forward we live the everyday intensely, tentatively, approximately. The couple of "Three Acts of Music" goes through innumerable cracks which are hinted (not having children, the woman's climb from poverty to middle class) or just implied (loneliness, time apart), but the story focuses instead on the quality of their dancing and their conversations *in between* cracks that have already occurred. A large number of Fitzgerald's later stories move in this space. "An Alcoholic Case" (1937) and "Financing Finnegan" (1938) deal with men lodged in failure and alcohol; "The Guest in Room Nineteen" (1938) with a man who has lost his health; "Three Hours Between Planes" (1941), as I will later show, is really about a man dealing with grief. The big Events have preceded these characters' lives, and they now live in the extended end of a season.

In *Cruel Optimism* Lauren Berlant qualifies this experience as an impasse: "a disturbance in the situation of the present and the adaptations improvised around it" (198). It is an extended stretch of time where we improvise in the failure of attaining what we want from the good life, where we realise we can no longer live as we did and attempt to navigate alternative scenes of living. Berlant also qualifies the impasse as "a space of time lived without a narrative genre" (198), something I identified in the failure of "The Crack-Up" to subsist in

the boundaries of autobiography. I would argue that the coda is a specific kind of impasse, the type we experience "after the dramatic event of a forced loss [...] when one no longer knows what to do or how to live and yet, while unknowing, must adjust" (199). This qualifies the "living after" of Fitzgerald's late work as somewhat different from Berlant's living *on* of ordinary crisis. There are identifiable Events in Fitzgerald's life, like his nervous breakdown, that his work specifically responds to as the *after*. Once "The Crack-Up" series is published his public image also naturally splits into a before and after the crack, a before and after failure. While the impasse is necessarily a condition of the thick, "overpresent" present (Berlant 196), the coda also has an added historicity, as we know that this is the last stretch of Fitzgerald's career.

However in the case of "Three Acts of Music", I would say the couple is experiencing the second kind of impasse Berlant considers: where "one finds oneself adrift [...] without an event to have given the situation a name" (200). They know *something* has unraveled in the everyday they experience, that it is already producing affective responses in them, yet they do not have a narrative structure for it. As they swing around they feel an emergence, a shift. What they encounter is singularity, "the part of one's sovereignty that cannot be handed off to a concept" (Berlant, 42). Singularities are pre-individual affects: the ineffable of living, points of turning that traverse us before we are able to name them. In *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze defines them as "turning points and points of inflection [...] points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety" (1990, 52). They are not on a higher or transcendental level from subjects, but they do *precede* subjects on the same plane. On an experiential level, singularities can be described as the strange moments in our lives where we feel *something* in

the room that precedes our entering it, much like the opening of "Three Acts of Music". An Event is a set of singularities colliding together in a recognizable form, yet singularities also appear, as in the case of this short story, in between and through categorizable Events.

I have previously discussed the question Deleuze identifies in "The Crack-Up": how can we encounter a crack without being destroyed by it? Yet he views "we" not as a stable form, but a constant process of becoming in which singularities collide and depart, slow down and accelerate. When we see life as a project we are preoccupied with the molar segments of our identity, and becoming is hidden by the goal-oriented structure of living. An Event like failure, loss or heartbreak makes us keenly aware of singularities because it exposes the myriad of elements that we cannot control and that yet affect our lives. This has aesthetic consequences on our living: after a heartbreak we can suddenly feel broken down and remade by a mood, or a song. Deleuze claims, in fact, that "personal uncertainty" is "an objective structure of the event itself" (1990, 3). It is by embracing this personal uncertainty that we can become worthy of the Event and fully embrace it. In the previous chapter, I indicated that this might be difficult to achieve in everyday life. That is because we must be able to both identify and inhabit the Event, and as Berlant points out, the reality is more complicated. We often find ourselves in scenes where we perceive an unclassifiable disturbance, a *something happening*, that has not yet found its "genre of event" (4). This is what she calls a "situation" in the terminology employed by police procedurals: "we have a situation here" (4). Alternatively, we find ourselves in the aftermath of a classifiable Event that has "no a priori consequence" (80), no clear path of readjustments and effects. That is the case for Fitzgerald

after his breakdown in 1936, and it is the case in "Three Hours Between Planes", published posthumously in *Esquire* in 1941.

