

**DELEUZE, BADIOU, PROUST AND AN ETHICS OF  
LITERATURE**

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This essay explores an ethics of literature: an ethics that aims to go beyond seeing art as merely the description of possible lives, or reading as a trial of self-knowledge and subjective constitution.<sup>1</sup> What if literature – far from being an arena of sympathy,<sup>2</sup> social reflection,<sup>3</sup> or world-disclosure<sup>4</sup> – were destructive of ethos and polity? Perhaps *reading* would then be neither communication nor comprehension (returning to the living origin of ethos and polity) but a confrontation with unreadability? If there are different styles of thinking – the thinking in concepts that takes place in philosophy, and the thinking in affects that takes place in art – then ethics, or the question of how we are to live, and what it is to live – will have to take account of the styles of thinking of which we are capable. It has

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- 1 In *Love's Knowledge* Martha Nussbaum has argued for a supplementation of philosophical approaches to ethics with a turn to literature. In addition to the more formal frameworks of philosophical theories of morality, literature supposedly allows us to explore non-cognitive or affective responses to other lives. In so doing we are not only engaged with others at the level of sympathy and pity, we can also become more aware of the ways in which certain emotional responses might work against what we know we ought to do. See Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Other approaches to literature, not merely as a scene of ethical examples but as itself a mode of meta-ethical (or perhaps counter-moral) understanding, include J. Hillis Miller's *Ethics of Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), where the very process of reading, as the actualisation of a text's potential sense, involves a decision and determination. The text itself is not ethical; nor does the journey of reading bring us to ethical understanding. On the contrary, reading is less oriented to disclosure than to a certain dead end of the decision. For Miller, it is because there is no guaranteed or necessary meaning of a text that reading is directly ethical; for every reader must freely take on the burden of a text's sense.
  - 2 Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
  - 3 Alasdair MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).
  - 4 Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987).

become a commonplace in what was once known as continental philosophy or ‘theory’ that Kant’s distribution of the faculties needs to be accepted and refigured: ethics is not science (for it cannot proceed from some known object, such as human nature, precisely because the nature of the human is not what would allow for the formation of *moral* laws, or laws that one might imagine *as if* one were not merely a physical being reduced to the laws of material nature). Nor is ethics some mode of the aesthetic; it does not proceed from a pleasant feeling of the sympathetic harmony of one humanised nature or organic community. Ethics is also not pure reason, for while reason may offer some formal logic that enables us to think in an orderly and systemic manner, allowing us to experience the world as a causally structured and coherent whole, it cannot yield a law of duty – what *ought* to be the case if there were beings capable of thinking of themselves as self-causing. It is the aesthetic, however, or the feeling of ourselves as synthesising subjects, that leads the way to ethics. How might I act if I were to imagine myself as a being not of this world but as world-forming?

When Michel Foucault<sup>5</sup> argues against an ethics of knowledge and criticises biopolitics, he takes up Kant’s critique of the illegitimate grounding of what we ought to be on some supposed knowable substance (human ‘life’). When Jacques Derrida asks that we consider concepts such as democracy, justice or friendship – ‘*if* there is such a thing’ – then he, too, detaches the thinking of ideas from experiential (determined) knowledge.<sup>6</sup> How might one think in the absence of the determination of these ideas? Habermas regards his post-metaphysical discourse ethics as also proceeding from the detachment of ethics from knowledge. Whereas a certain generation of post-Nietzschean French thought proceeded to celebrate art or literature as a domain where reason was liberated from instrumental calculation, and therefore would open the way to a radical transvaluation of values, Habermas held on to the notion of art as an arena of reflection, enabling the expansion of an ethics of communicative reason.

Deleuze and Guattari’s *What is Philosophy?*, like Deleuze’s earlier book on Kant, also proceeds from Kant’s distinction of faculties or modes of thinking. Philosophy creates concepts. Art creates affects and percepts. Science creates functions. Whereas most post-Kantian theory accepts Kant’s distinction and problematic relation among powers, with literature perhaps

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5 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972).

