

Proust According to Deleuze. An Ecology of Literature

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Abstract

This article, originally published in French in *Les Temps Modernes* 2013/5 n ° 676, pp.155-177, is interested in Gilles Deleuze's appropriation of formalism and, following the three versions of Proust and the signs (1964, 1970 and 1976), to the transformations that he subjected it following his meeting with Felix Guattari in 1969. The regime of interpretation, certainly Nietzschean, but still significant in 1964, gives place in 1970 to a regime of experimentation, transversality, which, with its pragmatic and ecological dimensions, completely modifies the status of the experience, the sign and the formalisms. The machine, as mode of experience and production of meaning, replaces the structure. It is no longer a matter of restoring a unity by interpreting a world of fragments, but of experimenting it transversally to affirm the irreducible singularity of the fragments to the totality. With this dynamic of the rhizome, the heterogeneity of encounter implies an ethology that refers to a map of affects. It is therefore a question of approaching the signs in their effects, that is to say in the processes of individuation. In such a way that semiotics become political and clinical issues.

The debate of Gilles Deleuze with the formalism is constant. It animates his thought from his first sharp drawings that contract philosophical systems around cores of consistency resolutely synchronic. From 1967, he took note of the transformation that takes place in the understanding of meaning in linguistics, anthropology, psychoanalysis, but also in politics and literature. A linguistic sign, a word for example, has no meaning in itself; neither subjective in the ordinary sense (produced by a conscious mental act), nor objective or given by the real, it only makes sense according to the interplay of relations within the system in which it is taken. All these theoretical practices move us from a theory of meaning to a theory of the production of meaning. Elements as different as an act of speech, an unconscious production, a social conflict, a kinship relation or a myth, do not refer to an empirical referent, nor to a logical meaning or a given essence. Where does their meaning come from? A positional effect, a game of relations qualified as symbolic, which provides a new area of production of meaning.

This epistemological mutation, which has been customarily assembled under the label of "structuralism", has repercussions in philosophy. It separates those who hold the sense as produce and those who maintain it as a transcendent reserve, frozen in

eternal essences or lurking in the intentionality of a human interiority. Although he doubts that the structural etiquette corresponds to anything other than this purely polemic unity, Deleuze takes hold of the notion of structure for a time, which allows him to break with phenomenology. He draws this conception of meaning as “surface effect”, and not a transcendent leap into another dimension, unconscious of the depths, or spiritual altitude.

With regard to philosophical invention but also literary explanation, he might seem to be still interested in *The Logic of Sense* (1969), and in his first two versions of *Proust and Signs* (1964 and 1970), to an interpretation significant. As soon as it connects with Guattari, the regime of interpretation definitely gives way to a regime of experimentation, which opens the formalisms on a pragmatic and ecological dimension. Signs, be they signifying, spiritual, biological or material, are no longer worth the degraded material duplicates of mental representation or meaning, but unfold in affect maps, ecological semiotics, ethologies of a territory. This completely changes the status of the experience but also the formalisms.

There is no pure, original experience to rediscover, or to explain scientifically, and which will stand once and for all below our formal operations, nor is there a plan for an exclusive constitution, which would attach experience to its corporal, formal or sociological dimension, or to a mixture of these instances. Experience is produced, and it is at the crossroads of the effects of reality (ecology) and productions of meaning (formalism). The production of meaning no longer refers to a strictly structural operation, internal to a system of signs, but to an experimentation which constitutes ecologically a new mode of experience that Guattari, starting from his article “Machine and structure” which initiate in 1969 his meeting with Deleuze, describes as a machine. This gives philosophical or literary criticism a clinical dimension that breaks definitively with the categories of the imaginary (the Bachelardian or Jungian archetype) and the symbolic (the structural formalism).

A character has had a role of privileged operator in this story that moves formalism towards an ecology of signs. It is Proust, to which, together or separately, Deleuze and Guattari have devoted many analyzes. In successive publications, we can follow these theoretical bifurcations at the end of which the signs cease to be only mental, discursive and human, to become just as biological, material and social.¹ Gathering the lessons of “formalism”, Deleuze, with Guattari, apprehends the literature in terms of machines, freed as much from the task of subjective expression as from that of objective representation, but it is not to lock it up on it. On the contrary, it is to see a diagrammatization of the worlds at the intersection of which we live and which allows us to actively reconstruct them. This transformation can be described as ecological, in

¹ You can find more complete developments on Proust, Guattari and the transition from a structural formalism to a machinical formalism in my works *Deleuze and Art* and *Deleuze. L'empirisme transcendantal*. Guattari quotes Proust from among his favourite authors (Guattari 2015: 210) and devotes to him lengthy analyzes in *The Machinic Unconscious* and in *Chaosmosis*.

the sense that Guattari gives to this term (Guattari 2000) and that stops confining the ecology to the environmental, as if a preserved nature remained outside our cultures. Simultaneously social and mental, the environmental is built, Proust offering an excellent example of this sensory percolation of the worlds of signs in which he precipitates his characters and reinvents them, as us, readers.