The story opens on Donald Plant, who, on the way back from a business trip, has three spare hours in the hometown of his childhood love before catching a plane. That spurs him to reach out to the girl, Nancy. When he arrives at her house they immediately start flirting and exchanging slightly mismatched memories of their childhood romance. She is worried that her husband might be seeing another woman in New York, to which he replies:

"After seeing you it sounds impossible," he assured her. "I was married for six years, and there was a time I tortured myself that way. Then one day I just put jealousy out of my life forever. After my wife died I was very glad of that. It left a very rich memory--nothing marred or spoiled or hard to think over." (117)

This introduces the death of Donald's wife as a significant Event that he *does not consider* significant to his own plot. In this sense, it operates as a sort of reverse MacGuffin. Rather than being an irrelevant element that triggers the character's actions, it is a psychologically meaningful plot point that he does not see as motivation. Donald recognizes his loss as a before and after in his life, but he is unable to understand the consequences of this Event or the affective shifts it continues to produce in his living. While he sees himself as wholly preoccupied with Nancy, all of his estimations of her are in some ways coloured by his wife. He remarks "whenever I talked to my wife about the past, I told her you were the girl I loved almost as much as I loved her. But I think I really loved you just as much" (118); he later

thinks to himself that "half an hour had developed an emotion that he had not known since the death of his wife" (119). He does not connect these dots into a narrative: he is a man without genre, tottering in a coda without recognizing it. He lives the present moment with Nancy intensely, but it is a present "that makes no sense with the rest of it" (Berlant 81). He is glad to have memories that avoid anything "marred or spoiled or hard to think over" because he equates a difficult thought with a spoiled one. He is pasting over what is hardest in order to maintain a grasp on some version of good life, but in doing so he must deny a part of the loss. In fact his monologue recalls Fitzgerald's description of Ring Lardner: circling over difficult moments of introspection to maintain a "compromised endurance" (Berlant 48) of the object of desire, the good life.

Donald kisses Nancy, but begins to feel confused. Did he kiss her, his memory of her, or a stranger he just met? An encounter that was supposed to connect his past self to his present one reveals, instead, his struggle to inhabit either. The confusion increases when she shows him a photograph book from her childhood:

> For a moment Donald failed to recognize himself in the photo--then, bending closer--he failed utterly to recognize himself.
>
> "That's not me," he said. [...] That's Donald Bowers. We did look rather alike."
>
> Now she was staring at him--leaning back, seeming to lift away from him.
>
> "But you're Donald Bowers!" she exclaimed; her voice rose a little. "No, you're not. You're Donald *Plant*."

"I told you on the phone."

She was on her feet--her face faintly horrified.

"Plant! Bowers! I must be crazy." (119)

Donald's shock plays with the expression "I almost didn't recognize myself". *Almost* qualifies the autobiographical bridging of our life from past to present, a foundational moment of creating genre. When he fails to recognize himself twice, Donald's identity infinitely doubles and also disappears, an overload of signification that cannot be smoothed into a narrative genre. Nancy's narrative also splits in two as she realizes her mistake, though the careful reader might notice some clues scattered throughout the story. When he calls her at the airport he hears in her voice "neither joy nor certain recognition" (116); as he enters the house she smiles through a "puzzled expression", before saying "Donald- it is you- we all change so" (116). It is clear from the start that they are swinging to different tunes. The story's careful unfolding of the mistake is both expected and elegant, almost pleasant. The reader feels this is a *situation*, a disturbance in the pattern that will soon unfold; Nancy brings out the photograph book and places it on his lap exactly before they kiss, positioning it as a Chekhov's gun. Yet while the story plays to our expectations, the unelaborated death of Donald's wife suggests an extra layer with which neither the characters nor the narrative can quite reckon. It is an Event that, while named, reverberates silently through the writing and the plot, as if the narrative was both introducing and attempting to capture something that cannot be fully brought into language. Life makes these characters react in disconnected, chaotic ways, that escape conceptualization as much as they involve it. The writing of this

living becomes a delicate balance of capturing singularities, of gesturing towards the unspoken.

