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Making Nothing Happen: The Transition from Reactive Nihilism to Affirmation in Jim Jarmusch's *Broken Flowers* (2005)

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Broken Flowers is about a man named Don Johnston (played by Bill Murray) who receives an anonymous letter from one of his former lovers telling him that, after their relationship ended, she discovered that she was pregnant with Don's child. She states that she decided to keep the child, but had omitted to tell Don about it at the time. Nineteen years later, her son, she suspects, has gone on a road trip to look for his father. Urged on by his neighbour and friend Winston, Don embarks on his own road trip across America to find the mother of his son. *Broken Flowers* is ostensibly a road movie; it contains many formal elements that associate it with this genre, such as the inevitable focus on the act of driving and a fetishisation of the car itself, wide panning shots of open landscape and a narrative that serves as an allegory of the quest for meaning or selfhood. However, director Jim Jarmusch uses these elements knowingly and ironically. The act of driving is presented as a repetitious activity and there is little differentiation between one day and the next; the vehicle that Don drives is not one of sleek beauty and speed—he describes himself as a "stalker in a Taurus"; the travelling shots of open landscape suggest urban banality and sameness rather than the awe-inspiring and sublime elements that are associated with the road movie; additionally, the use of music lends a comic tone to the absurd and futile quest on which this aging Don Juan has embarked. [1] Perhaps predictably, Don discovers nothing about his hypothetical son and the anonymous letter-writer. On one level, then, *Broken Flowers* can be read as an absurd quest or road movie; on another level, it is clear that the world of the film is an example of D.N. Rodowick's interpretation of Gilles Deleuze's "*espace spiritual*" (*Cinema 2* 120) as a "philosophical" space (*After-Images* 106). Within the structure of the road movie, Jarmusch posits and explores both existential and ethical dilemmas. This article will provide an interpretation of *Broken Flowers* as a study of choice as a mode of living. Through his experience on the road, Don must become the man who "chooses to choose" (*Cinema 2* 171) and to affirm *this* life through chance and becoming. The film is also, in terms of both form and content, a study in apathy, boredom and passive resistance to change and creativity; indeed, in *Broken Flowers* Jarmusch takes to an extreme the formula of "making nothing happen" that characterises so much of his previous work. In order to contextualise and problematise these themes, this reading of the film will draw readily from Deleuze's interpretation of the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and, in particular, from his reading of the concepts of nihilism, passivism and affirmation in the "eternal return".

Notably, in his books on cinema Deleuze only examines a selective group of American filmmakers (John Cassavetes, Shirley Clarke and Stanley Kubrick), but remains mostly unenthusiastic about the films produced in the 1970s by directors such as Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese, whom he regards as purveyors of a particular style: one of parody and irony. Aside from the cinema of Cassavetes, Clarke and Kubrick, Deleuze does not view American cinema as one of "time" and "thought". It would seem that, as a result of Deleuze's own neglect of American cinema, his relevance to contemporary cinema has also been somewhat overlooked. Yet, the work of a filmmaker such as Jim Jarmusch, which engages with notions of cinematic time, crisis, stasis and identity, would seem to correlate naturally with Deleuze's thought. Although there have been a number of excellent publications on Jarmusch's work (notably by Juan A. Suárez) this aspect of his work remains underdeveloped. While parody and irony would seem apposite descriptive terms for a film such as *Broken Flowers*, a close textual reading reveals it to be far more philosophical and complex, as questions of responsibility and self-creation loom large in this film. Furthermore, while Deleuze's writing is certainly post Sartrean, or what we could term broadly existential, the latter portion of *Cinema 2* and, more specifically, his radical and positive interpretation of Nietzsche's thought offer rich and productive responses to existential issues such as belief in the world and subjectivity. For this reason, Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche illuminates a film such as *Broken Flowers* on multiple levels and helps to reveal the creative possibilities that lie beyond, and yet that are implicated within, the film's seemingly nihilistic diegetic world. I would further argue, then, that contrary to the somewhat pessimistic scholarly and critical stance that has been taken with regard to contemporary American independent cinema, which delineates it as a cinema that is very much in a state of crisis (and thus correlates neatly with Deleuze's own assessment of American cinema), a film such as *Broken Flowers* is exemplary of a new kind of cinema that is emerging on the independent scene: one of time, thought and becoming.