Proust and the Worlds of Signs

We can note the lineaments of an ecological approach to signs from the first writings of Deleuze, who probably sacrifices to the structural craze by presenting, in 1964, the work of Proust as a learning that “is essentially concerned with *signs*” (Deleuze 2000: 4)². In this early text, we can already diagnose the crisis that shakes the formal syntax and distorts the symbolic closure of signs in systems closed on themselves. The connection of philosophy to literature does not take place in favour of an allegorical mastery of the thickness of the text reduced to its formal purity, nor to its hermeneutical all-encompassing logic. From the outset, Deleuze pulls the signs to their internal dimension, their structural composition in the letter of the text and develops them into worlds. He pluralizes them into experimental environments, in the fashion of Uexküll, multiplying the Kantian transcendental into as many Nietzsche's vital postures, which propose individualizing grips, varied sensory images. This bifurcation immediately tears Deleuze out of structural operations.

In this youth text, Deleuze selects four types of world that connects to different psychic faculties, varied time lines, distinct and irreconcilable semiotic bushes. The first world diagnosed by Deleuze is that of snobbery, with his hilarious painting of salons, of the time one loses there, of his blind intelligence. Then comes the world of love with its heartbreaking clues, its jealous affects, its lost time, its desperate desire. The world of the sensitive signs captures with involuntary memory floating individualities, landscapes or qualities, time regained compressed in the actualization of sensations. Finally, the world of art, with its specific, educated signs, solicits pure thought when it restores “a little time in its pure state”, an impression encapsulated in a word: these four worlds put our faculties (intelligence, imagination, desire, sensibility) in contact with an experience that exceeds them, a condition of true thought as problem-making and creation of concepts.

Examining the progress of the social (snobbery and worldliness) to desire (jealousy), perceptive (taste, flavour, smell) to the world of art (artificial signs, built signs), Deleuze

² Deleuze publishes in 1970, then in 1976, two successive augmented editions of the first one published in 1964. The third version includes, in conclusion, an article published in Italian in 1973, which re-elaborates Deleuze's speech at the colloquium “Proust et la nouvelle critique”, organized at the ENS, in Paris, in 1972, where Deleuze intervenes alongside Barthes, Genette, Doubrovsky, Richard, and Ricardou (cf. Deleuze 2006: 29-60).

probably plays in 1964 a hierarchy of Neo-Platonist style, which regulates the ascension by degree of a world of signs to another and culminates in the world of art, the only one that gives access to “the essence”. This pyramid with a nicely ascending pace is, however, immediately subverted: the essence is defined as “union of sign and meaning”, not as a meaning distinct from its material signaletic impact. Above all, these strings of signs, ritornellos before the letter, do not deliver a unitary world order, leading by gradations from the social to the unconscious, perception, then art. Their plurality rather proposes a bundle of modes of possible theorizations of the literature that Deleuze crosses without operating their unification, but by moving them: Balzacian sociological materialism, psychoanalysis of the unconscious, philosophy of Art with Schellingian accents, where the art, analogon of philosophy, gives access to the essence, phenomenology of pure perception. Now, these worlds of signs remain essentially open and contingent: another route would make pass through other worlds; they do not give themselves like the ontological compass of an exclusive itinerary, vaporizing the materiality of the signs to deliver their spiritual sense, since the meaning remains implied to the end in the sign. In their concrete thickness, their ethological consistency, these signs develop into bubbles of experience, in heterogeneous environments. Experience is pluralized into a diversity of worlds, clues and types of life.

Encounter and Diagnosis

It is in the materiality of a random encounter with obscure signs that they force one to think. Delivering once and for all in this early text the literature of the thankless task of illustrating philosophy, Deleuze in no way reduces the material corpus of the text to its signifying operative structure. He confines his intervention to the level of textual cases, the surface of meaning coinciding with the letter of the text, which is not marked either by the designation (empirical objects) as a naive empiricism or by the meaning (logical or signifying essence), allegorical stance to which Rancière would like to reduce Deleuze because he neglects his ethology of signs (Rancière 2004a; 2004b), nor, of course, on the side of the manifestation of the subject, psychoanalysis of the author personified in little Marcel or being of the phenomenological sensation. On the other hand, Deleuze borrows from Proust the trial of a furious and helpless thought, harshly solicited by an experience which exceeds it: we do not think when we would like it, nor when we wish to be intelligent, but when we jump under the unpredictable violence of signs that affect us without their meaning being given and that can be social, sensible, emotional or cultural. Their intelligibility remains to be constructed, thanks to affects that show thought grappling with an experience that does not pre-exist in the form of states of things or meanings, nor as a form of the interiority of a phenomenological subject. Experience diffracts into problems materially constituted where thought is

solicited by signs that affect it, but whose meaning remains to be constructed.

In this problematic mode of encounter, Proust's work is less concerned with memory, the melancholic eternalisation of a contingency reduced to a pure state, than with this Spinozist and Nietzschean adventure that puts thought into the struggle with strings of discordant signs, plural semiotics, vital as much as social, material no less than ideological. This philosophy of experience is fragmented in the form of clinical diagnoses by concepts construction. Produced under the condition of a violent break-in of material signs that push it to the limit of its power, thought is constructed as a clinical act, in response to fragmentary chains of clues, signals, and various coding.