6 John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley and Michael J. Scanlon, *Questioning God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 30.

acting as general reflective exercise on the language, syntax, grammar or horizon through which (or against which) reason takes place, Deleuze and Guattari emphasise a destructive discordance. If philosophy is altered by events in art – rethinking time, for example, on the basis of the cinematic image – it nevertheless does so *philosophically*, by creating concepts. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari's distinction of art as the creation of affects and percepts at once reinforces and conflicts with two other Deleuzo-Guattarian notions: becoming (becoming-animal, becoming-woman, becoming-imperceptible) and making language stutter.<sup>7</sup> The latter notion would seem to repeat a rather tired modernist formalism: language becomes functional and efficient with everyday usage, while literary language draws attention once again to language's materiality – or its non-semantic force. But if 'stuttering' is related to becoming, and this in turn is related to affects and percepts, the sense changes: affects and percepts are not affections and perceptions but are the potentialities or 'pure predicates' *to be perceived*. Becoming-animal-woman-imperceptible is to encounter these potentialities in a manner that is not grounded in the harmonious cognizing faculty of man. Language stutters in its disturbance, not from within itself, but in its attempt to write again, as if life were no longer already humanised. The dehumanisation of art or literature may take two forms after Kant: the first is expansive and organicist, while the second is destructive and profoundly inhuman. The notion of art as an expression of man as a moral being has given way (in recent theories of literary Darwinism or even of 'life') to a notion of art as extension of technical capacities for survival. In this respect all art is animalistic, a way in which the organism adapts to, and varies, its milieu for the sake of its ongoing organic life. A second post-Kantian path is offered by the notion of art or literature as an autonomous, machinic, 'stuttering' technicity that operates with a force beyond 'the lived.' This is not a modernist ethics/aesthetic whereby the experience of language *as language* returns us to the opening of speech and the origin of sense; it is, rather, an aesthetic of forces that are disarticulated – *stuttering* – not yet organised into the syntheses and ends of bounded life. Such a force would be neither ethical (grounded in place or ethos) nor political (deriving from the praxis of a polity).

### Autopoeisis

Ways of thinking about the self and its relation to literature have been

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<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia), 1994.

dominated by the concept of autopoiesis. As defined in recent philosophies of life, autopoiesis refers to any system that is self-maintaining and is often used to mark a distinction between the living and the non-living.<sup>8</sup> Autopoiesis as a model for life is in turn tied to the concepts of homeostasis and dynamic systems. An autopoietic being does not exist in itself and then subsequently adopt some relation to the world. The living being's border, limit or membrane is crucial in defining just what accounts for its own particular and *meaningful* milieu. An organism does not just happen to be placed in an environment. Living beings define both themselves and their world according to possible interactions and life-serving capacities. Every organism therefore acts less like a self-sufficient mechanism, and more like a thermostat – altering its own relations to the world in order to maintain its own stable state. Thus it makes sense to see all life not in Cartesian terms, where bodies are material entities that contain minds, but in terms of dynamic systems. Every living being is defined by the relations it maintains in order to maintain its own identity; its world is always a meaningful world of possible interactions, and its movements and responses are always grounded in a body that is nothing other than an ongoing, dynamic and highly selective engagement with a milieu.

In addition to its widespread currency in contemporary theories of life, embodied cognition and systems theory, models of autopoiesis have always marked a narrative and literary conception of the self. In contemporary readings of Aristotle's *Ethics*, for example, the self is regarded as an essentially narrative phenomenon: oriented towards the sense of ongoing coherence and the fulfilment of its individuating potentiality, *and* defined by its readability and recognition by others (MacIntyre 1982). Selves are self-fashioning, self-bounding phenomena that are nevertheless oriented to a world that is always their own self-defining world. Thus it is possible to see the claims of contemporary organicism, which stress that a dynamic living being is an ongoing process of equilibrium-maintaining responses to a milieu that is defined by its relevance for that body's possible states, as maintaining a tradition of valorising bounded individual life. The lure of this image of a bounded organic whole that is at once self-sufficiently enclosed and yet also open to a world (that is always *its* world) is ultimately (if cryptically) theological. We may have abandoned the commitment to a freely creating God, whose created world is at once an expression of his