The Diminished Life: Reactive Nihilism and Passivity

The crisis in *Broken Flowers* is one of middle age—the problem of dealing with the effect of time's passing and the urgency placed on life's affirmative possibilities as a result. As a study in the duration of existence, *Broken Flowers* functions as a time-image in and of itself (that is, as a cinema in which movement is subordinated to time and time as a disruptive force becomes apparent). Don is compared to younger men throughout the film, often to his disadvantage. Jarmusch links time's passing both to the liminality of middle age and to the act of waiting for something rather than nothing to happen. On a formal level, Don's crisis is manifest through visual "symptoms" that strongly remind the viewer of Deleuze's description of the breakdown of the action image (most notably the form of the trip or ballad and the loosening of action). In fact, Don's crisis is one of passivity. However, to link him to the figure of Deleuze's "seer" (*Cinema 2* 2), who sees further than he can act, would be erroneous for Don is beyond this. It is not that he does not know how to act in response to the world around him, but that he makes a concerted effort not to have any response at all (we see this in his non-responsive conversations with Winston). In this sense, the only thing he does actively is to resist change. Consequently, his life has become an endless repetition of the same (even his address connotes this: "Circle Drive, Center City"). As we will see, Jarmusch plays on this theme of repetition of

the same through the use of a series of similar shots that visually imply the stultifying nature of Don's existence (to borrow Suárez's description, Don has become one more "thing" amongst "things" (150)). The main part of the film, then, maps Don's painfully slow realisation that his life is going nowhere, but that he can do something about it. The cinematic world of *Broken Flowers*, as well as Don himself, must be drawn into movement. This is the true journey the film takes the viewer on.



***Broken Flowers*: Don (Bill Murray) busy doing nothing**

In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, originally written in 1962*,* Deleuze delineates between two forms of nihilism which lead to complete passivity:

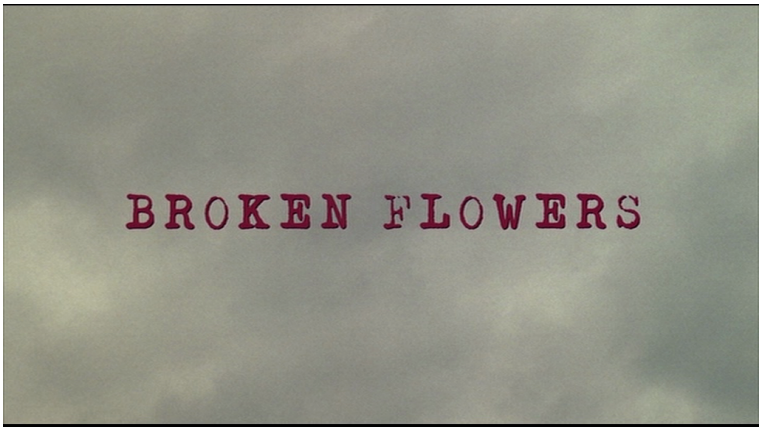
> Nihil *in* "*nihilism*" *means negation as quality of the will to power*. . . nihilism signifies the value of nil taken on by life, the fiction of higher values which give it this value and the will to nothingness which is expressed in these higher values. Nihilism has a second, more colloquial sense. It no longer signifies a will but a reaction. The supersensible world and higher values are reacted against, their existence is denied, they are refused all validity. . . only life remains, but it is still a depreciated life which now continues a world without values, stripped of meaning and purpose, sliding ever further towards its nothingness. . . The first sense is a *negative nihilism*; the second sense a *reactive nihilism* (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 139-140 emphasis in original).

It is not the first mode of nihilism that we see embodied in the figure of Don Johnston (he does not deny or debase life on the basis of a set of higher values or a higher world/existence), but the second. Don seems to be someone for whom nothing has any value or meaning. He occupies a superficial world in which self and surface blend seamlessly; indeed, Jarmusch's low-key lighting serves the purpose of blending character and background together. Furthermore, the cinematic world here is riddled with archetypal characters that populate a world of pure exteriority. Tellingly, though, Don's interior life seems to be as empty as his exterior one: he leads a depreciated form of life (as non-existence) or, as Suárez notes, one of "diminished expectations" (150).