The identity mistake turns Donald's brief romance into an embarrassment, and he is asked unceremoniously to leave. He begins to reflect on the experience as the plane takes off: only when "its passengers became a different entity from the corporate world below did he draw a parallel from the fact of its flight" (121). The collective of the passengers has mixed with the earthly world for three hours, but in the sky the group becomes a separate entity. For a moment Donald too "had lived like a madman in two worlds at once", "been a boy of twelve and a man of thirty-two, indissolubly and helplessly commingled" (121). In the sky he too must separate, return to his present self. This recalls the doubling movement of Fitzgerald's late writing I mentioned in the previous chapter: first a push outside of the self, a following of the cracks, then a holding, a re-pasting of the broken plate. The story closes on a melancholic passage:

> Donald had lost a good deal, too, in those hours between the planes--but since the second half of life is a long process of getting rid of things, that part of the experience probably didn't matter. (121)

Donald has lost two names, Plant and Bowers; two childhood stories, the one he remembered and the one Nancy did; two ghosts, his wife and the Nancy he knew as a boy. He has also lost the grip on a compromised version of the good life, one he had carefully maintained by selecting memories and banishing difficult feelings. Though he knows an Event has occurred

he does not know of his crack, so he cannot counteractualize it. Yet he must continue to live anyway and that is how he comes to the impasse, to the coda. Deleuze might say Donald has also gained something: a moment of madness, of pure immanence, where he was not himself and two men at the same time. Lauren Berlant also recognizes the possibility of an impasse that is experienced *positively*, as an opening of creative possibilities. Yet it is clear that Fitzgerald does not see possibility here, but only loss and instability. "Three Acts of Music" and "Three Hours Between Planes" both show turning points at which life *could* lead elsewhere but does not, it continues to swing around. Deleuze argues instead that it is possible to build a living that is not a transcendent plan, to build a plane of immanence. The next chapter will consider what the plane of immanence signifies in his philosophy and in one of Fitzgerald's last stories, "The Lost Decade". We will consider whether another living is possible, what its construction would mean, and if it can be written.

What Mr Trimble wants to see:

immanence, the ordinary and another living

Can life be experienced in a different way? Is there another living? Fitzgerald's late work circles around this question without ever reaching it. The previous chapters have indicated how he comes to find the conditions of his living unsustainable, and the artistic space he carves out after this realization: the coda. Yet can the coda be an alternative to life as a project? And if not, is there one? Deleuze sees in Fitzgerald's crack an opening to the plane of immanence, his philosophical counterpoint to transcendent structures. The plane of immanence appears as a promising alternative to life as a project, yet a close literary analysis of Fitzgerald's essays and stories has shown that this alternative fails to account for certain key aspects of our encounters with Events. It fails to notice irony, irritability and narcissism; it does not account for the sense of unhappiness and futility we experience in ordinary living; and it is blind to scenes in which we stumble without genre, meeting an Event without recognizing it. This chapter will consider why the philosophical plane of immanence ultimately fails at constructing another living. It will also explore what it would mean to *write* another living, how a different way of experiencing life could be approached by literature. I will argue that a convincing account of our relation to the Event must focus on the ordinary as a space that both involves and escapes theory. This focus also allows us to consider all the irritable, unhappy facets of individuality that a philosophical theory of the Event tends to overlook. I will consider this further through a last short story, "The Lost Decade", which seems to set up a binary encounter between a man who believes in life as a project and a

Deleuzian madman who has lost his subjectivity. Yet what emerges from the meeting is something shared and intimate: an ordinary immanence rooted in the body, in a relation to others, and in the perceived present.