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8 Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Boston: New Science Library, 1987). See also Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

divine goodness and yet who is also free *not* to be determined or delimited by any specified essence, but we nevertheless repeat and re-figure images of dynamically open yet complete production. Both the well-formed individual or the well-wrought work of art are models of a dynamism that is at once creative without its productivity being enslaved to an already determined model of production. The figure of life is, and always has been, theological in its management of the desire for a being that is fruitfully open and yet meaningfully self-enclosed: the God of theology is one way in which we can imaginatively reconcile a desire for *life* (production, creation, fruition, becoming) with a desire for being (for creativity is neither random nor fragmented but always expressive of a life that is nothing other than its own self-emanation in response to a milieu that is always its own.)

Theology, ethics and aesthetics have always presupposed normative images of individual life. The axiology determining proper and improper modes of life requires the presence of a border that allows for organisation: all relations among powers are structured according to a harmony of organs. The world that is seen by the perspectival eye, can be represented by the speaking voice and mastered by the enumerating hand of *techné*, a hand of articulating ‘digits.’ But this life of organised bodies (organicism) has its basis in a profound commitment to a life of autopoietic being in which being makes itself from itself: life is once *autos*, unfolding from its self or in a process of creative becoming, *and poiesis* or creative of itself *as* some structured whole. This valorisation of self-making life has several implications and inflections. First, in theology, God must at once be seen as distinct from the world of created beings – neither determined by any essence nor limited by anything other than his own free decisions – and yet not radically distinct from the world, for that would entail Manicheism. God must be at once infinitely free and yet creative – with creation never being radically other nor reducible to divinity as such. Second: in ethics, from Aristotle to Kant, the individual must give a law to himself or define himself in order to be distinguished as human from merely natural beings. But individuated bodies must also relate their self-definition either to the recognition of others (Aristotle) or to an ideal of humanity that is irreducible to any single person (Kant). Finally, as expressed in organicist aesthetics, the work of art must be complete and self-enclosed, and yet dynamically creative. Each of its aspects is essential for and definitive of the whole, with the whole being less an imposed order than a consequence of an interacting and self-governing form.

If these notions of bounded, dynamic, expressive and yet responsive wholeness sound either too Romanticist or too theological to have any bearing on the present we should bear in mind that equilibrium,

autopoiesis, operative closure and *meaning* (in the sense of being related to a milieu that is always relevant for this specific body) are key concepts in contemporary accounts of life. Further, we can also note that dynamic yet bounded wholeness also defines the modernist work of art. New criticism's concept of the poem as a well-wrought urn specifies that the literary object is at once complete and distinct, and yet also blessed with a dynamism of form that will revive and renew an everyday use of language.<sup>9</sup>

The modernist demand that of the art work that should not circulate as a familiar commodity but ought to break with the expected dull round of production and enjoyment seems to signal a break with organicist aesthetics. There is no doubt a strand of modernism concerned with disarticulation and non-actualised potential that would work against Romantic definitions of the fragment: whereas the fragment intimates some lost whole from which the part has been detached, modernist destructiveness works against the implication of order. Modernism would take organicist notions of the creation of a whole from dynamic relations and stress a striving toward wholeness or order that remains essentially incomplete. It is possible to see the artwork in its organicist and autonomous definitions as bearing two contrasting tendencies: a high Romantic organicism (perhaps already overcome in Romanticism itself) in which the limits of the work open onto an absolute, which the work *as limited* already indicates,<sup>10</sup> and a counter-organicist tendency in which the very presentation of a bounded body opens up the thought of an unbounded outside or radical exterior that is *not* defined by the relations of the presented whole. This would yield both two models of life and two models of reading. The first (normative) model of autopoietic life regards all life, properly speaking, as defined by a permeable border, such that there is at once an individualising distinction between inside and outside, while the necessary outside is known and realised only as it is *for* the body in question. A text or artwork would, accordingly, always be read and experienced from within some context, a context that is also always enlivened or reconfigured by the artwork.

The second model (offered by Deleuze and Guattari) is molecular, and considers life beyond its bordered and bounded forms, and considers individuation or the creation of difference beyond that of the individual. Here, there is no stable border between interior and exterior, and –

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9 Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947).