There is a second theoretical turning point that Deleuze accomplishes in his complementary thesis, dating back to 1968, by reorganizing Spinoza's whole work around the expression as a political critic of signs and imagination. (Deleuze 1990) For Spinoza, to hold that signs refer by analogy to an allegorical meaning, to an eminent meaning, enslaves our thought to obedience to equivocal transcendence. The signs do not imply a transcendent analogical meaning, but actually express the map of our bodily affections, that is to say, of what we can be sensitive to. This epistemological criticism of the analogue sign leads to a clinic of emancipation, a therapeutic liberation against the servile hold of the transcendent. Signs no longer symbolize an allegorical mode of eminent meaning, but ethically metabolize our bodily situation. It is this ethology that Rancière neglects when he confuses Deleuze's use of literature with an allegorical use and maintains that the fable (the intrigue of the *Search*) or the character (Charlus) become the emblem or the symbol of a destiny of literature, the work being the allegory of its own power. Proust young would have wished, says Rancière, a "book made of the substance of a few instants snatched from time," "drops of lights", "pathic substance" that can only be transmitted by "the construction of an analogic fable, a fable constructed to make feel the same affect as that of this pure sensible, which may think, but certainly does not write." (Rancière 2004a: 12 [*modified translation*]). The discursive signs, defined as being impervious to the other sign regimes, are therefore condemned to maintain with them only a relation of analogical signification, whereas, for Deleuze, the fable implies only other affects that it constructs literally, that it individuates by its style. Instead of referring unequivocally to a transcendent and hidden meaning, the signs expose the actual power relations in which are taken those they affect and express the moving map of the modes of affecting and being affected by which our individuations are transformed. It is in this sense that ethic becomes an experiment and that we are judged according to the physicochemical trial of our states, not according to a moral judgment concerning our acts and our intentions. It depends on the actual relations in which we enter and by which our power to act is favoured or diminished. This is what the fragmentary and singular map of the Proustian worlds, constructed by his literary experimentation, showed. The map of the Guermantes and that of the Verdurins do not overlap, as the Swann experiment painfully jumps from one to another, nor does it cut

out a unitary field: from love contamination to social parades, from artistic experiments (the Vinteuil sonata) to sensory impressions (moonlight so bright that one could almost read one's diary), each of these worlds borrows signs from the other and reconfigures them through writing, as they affect those who read them and risk to bind them differently according to their readings.

It is not a question of restoring the experience in the unitary and original form of a past, a pre-existing meaning, a formal structure, a pathic substance or a true essence, since this experience is not antecedent to the various clinical acts which shape it and which correspond to the mutations of the characters, to the successive plural baths of the environments which they cross and which they connect uneasily, just as to our plural readings. This third theoretical break distinguishes Deleuze from all phenomenology, as already shown by the conclusion of his first version of *Proust*, in which the philosopher calls for a new image of thought and gives the Kantian critique of the experience a remarkable twist. Criticism does not reduce the experience to the unitary transcendental structure of an eternal subject, as Kant wanted, but leads to a Spinozist and Nietzschean-like clinic, which pluralizes the typologies of thinkers, dramatizes thought in as many modes of experience including their posology and their casuistry: the jealous lover or the snob are not interested in the same qualities, do not seek the same "truth", do not have the same card of affects and move in reality in different and nonsuperimposable worlds, but which rather favour catches between these series of signs through which the characters are transformed, for us who discern them during our readings.

To reform the "image of thought" (taken here in the sense of representation that thought is made of its own use), Deleuze really build on a novel, a literally constructed clinical experience, the dosage of a case, where *a* singular experience that is in no way generalizable is singularly mapped literally, and not on a treatise on method where the experience of thought in general would be reflected (traced). It is not as a sovereign employment of a method which would lead by degree to the truth that thought establishes for itself. Deleuze's image of thought at the very beginning of his first article on Bergson in 1956 already formulated this conception of experience as a singular and innovative encounter between signs and concepts: "A great philosopher creates new concepts: these concepts simultaneously surpass the dualities of ordinary thought and give things a new truth, a new distribution, a new way of dividing up the world." (Deleuze 2004: 22) Such a distribution retails the ordinary, configures an experience which has nothing unitary and seems only so out of habit: experience is unified only under the rule of the ordinary and the customary, not on an original or essential mode. It only appears unitary when it is unified by our domestic beliefs of common sense, abbreviated social habits in our ways of speaking and our usual ways of acting. To think is not to reproduce valid answers to well-known questions (on the contrary, it challenges stupidity), but to attempt, in a hesitant constructive mode, to formally

constitute the diagram of a field of experience that exceeds it and forces it to reconfigure itself, just as the textual signs constructed by Proust force Deleuze to reconfigure his definition of philosophy.