The plane of immanence appears in Deleuze through Spinoza. In Spinoza's system all bodies, Nature and God are contained in a plane of composition not transcendent, but inherent in itself and immanent to itself, that contains no supplementary dimensions. For Spinoza, this meant a denial of God as a transcendent power in favour of one substance for all modes. Deleuze expands this to "any organization that comes from above" (1988, 128), including the organization of a society around power. It is clear how this description fits the definition of life-as-project: a top to gain, a good life to achieve, a happiness to pursue. So if the transcendent plan is equal to the project of living, the plane of immanence seems our best alternative. It has no top: it is simply a plan of composition of all there is, and the process of composition "must be apprehended for itself, through that which it gives, in that which it gives" (128). This is life as experiment and movement, in which singularities constantly unfold and emerge, sometimes colliding into a recognizable Event.

Transcendent plans revolve, instead, around a form and its development, a subject *first* and its formation second. Deleuze characterizes immanence as a battleground in the history of philosophy, a continuous threat to a hierarchical view of the world. From Descartes and Kant onwards, transcendence is displaced from God to the individual and becomes defined as "a field of consciousness" (1994, 46), immanent not to itself but to a thinking subject. Yet this only replicates the same hierarchy that favours representation (of the I onto the world) and

denies becoming. That is why Deleuze must deny the subject as a source or cause of immanence. In the plane of immanence "there is no longer a subject, but only individuating affective states of an anonymous force" (1988, 128). The subject is continuously created in a "fortuitous" way (1990, 65), as a "habit of saying I" (1994, 48); it is this anonymised subject who can counteractualize the Event and become the actor of his life. This other living is one of singular, apersonal pure immanence.

However, how can we perceive our own self as a fortuitous habit? If this is another living how do we live it, in the overpresent present, pushed and pulled by the accidents of the ordinary? This question might seem inappropriate, because it moves from the plane of theory to the plane of living. Yet living is not outside of theory: as we have seen living is narratives and concepts, intimately tied to how we move and speak. The plane of immanence is life itself, but life that has been de-individualized. Deleuze is attempting to view living from a point of view other than the subject's; that is why he insists that the plane is *prephilosophical,* because it precedes subjects and their conceptualizations. Nevertheless, he believes that it can be accessed by individuals in specific circumstances. In *What is Philosophy?*, him and Guattari write:

> Precisely because the plane of immanence is prephilosophical and does not immediately take effect with concepts, it implies a sort of groping experimentation and its layout resorts to measures that are not very respectable, rational, or reasonable. These measures belong to the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness, and excess. (1994, 41)

The first part of this quote, describing a "groping experimentation" with whatever compromised measures are available to us, seems close to living as a coda or an impasse; but the second half describes a series of states designed to take us out of the self, to break down subjectivity. Because the plane of immanence is life seen outside the subject's point of view, it can only be laid out in moments where the self breaks down: cracks and painful Events, or moments of inebriation. However we have seen that these moments are temporary, and constitute a small section of a myriad positions and inclinations we take towards Events. Per Lauren Berlant's analysis of the impasse sometimes we do not recognize an Event, its consequences, or the nature of our response to it. The plane of immanence only seems to allow for a subject-less subjectivity. It seems to be accessible only through extraordinary moments of living, but it is in the ordinary that the narrative of our living takes shape or unravels. Even when the Event we encounter is shattering or traumatic in magnitude, its consequences and disturbances force us to improvise every day, in waking moments, non-esoteric experiences and boring sobriety. Moreover when we do experience a momentary shattering of the self, we often feel it as a loss. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in Fitzgerald's stories this is often felt as a loss *only*. In Deleuze and Guattari's perspective the plane of immanence that does not consider individualities is assumed to be freeing, but it is only life that is being freed from the confines of subjectivity.