Don's state of lethargic apathy is similar to Deleuze's description of the modern protagonist who is struck by something "intolerable" in the banality of "everyday" existence and is no longer concerned with "love" and "life" (*Cinema 2* 165). Ronald Bogue reiterates that, for the Deleuzian modern cinematic character, "[t]he world is a bad movie, an endless series of banalities and clichés, platitudes and vacuous opinions" (*After-Images* 122). Deleuze writes of man's sudden awareness of clichés that affects the possibility of belief in the world as a symptom of crisis. The cliché, as Deleuze delineates, is an image that is simplified and purely functional; as a form of cultural shorthand, it can be assimilated without reflection and precipitates action, for we always know how to respond to it. When the perfunctory nature of the cliché, as one of the ways we invest meaning in the world, is made apparent, something ridiculous or even "intolerable" (*Cinema 2* 17) surfaces and man's automatic interaction with the world through daily routine falters. This revelation about routine and the cliché amounts to a realisation that both things exist, to a certain extent, because of man's fear of a void of meaning. It is this exposure of meaninglessness at the heart of supposedly meaningful human activity that is the "intolerable and unbearable" (*Cinema 2* 17) thing that renders all subsequent human action questionable.

Jarmusch seems to play on a similar notion to this by replacing the traditional cinematic narrative in which every element is meaningful with a clichéd pro-filmic world in which everything is meaningless and any attempt to "read" significance into things is thwarted continually. The film's opening sequence seems to confront directly the film viewer's ingrained desire to understand the world according to human need. However, in spite of setting up the viewer's expectations by suggesting the themes of destiny and fate, Jarmusch undermines this through certain formal choices and cinematic techniques. From the outset, the pink letter that will inform Don that he is a father is involved in a chain of events that seem to suggest destiny or fate. By using a trope associated with the melodrama and murder mystery genres, namely the concealment of identity (we only see a gloved hand posting the letter), Jarmusch establishes from the outset a mystery that begs to be solved according to classical cinematic tradition. The path of the letter is traced through its transportation to the postal sorting office where it is moved through a series of mechanical belts and levers. Eventually, the audience infers that the letter has been sent by airmail as the scene cuts to an aeroplane taking off into a grey sky. Although this opening sequence is precisely edited to ensure fluid movement, it is subtly undermined by Jarmusch's violation of screen direction, by his focus on an open sky over which the film's title appears, and by his choice of music. Objects that enter or exit from screen left or right are seen re-entering the frame from the same position but in the opposite direction, which suggests erasure of movement rather than the development of a smooth trajectory and narrative progression: this "movement" actually leads nowhere. Jarmusch's use of a clouded sky to introduce the film's title—something that occurs after a momentary black out—connotes opacity. The song that is heard over this opening section of the film foretells both the lack of resolution to the film's mystery and the inability to pin the world down to any obvious meaning. At the moment the film's title appears, Holly Go lightly sings the words: "I tried to see through the skies, but the clouds were there blocking out the sun", as though to hint that Don's quest or trip will be an absurd one that does not lead to resolution. Jarmusch suggests that, however much the audience may try to read meaning and order into the diegetic world, it will always remain unfathomable. This inclusion of a shot of open sky stands as a moment of pure void, which reminds one of Deleuze's delineation

of the difference between clichés and purely optical images that exceed the grasp of comprehension. Here, this image breaks with the previous sequence that had suggested pre-ordained meaning and enchained activity.



***Broken Flowers*: the open sky shot**

Deleuze states that the "subtle" way out of the intolerable situation of the world of clichés is to believe, in spite of all its absurd aspects, in *this* world and not some higher, ideal one. Rodowick writes of the conclusion that Deleuze draws that "the fundamental ethical choice is to believe in this world and its powers of transformation" (*After-Images* 99). This is to say that we must move beyond the quotidian or familiar towards the unfathomable in order to recognise once more the very possibilities that life can offer us. Ultimately, for Deleuze cinema must show belief in the modern world with all of its potential for renewal and discovery (*Cinema 2* 166). The rite of passage at stake in *Broken Flowers* is Don's transformation into an "active" man; in Deleuzian terms, nihilism and the value of nil must be negated through the eternal return (as the return of difference), for only difference and becoming can be affirmed in this process. As we will see, the very structure of *Broken Flowers* is cyclical, but what returns in this process is not a form of confirmation of the same, but the possibility of a new mode of existence. It also requires a reaffirmation of life's absurdity. It would seem that, at the film's outset, the world's indifference to human need (the awareness of which Deleuze attributes to the modern cinematic protagonist) has given Don justification to become indifferent to himself and others. In opposition to this, Deleuze, taking his cue from Nietzsche, states: "[t]hat the universe has no purpose, that it has no end to hope for any more than it has causes to be known—this is the certainty necessary to play well" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 25). Deleuze is referring to the act of rolling a dice as a metaphor for the affirmation of chance (an act that he opposes to the wager which is merely deciding between two existing options) and it is this affirmation of chance and life's possibilities that is lacking in the figure of Don. In Nietzschean terms, Don is a man of *ressentiment* because he has allowed himself to become a victim through his passivity: everything happens *to* him, yet he refuses to act in order to change anything about his situation (later on in the film, he will remind Penny, one of his ex-girlfriends, that it was she who left him). Deleuze writes of the man of *ressentiment*: "The term 'passive' stands for the triumph of reaction, the moment when, ceasing to be acted, it becomes *ressentiment*. The man of