Breaking with Kant who gives himself the transcendental as *a priori* structure of the subject, ahistorical condition of possibilities of experience in general, Deleuze, from the same stroke, departs of any phenomenology assigning to thought, finitude or the flesh, the mission to assume the possibility of building an experiment. On the other hand, experience itself, a random encounter, acts as a virtual, but not antecedent, condition of a reconfiguration of thought: the transcendental becomes the condition of this encounter between sign and thought, an implicit, ideal but virtual condition and which did not pre-exist to this singular experience but is constituted by it. It is on this condition that thought is creative, that is, functionally determined to rearrange its categories each time a meeting takes place. François Zourabichvili very rightly points out that “experience can only be gathered in signs, which, since experience puts the mind in conflict with the new, can only be created” (Zourabichvili 2011: 242 [*our translation*]), which points to the importance of art, although it is not the only authority to develop sign constructs, ethos captures, otherwise the artist would once again be given the privilege of being the only holder of an “authentic” access to experience.

Deleuze relates thought to the material forces that it presupposes as its conditions of empirical realization, which are not exclusively vital and do not focus on a perceiving body, which would still amount to a subjective anchorage of the phenomenological type. The interest of a concept is measured by the ability to revive the dynamism of thought by subjecting it to new tensions, so that an ideal of accuracy and recognition gives way to this new image of thought, associating evaluation with diagnosis, a creative perspective insofar as it is formed under the pressure of an unexpected but necessary problem that does not pre-exist its conditions of elaboration. This problem, which Deleuze also names an Idea, replaces the terminology of the essence, the unity of sign and meaning. Experience and thought are functionally determined as co-constituted and not pre-existing to each other. If philosophy relates to literature, it is not that it would seek to give itself a sensible body, nor that poetry would come to the aid of speculative thought. The literary experience puts thought with a singular experience, truly novel in that it goes beyond the experiences already mapped and made available by literary history. Every work that marks us produces this sensory recomposition, an infernal and playful machine that throws its reader into a new world. The scholar is mistaken, who “yawns in advance” when we speak to him of a new book, “whereas a good book is something special, something incalculable, and is made up not of the sum of all previous masterpieces but of something which the most thorough assimilation of every one of them would not enable him to discover, since it exists not in their sum but beyond it.” (Proust 1924).

A Literary Fragmentation Machine

The Guattari blast is measured on *Proust's* two modified reissues, which Deleuze successively publishes in 1970 and 1976, as well as in the new analyzes that they dedicate to Proust, this time to two, in *Anti-Oedipus* and in *A Thousand Plateaus*. First, Deleuze passes from the vocabulary of interpretation – certainly a Nietzschean interpretation, capture of forces and non-return to the origin – to experimentation, under the friendly introduction of the Guattarian concept of transversality. “To think is always to interpret – to explicate, to develop, to decipher, to translate a sign” (Deleuze 2000: 97), he wrote in 1964. “Interpreting has no other unity than a transversal one” (Deleuze 2000: 128, 168; Sauvagnargues 2009: ch.XIV), he replies in 1970, citing for the first time Guattari, introducing the concept of transversality, which catapults the philosophy of difference towards a new pragmatism and aims at preventing “those attempts to interpret a work that is actually only open to experimentation.” (Deleuze; Guattari 1986: 3) Just as our love, our jealousy is composed of “an infinity of successive loves, of different jealousies, each of which is ephemeral,” (Proust 1922) or that the sides of Méséglise and Guermantes do not communicate, “the entire work consists in establishing *transversals* that cause us to leap from one of Albertine's profile to the other, from one Albertine to another, from one world to another [...] without ever reducing the many to the One” (Deleuze 2000: 126), declares Deleuze, but by “affirming”, on the contrary, “without uniting *all* these irreducible fragments”. As they hammer it in their first book devoted together to literature, dealing with Kafka, Proust's twin figures, our relationship with signs is composed as a pragmatic experimentation of singular transformation, not as the neutral interpretation or restitution of a content given in advance. There is meaning only produced, not given.

The production of signs cannot be explained exclusively in the order of thought: it is the clinical and political turn of analysis that opens transcendental empiricism on a political ethology of signs. Any sign now comes from the analysis of a collective assemblage of enunciation, which includes its political and social dimension so that the meaning is no longer established in an exclusively discursive regime, cut off from its empirical connections, but as a process which would remain unintelligible in terms of formalism alone, because a formalism does not refer to codes closed on themselves, but to the modes of experience which it configures, to the assemblage it supposes, to the materials it brings into play. This decides on the abandonment of the structure, to the advantage of the machine concept, to explain the production of meaning: the status of formalism has changed. Meaning does not refer to formal syntaxes, but to concrete assemblage of enunciation by Marxian production, and not by exclusively logical or

signifying operations. For all that, it is not determined sociologically by causal empiricism, these assemblages playing the role of transcendental enunciation conditions which do not determine possibilities, but instead form blocking conditions from which a singular way of experimentation spawns its line of writing. This transversal conception of sign and meaning refers to an experience that is constructed from its cases of experimentation.