The plane of immanence cannot, therefore, be a true alternative to living-as-project: rather than presenting an individual life with no projects, it presents a life with no individuals. Fitzgerald explores, instead, resistances to transcendent structures from the subject's point of

view, rebellions towards the project of living that are firmly rooted in the individual. This perspective is subtly different from Deleuze's, and it gives us a more complex answer to why Deleuze fails to consider the sarcasm of "Handle With Care" and the bitter shift in tone of the last essay in the series. Sarcasm folds back on the self rather than de-individualizing it, and it is part of a general irritability or unhappiness that *requires* a subject aware of themselves. Even the "excessive" experiences mentioned in the quote require an awareness of the self, of a body against which we rebel. In "Immanence: A Life..", Deleuze cites the horrible grump of Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*: as he slips closer to death the people around him look for any sign of life or vitality and in the process grow fonder of him, which in turn makes him dimly happy. When he gradually gets better and regains full strength, he goes back to being terrible. Deleuze sees the moment of collapse of his person as the exact moment where *a life*, impersonal vitality and pure immanence, takes over. Yet the protagonist of Dickens' story is most himself when irritable, and his meanness points to a necessarily real subject. Loss, instability, frustration: it is in these moments that we *feel* the composition of our self more, like noticing the clothes we wear more when they itch. It is just then that we both break into pieces, and realize we had pieces in the first place. There we find the key to "The Crack-Up" series: the crack gives the plate awareness of itself just as it breaks.

We have seen how Fitzgerald attempts to shift his writing away from the impulse of linear narrative in favour of something closer to conducting music. This is, in itself, a failed operation: writing is neither music nor living. What remains is a movement *towards* both (as we saw in the delicate undercurrent of "Three Hours Between Planes"), an opening from narrative into the singularity of living that is mediated by a focus on the individual

experience. In this opening we find a multitude of composite everyday reactions to the Event that Deleuze's framework, in its de-individualizing effort, might overlook: sarcasm, silliness, anger, cynicism. These all appear in Fitzgerald's late stories through subjects who are suddenly made approximate and tentative by what happens to them, yet must continue living in the present through their composite self. We can see how the ordinary unhappiness of Dorothy Parker's "Coda", its futile resentment, also exemplifies this sudden awareness of the self brought on by failure and cracking. It is a realization of our boundaries, of the impossibility to step out of our body and be truly elsewhere- in fact Dorothy Parker characterizes hell as the only *other* place.

Fitzgerald's stories post 1936 work in this ambiguous, excessively present zone, that is neither life as a project nor a plane of immanence of pre-individual singularities. "The Lost Decade" (1939), published on *Esquire* twelve months before his death, is perhaps the most beautifully rendered picture of this space. It also illustrates in a remarkably clear way the terms of the problematic between life-as-project and plane of immanence that I have just set up. The story details a meeting between two men: Orrison Brown, a young journalist, and the mysterious Louis Trimble, who looks vaguely "otherworldly" (123) and appears to have been "out of civilization" for a decade (124). Tasked to take Trimble out for lunch by his boss, Brown becomes increasingly baffled by the man's strange demeanor and the bizarre list of things he wishes to see. Before they separate Trimble finally tells Brown that he has not been away, he was simply drunk for ten years. He has experienced that "excess" Deleuze describes as necessary to lay out the plane of immanence, and in the process he has lost subjectivity as

a stable, unifying function. He has become an Everyman, a nomadic and fortuitous self. We get a sense of this from his speech in the restaurant:

> "What do you want to see most?" Orrison asked, as they sat down.
>
> Trimble considered.
>
> "Well--the back of people's heads," he suggested. "Their necks--how their heads are joined to their bodies. I'd like to hear what those two little girls are saying to their father. Not exactly what they're saying but whether the words float or submerge, how their mouths shut when they've finished speaking. Just a matter of rhythm--Cole Porter came back to the States in 1928 because he felt that there were new rhythms around." (125)