ressentiment does not know how to and does not want to love, but wants to be loved" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 110). Don does not seem to understand why his romances fail continually, yet it is clear to the viewer that his passivity and indifference close him off from the possibility of connecting with another human being in any meaningful way. In the scene in which Sherry leaves him, the camera is positioned in line with Don; Don is framed in profile and Sherry (played by Julie Delpy) appears as a non-descript outline in the top left-hand section of the frame. Jarmusch eschews the use of rack focus so that she appears as an adumbration of a female figure, a strategy which implies that she is replaceable and that she does not impinge on Don's consciousness at this point. One can infer that Don is unaware that she is leaving him until it is too late.

If the cinematic cliché of the "break-up" scene is played out as a non-event in *Broken Flowers*, what follows is a series of scenes in which the idea of "making nothing happen" is taken to its very limit. As stated earlier, crisis is evidenced initially in the film in a manner that is reminiscent of Deleuze's description of the breakdown of the action-image due to Don's extreme passivity. Notably, though, these "symptoms" do not give way to any positive development in this initial section of the film, such as an affirmative "thought of the outside" (*Cinema 2* 164) that strengthens the link to *this* world. After Sherry has left Don, he sits on his own in the living room, drinks champagne and listens to Marvin Gaye. Undoubtedly, this scene is staged for comic effect: the romantic routine is overblown and embarrassing, as Don has nobody to "court". This markedly hackneyed scenario merely serves to emphasise the fact that Don is alone once again, but as a study in stillness it also has an excruciating effect upon the viewer. The scene opens with a lengthy close-up on a vase of wilting pink roses, the petals of which are dropping off; there is then a cut to a mid-shot of Don sitting on the sofa with a full glass of champagne in front of him; a further cut into a close-up of the champagne in the glass reveals the effervescent bubbles in the drink. Notably, during the held mid-shot of Don sitting on the sofa, he makes a hesitant gesture as though he might pick up the champagne glass, but then decides against it. Due to the fact that this scene is altogether still, this tiny gesture is thrown into relief. Don is someone for whom the smallest or most insignificant initiative is too much. As a figure on screen, he is characterised in the negative: by what he *does not do*. Throughout the duration of this scene the Marvin Gaye song serves as diegetic music, the lyrics of which seem to chastise Don directly: "Don't play with something, you should cherish for life. Don't you want to care? Ain't it lonely out there?" The viewer may well read some meaning into the message of this song and its significance for Don, but it seems to have no impact on him directly (indeed, it seems rather bizarre that he has chosen to listen to it); Don remains a thoroughly inscrutable character to the viewer. This relentless focus on objects (that seem to possess more life than the main character here) renders this scene of seduction ridiculous and lends it a meaning quite apart from its status as a cliché or a hackneyed scenario. Clearly, the song, the flowers and the drink are all part of a ritual that has worn thin. The emphasis on inactivity, the focus on objects that force the spectator to look for longer than he/she normally would and the characterisation of Don as someone who merely stares and seems to be unresponsive or unable to react to his environment link this scene with Deleuze's description of the breakdown of the action-image. In Deleuzian terms, the long static shots of these objects strip them of their clichéd status and recuperate them as objects that take on a life of their own—the flowers register the passing of time because they are seen to be wilting and the movement of the bubbles in the champagne glass undercuts the stillness of this

scene. It is as though Don's world carries on despite his inactivity and his reluctance to change his situation. He may be "one more thing amongst things" (Suárez 145), but his environment, divested of its usual meaning as seductive setting, seems marginally more alive than he does.