The concept of transversality already forms such a case of experimentation. Guattari first constructs it pragmatically as a clinical trial to improve the institutional therapeutic functioning of the clinic of La Borde, where he practises, and proposes a mode of connection which refuses the vertical subordinations (doctors *and* nurses, or carers *and* patients) and their horizontal hierarchies, by proposing transversal operations that bite through these consecrated hierarchies, spreading them on the same plane and associating any entity with any other. This non-centred conception of the organization is valid for the clinic as well as for political organizations, where Guattari distinguishes “subject groups”, firmly subordinated to a central leadership, a party or a chief – critic who touches as much the organizations of the left as of the right – and the transversal, self-managing and collective “subject-groups” where group subjectivity is not confiscated by its head. Transversality thus concerns any mode of organization not exclusively dominated by an antecedent hierarchical tree structure and transforms the regime of totality. This non-hierarchical conception of organization directly implies an epistemological break with the theories that are based on a timeless universal, vertically dominating its individual cases. The sovereignty of the universal, valid once and for all, gives way to a singular formalization, in tune with its conditions of experimentation, and these no longer express themselves on the ideational plane of the structure. This new conception of transversality completely renews the conception of the unity of the work.

The dramatization of the Idea formulated clinical criticism at the level of the thinker; with Guattari, the focus shifts to the clinic, conceived as an intervention, and to a pragmatic conception of the theory, conceived as a crisis, with a view to transforming our existing conditions into a prospective mode, and not to deliver the eternal, timeless or invariant structure. The relations between theory and practice are no longer conceived as unified domains, connected by a causal determinism, they are themselves transversal, connecting various theoretical segments to practices themselves not reducible to a single field of universality. To the regime of the logos and the organic totality that commanded the first version of *Proust*, Deleuze adjoins in 1970 anti-logos, vegetable pathos of partitioned parts communicating only transversely, according to a philosophy of the fragment that completely transforms the concept of essence of the first version, as well as the status of the oeuvre and literature. Essence no longer appears as the harmonious union of sign and meaning, but as a fragmentary point of view, a point of view which itself has nothing of an individual, is not attached to an exemplary personality (the figure of the artist), neither to a predominant character being worth as

an emblem, nor to a transcendent signification. Take the example of a train trip that allows Deleuze to formulate this new transversal conception of a nonunified totality:

The train turned [...] and I was lamenting the loss of my strip of pink sky when I caught sight of it afresh, but red this time, in the opposite window which it left at a second bend in the line, so that I spent my time running from one window to the other to reassemble, to collect on a single canvas the intermittent, antipodean fragments of my fine, scarlet, ever-changing morning (Proust 1924).

Proust no doubt calls for “a continuous painting” that the narrator’s runaway relines, but, notes Deleuze, the fragments are not aligned either in the thing seen, or on the narrator’s side, rushing against a window to the other, always surprised and snap by the discontinuous, broken and erratic fragments that the speed of the train cuts and trims, kaleidoscopic vision machine.

Benefiting from the work on Simondon and Spinoza provided in *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, this point of view is not inscribed in the interiority of the artist, nor in the unity of an environment, but on the contrary defines a mode of individuation that transforms individuation as much as its environment, so that the train presents, at each movement, always varied combinations of kinetic landscapes, a recomposed Normandy, the ethology of a card of emotions mixing the Persian charm of the name of Balbec to meet a “beautiful girl” who offers *café au lait* to sleeping travellers, in a small remote resort. Proceeding by individuation without subject and impersonal singularity, this card of affects does not refer to the personal story of the little Marcel, but to the process of individuation of the writing itself, to the style, to the constructive metabolism of the literary signs.

The unity of a deductive interpretation gives way to the functioning of an antilogic textual machine that functions by disjoint fragmentation: the Guattarian transversality is grafted on the theory of the fragment that Blanchot was able to pose “in the most rigorous terms, at the level of the literary machine” (Deleuze; Guattari 1977: 42). The regime of relation of the part to the whole has changed. This new conception of totality passes through all unitary conceptions, that of the literary work as that of individual identity or personal cohesion. It marks a new regime of the concept of multiplicity.

The deleuzian multiplicity, well determined in *Bergsonism* and *Difference and Repetition*, takes charge here of a new power of political and pragmatic impact, transversely thwarting the models of centred organization, the hierarchical sovereignties, the dominant organs, the normalities instituted but also the role of the universal or the structure functioning as a timeless unity giving the experience its unity by generality. Detached from any pre-eminence of unity and identity, the fragment does not refer to one or the universal either globally, restoring an original unity, or locally by referring to an absent totality implied, but is transversely worth in its power of fragmentation, disjunction. To conceive the fragment under the authority of the one led to a Platonic conception of the symbol, fragmentary call towards the restoration of an

absent original unity, as in the theory of love, desire and sexuality, oriented towards the reproduction of a lost unit.