Trimble wants to see movement and connections: of necks to heads, of words to mouths. He is not interested in "forms and their developments" (what *exactly* the girls are saying to their father) but in the "speeds and slownesses of sound particles" (Deleuze 1988, 123). His reference to the submergence or floating of sounds recalls the affective music sheet of "Three Acts of Music". As in that story, the emphasis on music goes hand in hand with a disavowal of meaning as an effective tool. In this monologue speaking is figured not as the act of an agent producing meaning, but as an affective relation of different velocities between mouth and air, sound and noise. Trimble is a knot in *a life* as anonymous puissance, immanent only to itself. He goes on to talk about "'the weight of spoons [...] so light. A little bowl with a stick attached" (125). This description, matching the way he talks of people's necks joining their heads, is positively Spinozian: he is able to see different modes of the same immanent

substance, of identifying common notions between bodies. Conversely Brown, a younger man interested in his career, is our avatar for living-as-project. He is even named after a colour, which Deleuze refers to as more "indicative of the [transcendent] plan" (1988, 124). Trimble's name recalls instead a trill, a vibrating sound.

In the passage above songwriting is once again mentioned, through Cole Porter, as an ephemeral but ever renewing art. Trimble makes the reference because, as the reader is close to finding out, he is an architect: a commercial artist, like the song lyricist or the writer of magazine stories. The lunch gets more confusing when he claims, before they leave the restaurant, that he'd like to see "the cast in that waiter's eye. I knew him once but he wouldn't remember me" (125). Brown adds that it would be hard for him to remember after ten years, but Trimble reveals he had dinner there a few months before. Sensing that this meeting is becoming "all kind of nutsy" (125), Brown scrambles to bring things back to normal by pointing out new buildings that Trimble might have missed while he was gone: Rockefeller Centre, the Chrysler and the Armistead. Trimble then reveals he designed the Armistead, but was "taken drunk that year- every-which-way drunk" (127). Now he has no interest in seeing it:

> "I've been in it--lots of times. But I've never seen it. And now it isn't what I want to see. I wouldn't ever be able to see it now. I simply want to see how people walk and what their clothes and shoes and hats are made of. And their eyes and hands. Would you mind shaking hands with me?"
>
> "Not at all, sir" (127)

The project of living prevented him from seeing the work he was designing, as he was alienated both from his desire for the good life and from his creative labour. His ability to see connections, to create immanence, has come at the loss of an individual and an artist. Yet it is important to note how in the course of a few paragraphs, the nature of what he wants to see begins to shift. First it is the relation or connection between things, between a mouth and the sound it makes. Then it becomes more specific and individualized, like the look in *that* waiter's eyes, who actually does seem to remember him. Finally he wants to see things that are common to all people, yet also singular for each person. Ways of walking, materials and fabrics of clothes, eyes and hands, and finally *one specific hand*, Orrison Brown's. From the horizon of the plane of immanence in which forces unfold and emerge anonymously, he is already beginning a process of individuation that remains tentative, that manifests as an excess in sensing the present. This excess is passed on to Brown who, after shaking the man's hand, watches him walk away:

> "Jesus," he said to himself. "Drunk for ten years."
>
> He felt suddenly the texture of his own coat and then he reached out and pressed his thumb against the granite of the building by his side. (127)

He immediately feels the need to confirm the things Trimble wanted to see: the fabric of his clothes, the feel of his own body. He touches the building Trimble built, which, unlike popular music, is made to withstand the passage of time and impose an order on it. In this sense it is the ultimate project, a symbol of pre-Depression prosperity and reassuring masculinity. His holding on to it is an attempt of holding on to the good life, to a young

man's belief that struggling will grant a prize. However, on a more fundamental level it is also the need to simply touch things, to truly *feel* his body by connecting it to an object. His meeting with Trimble has suddenly rendered the present a space felt in excess, enough that every touch becomes essential. In the encounter *something,* a singularity, has thrown itself together and overcharged this simple moment with affective force: what Kathleen Stewart calls the "rogue intensities [that] roam the streets of the ordinary" (2007, 44). The handshake between them, the key moment of intimate contact, is too powerful to be described: it is only mentioned in dialogue. So is the kiss between Donald and Nancy in "Three Hours Between Planes". Both are pure moments of immanence that cannot fully be brought into language, and moments of fundamental connection to the Other.