Don's passivity is also evident in his extreme reluctance to embark on the road trip; indeed, he is a thoroughly resistant neophyte in his own rite of passage. It is Winston who enables the trip by planning Don's journey, renting him a car and finding out the addresses of all his former lovers. Don is perhaps right to assume that the trip will prove to be a "farce" and that he will find out nothing; however, the issue at stake, as we know, is not finding a solution to the mystery at the heart of the film's narrative but, rather, to introduce movement and difference in Don's life. Throughout the earlier part of the film, Jarmusch inserts several graphic matches between various scenes of Don sitting or sleeping on his sofa. The implication of these graphic matches is clearly that Don never leaves his home and never does anything different. Winston urges Don to see the letter as a sign of the direction in which his life is heading. The main section of the film, in which Don goes to see five of his former girlfriends, has a cyclical structure. As we will see, Jarmusch deliberately emphasises the repetitive nature of Don's road trip by using a limited repertoire of shots; additionally, the landscape that Don drives through is not particularly varied, even though we can surmise that he has crossed quite some distance because he has to take internal air flights to reach the different destinations. The recurrent musical motif in Mulatu Astatke's music, which accompanies most of the road trip, also serves to heighten the effect of recurrence. While this structure clearly serves as a form of parody or commentary on the repetitive and dull nature of Don's existence up until this point, it also, as a form that evokes Deleuze's reading of the Nietzschean eternal return, breaks the cycle of repetition and inserts movement, chance and possibility into Don's life. He may not be able to change the effect his actions have had on others and on himself in the past, but he can accept the possibility of the new and the affirmative in the present. As we will see, by the film's conclusion Don has undergone a subtle but important shift in his outlook on life and Jarmusch offers the viewer significant visual clues that are suggestive of this change.

The Eternal Return and The Affirmative Life

In the main part of the film, a visual symmetry is found in the scenes in which Don travels to his former lovers' houses. This is especially unusual for a road movie, a genre that emphasises the connection between geographical and personal progression. From the outset of the road trip, Jarmusch suggests that this "quest" will lead nowhere. For three of the sections, Jarmusch uses a cluster of staple shots of an aeroplane taking off into a grey sky in which the aircraft is seen travelling from left to right; it is quite conceivable that this is the same shot used four times (including the shot of the aeroplane in the film's opening sequence) but carefully edited to look like four separate occasions. The aeroplane travels in the same direction each time, the sky is exactly the same hue and there are always two transmission poles on the right-hand side of the screen. Once Don is inside his rental car, his journey is always conveyed through the same series of shots; these sequences, taken together, consist of: seven profile shots of Don driving taken from the car's interior; ten frontal mid-shots of Don driving taken from the car's interior; eight close-ups of Winston's maps and CD or Don putting the CD into the radio system;

seventeen stationary point-of-view shots of roads (either freeways or residential lanes) taken from the car's interior; seven panning shots from Don's point of view that start from the car's left-side wing mirror and move to face the road from inside the car; six objective landscape shots of sections of freeway or houses (that are all prefabricated modern buildings); seven shots of the car either approaching or driving away from the stationary camera; five exterior travelling shots of Don in the car (usually on the freeway); and five over-the-shoulder shots of Don, whose eyes can be seen in the rear-view mirror, looking at the map.