10 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

following on from this – no definitive milieu. In the remainder of this essay I want to differentiate this second molecular aesthetics and ethics from a seemingly more organicist and more traditionally modernist aesthetic of defamiliarisation.

The post-Romantic modernist aesthetic and ethic of defamiliarisation can be tied to the form of vitalism that Deleuze and Guattari see as running from Kant to Claude Bernard: the world as we know it is the effect of an active power that is known only through its acts of synthesis, never as it is in itself. This vital, relating and effective power ‘acts but is not’:

Vitalism has always had two possible interpretations: that of an Idea that acts, but is not – that acts therefore only from the point of view of an external cerebral knowledge (from Kant to Claude Bernard); or that of a force that is but does not act – that is therefore a pure internal Awareness (from Leibniz to Ruyer). If the second interpretation seems to us imperative it is because the contraction that preserves is always in a state of detachment in relation to action or even to movement and appears as a pure contemplation without knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

To consider artworks as properly enlivening in their power to take the fragments of everyday life that circulate mechanically and unthinkingly and then reinvest those elements with power through processes of recombination is to presuppose a life or potential fecundity from which matters have become detached, a life ultimately harmonious with an ‘external cerebral knowledge’, a *mindful* life. Aesthetic defamiliarisation is also a mode of revitalisation: the language that was once actively and freely created has now become so familiar that we no longer recall its original force and difference. The task of art would be to present language *as language* in all its difference, and thus to call to mind once again the creative and emanating power from which all seemingly natural and inevitable relations emerge. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari cite the modernist book as one way in which proliferating connections and relations might be regrounded on an actively synthesising whole, a ‘superior unity’ in which multiplicity becomes once again unified through streams of language:

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<sup>11</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York Columbia, 1994), 213.

That is why the most resolutely fragmented work can also be presented as the Total Work or Magnum Opus. Most modern methods for making series proliferate or multiplicity grow are perfectly valid in one direction, for example, a linear direction, whereas a unity of totalization asserts itself even more firmly in another, circular or cyclic dimension<sup>12</sup>

Derrida made a similar point in his early book on Husserl: Joyce appears to create a high degree of incommensurable voice, and yet everything ultimately returns to the great notion of language, of a final emanation of the word.<sup>13</sup>

Another vitalism, another aesthetic and another ethics can be discerned in Deleuze and Guattari's second counter-tradition of vitalism that runs from Leibniz to Raymond Ruyer, and is passive. Far from activating the power from which relations must have emanated, and therefore quite distinct from a process of negating or destroying the familiar, this ethic and aesthetic is less a re-vivification of the self's own powers than a creation of a point of view beyond life as it is lived. Such a point of view or 'survey' would aim to express powers of difference *as such*, not as they have been lived, and not as they are constituted in relations and systems of life. Thus if we can think of organicism as a recognition that each part is what it is only in relation to a whole, with the whole – in turn – being more than the sum of its parts, then organicism would be a theory of life premised on intrinsic relations. That is, if any part or term of the whole were to be detached or placed into different relations then its identity would change, and if the whole were to lose any of its parts it too would no longer be what it is. Such an organicism is tied to an active vitalism that would provide a synthesising and unifying force of life that would infuse matter and grant each potential being its identity as part of a whole that could only be known in its act of generation.

On the other hand, if we consider Deleuze and Guattari's *passive* vitalism this would be tied to a commitment to the externality of relations: 'there are two very different types of relations: intrinsic relations of *couples* involving well-determined aggregates or elements (social classes, men and women, this or that particular person), and less localizable relations that are

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12 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1987, 6.