We recall the doubling movement, in Fitzgerald's late work, of reaching out and holding back. On one hand the cracking of the plate, the loss of the self; on the other a coming back to the body, a self-reflective awareness, even a turn to self-centredness. "The Lost Decade" seems to represent this double movement through its two characters, yet in each we find a germ of the other, a moment of transference brought on by the encounter. On a first reading it appears that Brown is the only one changed by the affective weight of the present. Yet even Trimble, the Deleuzian Everyman who lost himself and accessed *a life*, shifts from the impersonal to the individuated: Brown's hand, the touch and feel of a specific body to his own. The encounter opens, then, a momentary space which both characters can access. They are united by the experience of living without a genre, of slipping by and through Events that do not break us apart forever, but push us along the everyday. The space opened in this encounter is not the plane of immanence: it is personal, momentary, and ordinary. There is no

concrete change in the characters' lives, only a shift in perspective that we can assume to be temporary. Nothing changes at the end of "Three Acts of Music" or of Dorothy Parker's "Coda", the grumpy Northern Star of this reflection. Fitzgerald's late work does not suggest the possibility of a true alternative to life-as-project. It is interested in exploring the points of otherness and singularity contained within the ordinary, that gesture towards the unfulfilled possibility of something else.

His stories focus on the ordinary present as a zone of potentiality and *necessary ongoingness*, that pushes any Event into "something that has not found its genre" (Berlant, 64). It is in the everyday that the Event actualizes and reverberates, that we adapt and improvise while attending to the impasse. The perceived ordinary is both constructed by social and ideological forces, *and* a prephilosophical space of intimacy and interaction in which necessarily real (if constructed) subjects move and stumble. That means that while it may be conceptual, it refuses to be fully conceptualized. Philosophy is "a constructivism", a "laying out of a plane" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 36), and in its constructivist effort it is maybe ill-suited to understand the ordinary not as "something to make sense of, but a set of sensations that incite" (Stewart, 93). Literature can explore these sensations without giving them an answer, negotiating the organizing impulse of narrative with the parts of living that resist organization.

In this sense, another living cannot be written: writing remains and thrives in this ambiguous openness. The coda and the impasse take effect when we realize that living as a project is no longer sustainable, yet while they run counter to life as a project, they cannot form a stable

alternative plane that can be constructed. They cannot provide an alternate theory of living that is impermeable to the excessive presence of the present: that would be a project in itself, another attempt to bear life with a certain shape. Once Fitzgerald becomes unsatisfied with the narrative project of living, he uses the narrative form to try and approach a living that naturally resists narration, that resists language and structure. Paradoxically, the encounter must fail in order to succeed. It must change nothing in order to produce this delicate kind of art. In this context we can see that the futility of our unhappiness towards living is not an obstacle, but a necessary component. The space of the ordinary is naturally proximate to failure, and *must* remain close to failure.

As we have seen, the characters in Fitzgerald's stories often fail to change in the conventional sense, as an act of clear and self-transparent agency. There are no clean breaks: to live in the coda is instead to repeat your core themes, your fundamental patterns, with variations and adjustments. At times these variations introduce new material, but it might be material you have not chosen, with a mysterious source and an unknown use. This opens the subject to a host of possible reactive positions, of affective moments. It opens the ordinary present as a scene of dynamic, intimate immanence. The answer to whether or not there can be another living must, therefore, remain tentative and vulnerable to unpredictable singularities. Perhaps there can be another living only sometimes, in ephemeral interactions and impressions, after a strange business lunch or an ordinary dance with our spouse. Whenever we are stumbling and failing, or swinging along approximately.