This new conception of the fragment directs us towards a theory of becoming which concerns as much the imitation in art as the vital, social or mental reproduction. It is a fragment of Proustian text, that of the homosexual love parade between Charlus and Jupien, put in relation with the capture between wasp and orchid, which determines this new conception of the encounter as a symbiosis. This new model of symbiosis applies a Spinozist ethology that Proust uses to elucidate the affects of his characters, their speeds and their slowness, their variations and their sexual mutations, with the precision of an entomologist. There is a whole new theory of individuation that no longer operates by species and genre, nor by social normality, but actually expresses affect maps that transform the characters. Charlus or Jupien, as well as Saint Loup or Gilberte, are gradually caught by a homosexual becoming that precipitates them in an ever-increasing whirlwind of transformations, the baron metamorphosed from a bumblebee to an old duchess, Albertine, from a group of young girls to a prisoner, to disappeared, from a conquered lover to a young unknown seducer. So that literary characters, like conceptual characters, do not imitate particular people, socially determined individuals, nor refer to the narrator or the author, but explore individuations in process of constitution, modes of subjectivation taking shape. Levinas remarked with slight disgust that, in Proust, the soul “inverts itself” into an “outlaw” so that the most vertiginous relations are established between the characters, insisting on inversion, the usual term of Proust’s time to qualify homosexuality. However, it is not a matter of morality, or even to advocate marginal sexuality (upside down morality), but to stop exploring mutant desires with ready-made categories, to turn literature into a true machine to explore our unconscious desires.

This theory of production (and not of reproduction) transforms the animal series (wasp) “captured” by the plant series (orchid), and which now assumes for it the function of external reproductive organs. The ethological case thus leads to a logic of symbiosis, assuring on the biological level what is badly called “the reproduction of a species” by the random encounter of perfectly different species, insects and plants interacting with one another. While this model of reproduction, imported into literature and art theory under the guise of an imitation of nature, gives way to a theory of encounter in becoming, the ecological function of literature is now to capture these most diversified vital traits. Literature detects and explores our real modes of individuation and Proust inaugurates gender studies, because instead of confirming normed sexual identities, he describes modes of seduction with *n* sexes, the *woman* part of a man resonating with the *man’s* part of a woman, and other variations so complex, to *n* sexes. In reality, it is the whole conception of sexuality and unconscious desire that moves from a molar sexuality (social, statistical and individual) to a molecular sexuality, indifferent to gender and norms, truly transversal, because it operates on the plane of the captures

of affects and not of the constituted social identities, or of the biological sexes considered “natural”. So that sexuality opens towards an ecology of symbiosis, implying the capture of heterogeneous fragments, indifferent to the partitioning of individuals conceived as closed unity and identity. The fragment theory implies this attention to the capture between heterogeneous series, of which the wasp and the orchid form an exemplary case, which allows the displacement of the organic unit towards a vegetable symbiosis, the displacement of a dominant sexuality towards a perplexed homosexuality of which Proust deciphers the signs and makes *La recherche du temps perdu* a true ethics or physics of homosexuality. That being said, this community is constituted politically in France, in the 1970s, with the FHAR³, determined to claim the rights of a minor sexuality. It is politically as much sexually that the literature asserts itself as an exploration of sexual and psychic margins, as a political experiment on modes of subjectivation undefined before their literary experimentation.

This puts an end to any subordination of literature to the dominant schemas of the signifying structure, be it linguistic or psychoanalytic, just as it silences the nonsense assigning to literature the autotelic mission to inform about its own essence. The literary machine produces new modes of social experimentation.

This is why in *Anti-Oedipus* as well as in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Proust (he is not the only one) serves as an operator for a new conception of human individuation and unconscious or conscious social modes of subjectivation. Instead of unloading Proust and Kafka by folding them on the Oedipal grid of castration, symbolic or imaginary, Deleuze and Guattari are interested in their writing machines, in the modes of existence they produce. With the capture between wasp and orchid, the desiring machines, indifferent to the relations instituted, express a schizoid position which pulverizes with laughter the relations between desire, transgression and law. This schizoid innocence, more radical than the apparent depressive guilt, is named by Deleuze vegetal, to translate the distance with any model of organization centred on its supposedly unitary organization and on its supposed identity. It goes without saying, however, that in this view, no more than the vegetable, animal (or human) sexuality is centred, but must be understood symbiotically as an alliance and becoming ecological. This calls for a new conception of the body as much as the unconscious. Hence the theory of the “body without organs”, a transversal conception of a mode of bodily experience that is no longer centred on the hierarchical organization of closed unitary organs. Hence also the “schizoanalytic” conception of the unconscious, as a desiring machine or as a collective assemblage of enunciation, which objects to psychoanalysis of giving itself the unconscious as a nature of the human in general, while Oedipus moulded on the figure of the European bourgeois family, a historically determined case of political moulding of

³ The FHAR, Homosexual Front of Revolutionary Action, founded in 1971 by Françoise d'Eaubonne, see the 12th issue of the journal *Recherches*, a collective of research in social sciences founded by Félix Guattari. (Hocquenghem & Querrien 1973).

the unconscious. The unconscious is connected to the political and the social by production, not by representation of private parental figures supposed to be ahistorical (Freud), or structured by the invariant mathematics of the symbolic (Lacan). It is the very notion of the individual that opens up to a modal conception of the symbiotic encounter. Not only do humans trade with bacteria and other living things by which they are transformed in return as they transform them, but all sexuality is of encounter, of the lichen type, of alliances and not of reproduction. All human cultures thus hybridize with encounters, theorized in the animal-becoming that must be completed with vegetable-becoming and mineral-becoming (the alliance with silicon, for example, qualifies our current digital world culture).