13 Jacques Derrida. *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: an introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey (Nebraska: Bison Books, 1989), 2.

always external to themselves and instead concern flows flows and particles eluding those classes, sexes and persons.<sup>14</sup>

One simple and easy way of accounting for Deleuze's ethics is to see him indebted to a modernist aesthetic: as long as we approach the world through an already given language and in terms of habitual concepts we have failed to really think. Further, because habitual language maintains the form of the self through time, allowing us to experience the future in the light of the past, and the past from the sense of the present, then everyday functional and efficient language is also the death or loss of time. The work of art, in destroying everyday language and communication would reintroduce some chaos into the order through which we live the world and would, therefore, be an affirmation of life and an ethical imperative: 'How can a moment of the world be rendered durable or made to exist by itself? ... Through having reached the percept as 'the sacred source', though having seen Life in the living or the Living in the lived, the novelist or painter returns breathless and with bloodshot eyes.<sup>15</sup> One should live as an ongoing work of art, never submitting life to the rigidity of concepts, and always using language to destroy comprehension and communication. However, in both his book on Proust and in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze offers a far more complex ethics of modernism, in which the powers of art allow for a philosophy and ethics of time. In a gesture that goes well beyond modernism, art is not simply the destruction or rendering-affective of language but – as Deleuze insists in his book on Proust – a way of creating signs that are not those that give us a manageable and lived world.

That Proust can be read as an artist of *signs* has twofold significance: Deleuze regards the sign as a potential relation that may – in the case of language or worldly signs – tie a particular experienced predicate to an identifiable, repeatable and shared worldly denotation; but signs may also relate thought to what is not given (the signs of love, such as the face of the other whose desire I cannot know or sense):

Love's signs are not like signs of worldliness; they are not empty signs standing for thought and action. They are deceptive signs that can be addressed to us only by concealing what they express: the origin of unknown worlds, of unknown actions and thoughts that give them

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14 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 196.

15 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 172.

a meaning. They do not express a superficial, nervous exaltation, but the suffering of a deeper exploration.<sup>16</sup>

Signs may also have nothing psychological about them, establishing relations among qualities – and we might see these sensuous signs as pre-personal, as the tastes or affects from which we are composed. The signs of art, though, are at the centre of Deleuze's ethics, for it is the work of art's capacity to present signs – to present everyday language, the lacunae and gaps of love, and the sensuous intensities – that brings us to a level of thinking which is truly ethical. For we are able, after journeying through these layers of signs, or all the ways in which relations are established, to think relationality as such: 'Now the world of art is the ultimate world of signs, and these signs, as though *dematerialized*, find their meaning in an ideal essence'.<sup>17</sup> Ethics is, then, both tied to *ethos* or the sentiment or feeling that places us where we are, but also goes beyond character. For Deleuze, we are not subjects who, through time, establish relations and create our own selves. Rather, there are relations or the capacity for intensities to reverberate, and these intensities are the souls or contemplations from which we are composed. Deleuze offers, then, a contrast to the dominant model of narrative ethics, where selves and communities create themselves through time and deploy literature as both a reflection and mode of that creation. In so doing his ethics passes from happiness or the bounded and autopoietic model of a life well-lived, to the joy of a pure past or intensities that exceed the lived:

It may happen that a sensuous sign gives us a strange joy at the same time that it transmits a kind of imperative. Thus experienced, the quality no longer appears as a property of the object that now possesses it, but as the sign of an *altogether different* object that we must try to decipher, at the cost of an effort that always risks failure.<sup>18</sup>

These are true signs that immediately give us an extraordinary joy, signs that are fulfilled, affirmative, and

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16 Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 9.

17 Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 13.

18 Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 11.

joyous. *But they are material signs.*<sup>19</sup>

### Joy and Happiness

Aristotle had aligned ethics with happiness – or, if this is not an accurate translation of the term – with well-spiritedness. A self lives well, not if life is a series of punctuated moments, or a series of pleasures; on the contrary, *Eudaimonia* or living well is tied to a narrative life. Happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, and a virtue is an excellence or actualisation of the self, a bringing into being of those powers in the self that are definitive of oneself.<sup>20</sup> For Aristotle, then, it is because the potential to reason is the excellence uniquely attributed to human souls, and because a rational life is ordered in the manner of an ongoing narrative, that happiness will require a well-ordered life, a life in command of itself. If, in modernity, we no longer recognise the human as a potentiality for reason, where reason just is this power of intuiting what makes each being what it uniquely is, we might still say that happiness lies in the actualisation of one's specific potential. Ethics would still be a maximisation or bringing to fulfilment of one's powers, even if those powers were no longer determined as the (rational) capacity to intuit what makes each being the being that it essentially is.