Conclusion, or coda

> Everything left unframed by the stories of what makes a life pulses at the edges of things. (Stewart, 44)

The last four chapters have explored the questions I first posed in the introduction: why must life be a project, and how does it crack us? What happens to our self when it collides with an Event? What happens after we have cracked? And is it possible to find another living? We have seen how the structure of a capitalist system configures life as a hierarchical, transcendent plan, forcing the subject to endlessly struggle and defining the struggling as necessary. Our relation of cruel optimism to this kind of living is what can potentially cause us to crack, shattering the narrative structure of our life and making it unable to hold a shape. The nature of our response to this collision is complex and unpredictable. It might first appear that the self can react in two ways, either fully cracking under the weight of an Event or attempting to embrace the crack's nature. Yet even when the Event we meet is defined and recognizable, the ongoingness and urgency of the perceived everyday modifies it, opening a space of constant negotiation between the crack and the self. This zone of "living after" has been defined as the coda or impasse and it has been located in the ordinary, a site of potentiality and connection that offers moments of otherness within our living.

However the last question, of whether another living is possible, has only offered a compromise: a temporary midway point between the plane of immanence and the transcendent plan, an ineffable moment of connection and emergence. It seems as if another

living cannot be constructed in a systematic way within the subject's horizon of agency. So if we are locked like Dorothy Parker in "this living", is going to hell our only option? Must we be unhappy all the time, confined to ordinary unhappiness? I am not ready to suggest that all life is misery, but I am interested in considering more deeply the role that negative feelings play in our narratives. I have previously suggested that the question of living is an inherently literary one. The frustration and dissatisfaction we sometimes feel towards living is perhaps indicative of a deeper, molecular form of revolt towards linear narrative as a whole: the narrative of our day with its tasks to be achieved, the linear narrative of time marching by, even the narrative of life proceeding year after year towards an inevitable end. This feeling of despondency, of powerful unruliness, does not necessarily amount to a change in life, but it can push us to investigate and question its structure. This investigation can be sombre and angry, like Fitzgerald's "Crack-Up", or it can be silly and satirical as Parker's "Coda". Both pieces play with and mistreat their form, recognizing the limitations of writing from within its confines in the same way we protest living from the limited view of our body. They illuminate the parts of living that, as Kathleen Stewart puts it, pulse "at the edges" of narrative and language, unbearable and wild.

What first struck me about Parker's poem was its ability to enclose a thorny, uneasy message inside a neat poetic formula. It is the contrast between them that gives the poem an angry energy, which never explodes. It is important that the poem can also seem quite sad: this disrupts the notion that negative feelings like frustration, sadness or depression cannot contain vitality, power, and even laughter. "Coda" is funny in a way that might make us uneasy, that makes us want to protest its message. We sometimes flinch at what makes us

unhappy or melancholic, but not all unhappiness is the same. Some unhappiness runs along a volcanic crack, it teeters on the edge of disruption. It threatens to dismantle the most basic systems organizing our living, the stories we tell in order to get by. Unhappiness is therefore a powerful and necessary tool for questioning order, hierarchy, transcendent structures. In the context of literature, the tension between the narrative and linguistic forms that create writing and a sense of frustration towards *all* narrative can produce a truly unique kind of art. The neat rhyming scheme of "Coda" is what underlines the negativity of its content, and what keeps it from being extinguished. The form limits the content, but in doing so it also creates it, opening a space of conflict and action that can never be closed.

The writing analysed in this essay also indicates that perhaps happiness does not have to be a necessary end goal for a living still full of potentiality, of connection with others. As Sara Ahmed notes, unhappiness is always possible, "which makes the necessity of happiness an exclusion not just of unhappiness but of possibility" (218-19). That does not mean, however, that possibility and connection can only come from unhappiness. In *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze concludes, at the end of his analysis of "The Crack-Up", that "anything that is good and great in humanity enters and exits [through the crack] in people ready to destroy themselves" (160). This focuses, once again, on the extreme rather than the ordinary. If we move to the space of the everyday we can see that it is precisely when people are *not* ready to destroy themselves, when they must continue to live and create, that something great can occur. That something great is simply ordinary living itself, as an ever-renewing negotiation between ourselves and our narratives, ourselves and our cracks. In that expanded cadence, that coda, we make our living and swing our tunes.

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