This vegetal innocence, which Deleuze considers more dangerous and stimulating than centred organic guilt, informs us on the new image of thought that the conclusion of the first version of *Proust* called: the power of the anti-logos dislocates the closed systems and passes from the centred animal totality to the vegetable rhizome, made of connections and heterogeneity, of insignificant ruptures. This new conception of disjunctive synthesis, by communication and resonance between disjointed series, takes in 1976 the botanical name of rhizome, which will form in 1980 the introduction of *A Thousand Plateaus*. Far from melting differences in the identical (symbolic or dialectical conception of difference), it is a question of considering the connection not as the link that unifies divergences, but as a real production of new differences.

Such are the principles of the rhizome, a practical theory of multiplicities which applies as much to the theory of writing, literary or philosophical production, the symbiotic assemblage of signs, as to the theory of systems. Fragmentary and disjoint, every system is worth by connection and heterogeneity, producing “multiplicities” by “insignificant rupture”: if it proceeded in fact by signifying rupture, the connected heterogeneities would consist of pre-existing units, divided according to formal procedures or given object units. With the dynamics of the rhizome, literary criticism is not worth as a decal of objectivity imprisoned in the work, it is worth as cartography.

The critical input is not trivial in the sense that it is indifferent, or arbitrary, but random, that is to say, remarkable for this reading occurrence. Transversality goes much further than simply questioning the hierarchical structure of the work. A whole pragmatic theory of reading was implicated in this passage from the beautiful totality to the disjointed fragment, and Deleuze and Guattari provide a practical demonstration from the first page of *Kafka*. The entry into the work is fragmentary: it is necessarily that it elects any point in the work, point of *entry* that forces a way in the work. What is arbitrary, not predetermined, is the critical entry point. “We will enter, then, by any point whatsoever”, “no entrance is more privileged”, since there is no more totality hierarching the ends. The entrance “connect with things that we hope will eventually appear”. The privileged entrance was substituted by the kinetic entry: “We will be trying only to discover what other points our entrance connects to, what crossroads and

galleries one passes through to link two points, what the map of the rhizome is and how the map is modified if one enters by another point.” (Deleuze & Guattari 1986: 3-4) The work, which demands an entrance, produces an effect; in this sense, it “works”, a machine whose functioning operates *in re* instead of being situated on a metadiscursive plane of structure and whose meaning “depends solely on its functioning” (Deleuze 2000: 146). The entrance is necessarily fragmentary, since it signals the reading operation as an effective intrusion, which provides a living area with its circulation space and its nutritive network as well as its random beam of new walking lines. “The new linguistic convention, the formal structure of the work, is therefore transversality” (Deleuze 2000: 168).

This conception of the open system, which borrows from Marx as much as from Varela, from Prigogine and Stengers as well as from Daniel Stern, is methodologically as well as semiotically valid and gives information on the semiotic productions constructed (the signs of art, the social ritornellos) as much as for the non-human productions of signs. The field of experience, reconfigured in this fragmentary mode, constituted by semiotic bushes, plural ethologies, is pluralized in territories of experimentation, in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari understand the territory, that is to say, as an act of deterritorialization, and not as a field already given.

Regimes of Signs and Ecological Ritornellos

This rhizomatic conception now prevents us from separating into the sign regime the so-called natural indices of the artificial constructs, as it rejects the hierarchical ontology of the kingdoms, dividing the inanimate mineral from the vital organic or the human cultural. The rhizome is above all an explanation of the signs and signals the abandonment of the linguistic primacy, from the interpretation of signs reduced to a logical, imaginary or symbolic meaning, anyways purely human. All the signs are composed rhizomatically in a pragmatic transversal mode that organizes heterogeneous semiotic bushes, cutting and connecting material signals, biological, unconscious and social coding with modes of subjectivation partly unconscious, but not exclusively. Semiotics thus open up on the political philosophy and the clinic of social assemblage, in particular capitalistic ritornellos.

From this point of view, the four worlds selected by Deleuze in 1964 take another look. No totalization unites them, they are given at the chance of the encounter, concern the narrator’s affect map, and have no generality. Instead of being reduced to a unified symbolic algebra and rendered meaningful under the closing of a homogeneous system – linguistic stylistics, signifying structure of the unconscious, class sociology – these signs are distributed into distinct ecological bubbles, including systematicity and therefore the relative unity does not prevent diversity. They develop their systematic

assemblages in the form of differences. As Deleuze writes with Guattari, it is a question of “regimes of signs”, discordant ethological systems, dietary as well as political, involving a variegated scenography of body signals, redness, skin texture, social marks, sensations and psychic landscapes, which connect the discursive language or signifier with non-discursive, material, social, physiological coding, and which open the regimes of signs on their associated environments.

The signs act here on a rhizomatic mode and are not confined to the mental plane of the meanings, nor to the abstract structure of their formalism, but appear as material and concrete emissions, individuations thought in their environment, variegated strings of signatures, of territorializing sensible marks. They consist of ritornellos, ethological charts of clues, signs and posters that now reflect the physicochemical and political regimes of meeting the bodies, strings of affects that exemplify modes of existence, powers of individuation, not formed individuals. Such worlds, therefore, are not given as parts of the experience, but constructed by deterritorialization tearing away from the ambient milieus social, amorous or artistic ritornellos, selecting functional qualities by transforming them into signatures, so that the appropriation of the signs is territorial marks – from homosexuality to snobbery, from desire to art – results from such a transformation, an act of constitution of new expressive territories. Guattari thus analyzes the Proustian ritornellos in *The Machinic Unconscious*, published a year before *A Thousand Plateaus*.