This effect of repetition and mirroring is accentuated by Jarmusch's use of the rhythmically-driven music of Ethiopian jazz musician Mulatu Astatke. Astatke's music is characterised by minor modes and recurring themes and variations played in a consistent rhythmic pattern. Jarmusch is deliberately selective with the musical score in order to emphasise its repetitive refrains. Although at least two separate pieces of Astatke's compositions are used, it is only after multiple viewings that it is possible to decipher the subtle differences between these sections of music. The instrumentation of jazz organ and tenor saxophone is a constant, and the key is always predominantly minor, but not morosely so. The pieces are composed of a distinct theme that is then repeated through the use of slight variation. Interestingly, there is a clash between the more buoyant, recurring chords of the organ and the expressive minor refrain of the saxophone that never leads to a melodic resolution. Jarmusch uses Astatke's music to compliment the themes of the film: repetition, the mysterious, inchoate nature of the world and the inevitable lack of resolution to what one is seeking. The lasting effect of these scenes of transition is one of indecipherability; taken as a group, there is little differentiation between them. The landscape remains resolutely urban throughout (either large, anonymous sections of motorway or equally non-descript sections of suburbia). Furthermore, these moments of transition or liminality are given nearly as much screen time as Don's reunions with his former lovers and, while the meetings are characterised by a certain amount of repetitious, ritualistic routine, these moments of transition reinforce the theme of punishment through reiteration and cumulative effect. Indeed, Don's reunions with his former lovers are constructed out of similar shots that help to reflect the uncomfortable atmosphere Don's presence creates. In particular, Jarmusch uses the shot/countershot technique to suggest division between the characters as well as a mounting feud. Indeed, these scenes grow increasingly acrimonious and, on his final encounter, Don is knocked unconscious. In terms of the rite of passage, these encounters clearly constitute a set of trials for Don that should prepare him for the next stage in his life. In Deleuzian terms, though, it is not the case that Don must pass to a new stage in his life but that he must undergo a transformation from a man of *ressentiment* and passivity to a more affirmative and active way of thinking, which in turn requires a new set of values: "The reversal of values and the establishment of active values are all operations which presuppose the transmutation of values, the conversion of the negative into affirmation" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 166). According to Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche, the affirmative value is embodied in the "Overman". Deleuze writes: "affirmation is only manifested above man, outside man, in the Overman which it produces and in the unknown that it brings with it. But the superhuman, the unknown, is also the whole which drives out the negative" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 167). The Overman does not designate dominance, but superiority to man because "man", for Nietzsche and by extension Deleuze, is habitually tied to reaction and the nihilistic impulse: "*Ressentiment*, bad conscience and nihilism are not psychological traits but the foundation of humanity in man" (*Nietzsche and*

Philosophy 60). To break with this negativity, man must undergo a transmutation and the negative must be transformed into the affirmative. In doing this, he becomes the Overman. It would be too bold a claim to state that Don Johnston becomes an example of the Overman by the conclusion of *Broken Flowers*, but he does undergo a subtle transformation through his "cyclical" road trip that allows him to review the world's opacity and indifference to man's needs in an affirmative way.

If this reading of *Broken Flowers* is accepted, it is possible to draw an analogy between the cyclical structure of the film and Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return as the return of difference: "The eternal return is not the permanence of the same, the equilibrium state or the resting place of the identical. It is not the same or the 'one' which comes back in the eternal return but return is itself the one which ought to belong to diversity and to that which differs" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 43). In opposition to traditional readings of the eternal return, Deleuze states that what returns is not "the same" but "difference" and "diversity" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 43). He states that to will the eternal return is to make two levels of selection: the first selection being the necessity of willing every action again and the second being the negation of negativity itself. The initial level of willing is highly selective already: the affirmative man shall will life-enhancing properties that enable becoming; yet, it is in the second form of willing that the negative is eradicated, for the eternal return of the negative is illogical. Deleuze writes: "Only the eternal return can complete nihilism *because it makes negation a negation of reactive forces themselves*" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 65 emphasis in original). Nihilism as a life-value can never be affirmed through the eternal return because it self-destructs within this process: "However far they go, however deep the becoming-reactive of forces, reactive forces will not return. In and through the eternal return negation as a quality of the will to power transmutes itself into affirmation of negation itself" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 66). Furthermore, for Nietzsche, the transmutation of the negative into the affirmative way of life is also a confirmation of the creation of values; this, of course, does not mean the creation of a higher set of values from which we judge and depreciate life, but the creation of values that honour life in spite of its absurdity; it urges us to create values that are enhancing to life: "To affirm is to create [values], not to bear, put up with or accept" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 175). Through the affirmative life, a greater sense of urgency is placed on the passing of time as indivisible *durèe*. To affirm is also to recognise becoming and to open oneself up to the possibilities offered by creativity and the thought of the outside. For Don, it is a question of acknowledging the potential of difference and the genuinely new. His statement to the young man, who has proved to be the most promising candidate for his "son", that "the past is gone and the future is not here yet, so this is all we have" seems to reflect the importance of the passing of the present moment. Deleuze, following on from Nietzsche, states that: "To *affirm is not to take responsibility for, to take on the burden of what is, but to release, to set free what lives*" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 174 emphasis in original). Don cannot really atone for his former actions; his travels through the "sheets" of his past (to use Deleuzian terminology) have merely revealed to him that he has made the same mistakes continually; by acknowledging that the past is unchangeable and that the future is really conceptual, he opens himself up to the possibility of *difference* within the passing present: "That the present moment is not a moment of being or of present 'in the strict sense', that it is the passing moment, *forces* us to think of becoming, but to think of it precisely as what could not have started, and cannot finish, becoming" (*Nietzsche and*

Philosophy 44). There are certain visual clues that Jarmusch gives to the film viewer to suggest Don's subtle, but affirmative, transformation.