Deleuze's ethics of joy might then be seen to continue – by way of Spinoza – a naturalist tradition of ethics, where living well is not only the affirmation of one's own powers, but also the expansive connection with, and enjoyment of the powers of beings other than one's own organic self. If, for Aristotle, the reason that is our proper potential is the capacity to intuit what each being *ought* to become (and therefore is grounded on recognising the actual form each potential should realise), for Deleuze (following Spinoza) reason is the capacity to intuit beings *sub specie aeternatis*: not what they would be as they come into being in time, but the powers that might be realised differently for all time, and whose potentiality exceeds any single actualisation. This raises, I would argue, a problem of ethics and style, a problem that is answered by Deleuze's appeal to modernism. If happiness is the distinct potentiality of each being moving towards what it ought to be, then happiness is essentially *narrative*: in the beginning is a gap or absence which, through time, must arrive at an actuality that was prefigured in, but not fully present at, the origin. The content of the narrative would be the filling out of form, and we could imagine – as is the case with the history of the novel – the same form of individual

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<sup>19</sup> Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Terence Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

felicity and marriage being fulfilled through a variety of different and accidental narrative contents. In all cases, though, the happiness of this trajectory would be *energeia*: the end or fulfilment is not separable from the process of coming to fulfilment. The fortune or marriage that ends a novel has its sense only as the achievement of this act of narrative striving and becoming: at each point in the narrative the narrative form is being fulfilled. As narrative beings humans fulfil themselves in this passage of time, and do not go through time accidentally; their being is a being of temporal fulfilment. If, however, potentials or powers are fully real and are *not* determined by an actuality which they ought to fulfil then we need a literary form that is not the unfolding of what something is – such that content would be accidental – but a form in which each potential, each accidental occurrence, each affect and particular could present itself as a power in its own right. Liberated from the man of reason who passes through time only to recognise himself as a being who is the master of time, the self of pure potentialities would have to lose any sense of self which might determine potentialities as potential predicates of some substance. Thus, the time of such an ethics would be a non-narrative time, and the happiness, felicity or joy of this ethics would be achieved in a becoming-impersonal.

To a certain extent this liberation of literary form from any notion of man as the fulfilment of reason is identified by Alain Badiou in his reading of Beckett. Those seemingly particular and descriptive moments in Beckett – the character who loses a series of possessions – allow us to arrive at a point of the speaking self, where there is no longer one who speaks in the manner of some qualitatively robust subject who unfolds who he is through time, or who has a world that he might describe, define and master. Rather the emptiness and poverty of the self prepare us for a capture of an essential humanity, where we are nothing other than speech addressing the void. According to Alain Badiou, Beckett's work evidences a passage from misery to happiness. The early works concern a stripped down Cartesian figure of 'man' who faces the void. The self is isolated within a language that can only circle around itself, never refer to, represent or name a world. What is other than the self is given not in any qualitative specificity but as a grey indeterminacy. The paring away of the self reveals an essential misery.

In the later works, however, Badiou identifies an opening to happiness. The content used to figure this opening – the relation between man and woman – is formal. Sexual difference is a pure relation between a man who faces nothing, and woman who is this nothing. Woman opens the void to infinity. One no longer speaks in a miserable solipsistic Cartesian

theatre; the woman whom one addresses cannot be known and named, but one nevertheless establishes a relation to what cannot be given. The happiness of love is therefore not that of union and blissful return to a state beyond desire and striving, but a happiness in which the self is no longer a mere voice without relation to anything other than itself:

The 'man' desires the *nothing* of the Two, whilst the 'woman' – the wandering guardian and narrator of original unity, of the pure point of the encounter – desires *nothing but* the Two, that is, the infinite tenacity of a lasting Two.<sup>21</sup>

Happiness is indistinguishably 'man' and 'woman'; it is, at one and the same time, a separating void and the conjunction that reveals this void. As happiness, as the outline of happiness, it is the nothing of the Two *and* the nothing but the Two. Such is its inseparable sexuation: immobility and wandering, imperative and story.<sup>22</sup>