These powers of individuation consolidated by ritornellos also allow the beautiful theory of individuation as haecceity that Deleuze elaborates by connecting Spinoza and Simondon with Guattarian semiotics and that he takes up with Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, taking precisely the example of Proust. What are the characters then? “Proust at least has shown us once and for all that their individuation, collective or singular, proceeds not by subjectivity but by haecceity, pure haecceity.” (Deleuze; Guattari 1987: 271) Where movement is no longer the opposite of rest, as Spinoza maintained, the individual is composed of relative movements and rest, that is, of velocity and slowness, a symbiotic force or longitude, which also vibrate in latitude by variation of power. It is such haecceities that art composes on a plane that is never exclusively human, but that connects the environmental to the mental and the social, which corresponds to the Guattarian definition of ecology. Because the molar characters of the novel, which are distributed differentially according to their worlds, Albertine or Charlus, Vinteuil or Guermantes, circulate through these ethological bubbles and recompose their haecceity through different environments. It is not the character who walks his identity in an antecedent world, but the capture of the world that proceeds by ritornello to different individuations. So that individuation is formed as a result of a rhythmic character and worth as a ritornello, mix of redundancy and of transformation. That is why in 1973, when he returns to Proust, one year after the publication of *Anti-Oedipus*, in what will be the third version of *Proust and the signs* during the re-edition of the book in 1976,

Deleuze breaks with any personalistic figure of the narrator or the novel hero. “There is less a narrator than a machine of the Search, and less a hero than the assemblage by which the machine functions under one or another configuration [...] the narrator is an enormous Body without organs.” (Deleuze 2000: 181), that is to say an intensive distribution of connections producing heterogeneous, ethological capture of affects that would have remained imperceptible without the construction of such a sensory frame.

Art does not imitate natural characters, be it social snobbery, loves and desires, sensations or even constructed signs of art, and these various worlds are no longer based on a hierarchical progression. On the other hand, it is these rhythmic pitches which constitute by haecceities these beings of sensations, the sensible signs taking abruptly evanescent and material consistency – the foam of the milk, a bell that rings, a peeled asparagus – and which propose these trembling haecceities, encapsulated in “the rings of a beautiful style”. Of course, they would be imperceptible without the intervention of the signs of the art which detects and makes sensible the semiotic ritornellos of which the characters are affected. So that literature is directly connected to politics, as philosophy, by diagnosis and construction of concepts, it configures not the experience in general, but that immanent and singular experience that we transform by constituting it, as the problem of our actuality, a problem that we have to solve today, which does not exist before us, any more than it would be available in the revival of the systems of tradition.

Such an ecological formalism connects the literature on its capacity for invention and transformation of the usual social worlds and delivers it, including on the plane of ordinary language, of any subordination in the proper sense. This shifts the relationship between reality and fiction, because literature can no longer be confined to the moist interiority of an imaginary hobby if it ecologically configures individuation, by linking environmental, social and mental signs, which produce new environments of individuation. A history of literature remains to be constructed according to this angle, which would be interested in the ethological study of these diverse environments. The Balzacian individuations, for example, detail carefully the list of all the constituent accessories – from the cane varnish to the number of buttons – the fabric of the garment contracting its manufacture, its purchase price and its social value, affirming a genealogical network of relatives and relations that make up a character by the totality of his acts of property, according to a theatrical bourgeois logic. By contrast, Beckett's floating individuations, larval and subtractive, instructs ecologically different types of characters, yet equally complete and defined, with distinctive ritornellos, but emerging as mists of signals on radars or other patchy and specialized screens. And these mix of postures and mimicry, snapping beaks and colourful signs are not reduced to the imagination of an author owning a style, or the symbolic capacity of these scattered elements to contract significant codes. There is no transport of a proper to a figurative sense, symbolic or imaginary, but a circuit of deterritorialization and composition of

plural worlds, new social ecologies, very real. Instead of being a licence, metaphors and literary figures propose metamorphoses of territorial coefficients whose words are carriers by transformation of their metabolism. In these conditions, it is useless to prioritize linguistics and stylistics, as a low and noble use of the language, or to hold the masterpiece for the brilliant exception of a great author who is often male, the patent owner of an exquisite idiolect. This does not prevent us from affirming our attractions and our predilections, but as a card of affects by which this meeting transforms us, and not as a register of scales and cultural temperatures, disposing of the available works according to a hierarchy supposed to be immutable. The bewilderment that produces a book which we then hold for a masterpiece is not predefined by its eminence but is due to its power of indeterminacy. This one remains impossible to crystallize on an internal axiomatic, since it defines conditions of enunciation that precede their grammatical, social and mental conditions, which incited Proust to ensure that “beautiful books are written in a kind of foreign language.”

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