The formal manner in which Jarmusch presents this last section of the film suggests that Don's awareness of the absurdity and opacity of life has led him to reaffirm its possibilities and his own potential. This reading proposes that Don chooses to believe in *this* world and its possibility, then. Ronald Bogue, developing Deleuze's discussion of the necessity to believe in this world, states that: "[t]hose who choose to choose affirm the possible" (*After-Images* 121). Fundamentally, the issue at stake here is the choice between two modes of life: that of the man who refuses to believe in anything and therefore chooses nihilism and that of the man who chooses to affirm life and thus creates values that honour life lived in the becoming of the present moment. Through his road trip, Don has reencountered his past in all its depressing banality and repetitiveness; he has had life's essential meaninglessness reconfirmed to him, but, just as he seems to be reneging on his altered outlook, he has an encounter that encourages him to believe in life's opacity as a form of chance. This encounter gives Don a chance to think differently about his life. Deleuze writes of the change in consciousness: "The phrase 'a new way of thinking' means an affirmative thought, a thought which affirms life and the will to life, a thought which finally expels the whole of the negative; to believe in the innocence of the past and the future, to believe in the eternal return" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 33). At this point in the film, Don has just returned from his road trip and berates Winston for sending him out on a farcical errand; Don claims he simply wants to go back to leading his life, yet it is at this very moment that he sees the young man who proves to be the most promising contender as his hypothetical son. Don buys the boy a sandwich and strikes up a conversation with him; he finds out that the boy likes "philosophy and girls" and Don tellingly replies to him that he *was* into "computers and girls". Despite the fact that Don has just proclaimed that he wants to go back to leading his old way of life to Winston, he then describes his life in the past tense to this young man. Furthermore, this seems to be the most intimate and open encounter Don has had with any individual in some time. In view of this, the last shot in the film seems significant.

Throughout the film, Jarmusch has used a repertoire of shots to connote sameness and the mundane. The opening shot of one scene will often mirror the closing shot of the previous scene (for example, the shots of Don sleeping on his sofa) and the effect of this is an annihilation of time's passing. In effect, Don's repetitive existence seems set up to deny the fact of time's passing: one day is exactly the same as the next. Similarly, the main body of the film is constructed out of shots of echo and refrain, which all denote self-sameness, repetition and, above all, stasis. Even though *Broken Flowers* can be broadly characterised as a road movie, there is very little movement within the diegesis. This is because Don is such an intransigent character, so resistant to change, that he is passively transported along: we may see landscape passing outside his car window, but within the car the atmosphere is stifling and claustrophobic. Indeed, Don's facial features even very rarely move. In addition, Jarmusch's camera often remains static: it either captures movement from inside the car or remains stationary outside of the vehicle and shows it entering or exiting the frame. The final shot of the film, however, stands in notable and stark contrast to its main body. As Don stands at a set of crossroads, Jarmusch's camera pans around him in a circular shot; of course, the crossroads are a traditional visual motif for indicating a point of crisis in someone's life and this is precisely what Don faces at the end of

the film. Moreover, the ring is an established symbol in folklore for marriage, fidelity and commitment; arguably, Don may also be considering the possibility of marrying Sherry here. For Deleuze, the only solution to the crisis of the modern protagonist who "no longer believes in love and life" is a stubborn insistence on belief in *this* world and all of its potential all the same; similarly, Don has had the absurdity of the world confirmed to him (something that typifies his outlook on the world from the film's outset), but it would seem his consciousness or realisation of this has shifted by the film's conclusion. If *this* is all we have, as he points out at the end of the film, one has to make the most of it by honouring life's unpredictability, by accepting chance, by affirming life. The crisis that Don faces at the end of the narrative is altogether different from that which he faces at the film's opening. He is between multiple paths: he has to become the man who chooses to choose. In Deleuzian terms, the only affirmative choice is to live *this* life.

Notes

[1] The character of Don Johnston is likened to the figure of Don Juan throughout the film; indeed, it could be argued that Jarmusch is exploring the notion of unqualified freedom in the pursuit of maximum quantity set forth in Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). If this is the case, it is clear that Jarmusch takes a tempered view to this philosophy, as Camus himself did in his later publications such as *The Plague* (1947).

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