In his book on *Proust* Deleuze similarly advances to the joy and ethics of life and art through the figure of love. It is the signs of love that take us beyond worldly signs. We might therefore note that for Deleuze the ethics of fiction is *not* the opening of a shared world, the establishment of a horizon of sympathy and communication. Rather, it is just this world of an ongoing, shared and communicable time – the time of everyday language – that is shattered by love. Thus in Proust we are at once given Combray as it is commonly seen and described, its conventions and clichés; but within that propositional language of the world as it is known and lived, we are introduced to relations of love that disclose what is hidden, unfulfilled, devoid of production or sociality and frequently not brought to the level of the lived:

Love's signs are not like signs of worldliness; they are not empty signs standing for thought and action. They are deceptive signs that can be addressed to us only by concealing what they express: the origin of unknown

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21 Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, ed. Alberto Toscano and Nina Power (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2006), 6.

22 Badiou, *On Beckett*, 34.

worlds, of unknown actions and thoughts that give them a meaning. They do not express a superficial, nervous exaltation, but the suffering of a deeper exploration.<sup>23</sup>

Such an ethics of fiction – where the everyday world of expectation, efficiency, communal agreement and propriety – would seem to reinforce an ethics of modernism reinforced elsewhere by Deleuze and Guattari, both explicitly in *What is Philosophy?* and implicitly in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari describe the artist who plunges into chaos in order to overcome the bourgeois clichés of opinion. Opinion is intrinsically bourgeois and essentially tied to taste: one passes directly from a certain affect, such as the strong smell of cheese, to the assumption of a common sense, where every man would find such cheese offensive.<sup>24</sup>

It is not surprising that the brain, treated as a constituted object of science, can be an organ only of the formation and communication of opinion: this is because step-by-step connections and centred intergrations are still based on the limited model of recognition (gnosis and praxis: “this is a cube”; “this is a pencil”), and the biology of the brain is aligned on the same postulates as the most stubborn logic. ... If the mental objects of philosophy, art, and science (that is to say, vital ideas) have a place, it will be in the deepest of the synaptic fissures, in the hiatuses, intervals and meantimes of a nonobjectifiable brain, in a place where to go in search of them will be to create.<sup>25</sup>

Opinion has its metaphysical condition in the assumption and constitution of one world that is the same through time, and the same for every other possible subject. Everyday time and life operates through extensive quantities. Each experience is the experience of some thing – some extended being which remains what it is through time – and such things can be placed within the same time and space of other things, a quantitative time that is a series of nows, and a quantitative space that is a field of points. Indeed, one might argue that it is only possible to have lived experience through

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23 Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 9.

24 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 174.

25 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 209.

extensive quantities and magnitudes: each sensible experience must have its location in time and space, and so be an extensive magnitude, and those forms of time and space are only achieved by carrying one moment over to the next, anticipating the future from the present, and retaining the past into the present – all as the time of this one life. By contrast the artist uses figures or lines to destroy these readymade figurations.

We might therefore read Deleuze as endorsing, following Badiou, a strictly formalist modernism where the aim of art is the destruction of sense, the tearing apart of relations, and the arrival at a moment of pure and non-semantic affect. This would seem to accord with the notions of literature as introducing a ‘stuttering’ into language: literature would be the affirmation of singularities – as though one might arrive at pure intensities, not intensities or qualities *of* some extended being, but quality as such liberated from its maintenance through time and across space. Literature ‘quantifies writing’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 4) by engaging with pure forces that are not yet synthesised into determined and extended substances:

This is, precisely, the task of all art and, from colors and sounds, both music and painting similarly extract new harmonies, new plastic or melodic landscapes, and new rhythmic characters that raise them to the heights of the earth’s song and the cry of humanity: that which constitutes tone, health, becoming, a visual and sonorous bloc. A monument does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event: the constantly renewed suffering of men and women, their re-created protestations, their constantly resumed struggle.<sup>26</sup> (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 177).

When Deleuze refers to an ethics of *Amor Fati* we might then think of *love* of what is – not the mastery, maintenance and sense of what is.<sup>27</sup> Such an ethic would reinforce a modernism of shock and transgression, a destruction of cliché, sense and system and a celebration of abandonment, loss and death. Perhaps this would lead us also to Badiou’s post-Sartrean celebration of Beckett: it is only in the loss of all meaning, of all reference and all sense

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<sup>26</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 177.

<sup>27</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (London: Continuum, 2004), 170-72.

of one as a self, that one can live that happy relation to an other who can never be given, only lived as absent.

The importance of Deleuze's Proust book is however, that it does not affirm a simply destructive or intensive modernism, and can therefore be contrasted with all the French celebrations of a Joycean linguistic formalism that would stop at the reintroduction of noise or intensity in an otherwise measured and meaningful language. If meaning is time – the capacity to intuit in this singular present a quality that could be repeated and represented beyond this present – then Deleuze's ethics of modernism is neither a destruction of meaning nor a destruction of time. Rather, art is the passage from a digital language of extensive magnitudes, where each experience is lived as already referred beyond itself to a shared time and space, and is already subjected to a repeatable and formal system, to analogical language. Art is not simply the destruction of order and system and a return to chaos. If it were then art would be the arrival at intensive magnitudes – pure affects or pulsations have no relation to anything other than themselves. The creation of figures or signs of love, and then the creation of sensuous signs, and finally the creation of signs of art is not simply the *loss* of time – the abandonment of all relations – but the regaining of time. Time is not system or measure – an extensive quantity where each moment is merely a point in which something happens – but time becomes intensive quantity. How does measure or quantity – a point of stability or reference – unfold from an intensity?

Deleuze's ethics of intensive quantities frees itself from the myth and economy of a destructive modernism. The everyday bourgeois narrative subject achieves his happiness by sacrificing pleasure here and now for the sake of some anticipated higher enjoyment. If human happiness is the recognition of oneself as a rational being – one capable of mastering his pleasure for a sense of who he is – then happiness also establishes a time of extended measure, each moment being part of an ongoing and economically mastered life. The modernist response to this life of measure and quantity for the sake of being oneself is the sacrifice and destruction of the self: a spending, squandering or waste that refuses to maintain itself or recognise itself: 'The ethics of intensive quantities has only two principles: affirm even the lowest, do not explicate oneself (too much).'<sup>28</sup>

Thus we might arrive at Badiou's Beckett, a reduction to a simple quantity – the two of love – who are not two of any kind, whose sexual difference is purely formal, and who do not maintain themselves through time but become nothing more than a relation to nothing: the immobile

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28 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 244.

man who faces the void but encounters the mobile woman, and the woman who does not resist the duality. No longer a man who masters and measures his world in order to establish a lived time, love is an event that breaks with ongoing time and exposes humanity as pure plurality, not this or that determined being but a relation between one who demands speech (man) and a woman who will narrate.

Deleuze's ethics of intensive quantities is, I would argue, an attempt to think beyond the pure mathematical formality of relations between terms. Deleuze offers a more complex ethics of modernism that is neither purely formal, such that the work of art is always about nothing more than the tracing out of relations, nor purely affective, such that art goes beyond all cognition and becomes simply visceral. Instead, the work is bound up with an ethics of taste: what are the intensities or affects from which we are composed? What sensibilities have organised our thinking? What is the pure past – not the qualities as they were lived, but intensities that formed relations that then allowed for a self who could go on and live a life? How does a term, something that can be counted as one – as a quantity – emerge? At what point does an intensity or a potentiality to be perceived create a point of relation?:

Intensity is simultaneously the imperceptible and that which can only be sensed. How could it be sensed for itself, independently of the qualities which cover it and the extensity in which it is distributed?<sup>29</sup>

This discernment or intuition of intensive quantities – or emergence of something that can be taken as 'a' quality – will be tied, crucially, to *taste*. In the Kantian distribution of reason, understanding and the imagination, it is taste that allows one to feel – but not know – that the relation between concept and intuition is harmonious: beauty is not a bodily particular pleasure, for beauty is just the feeling that what I experience as a felicitous coupling of form and content would also be felt by any subject whatever. Taste gives us the feeling of *sensus communis*, the feeling for the supersensible substrate of humanity, such that all subjects would feel pleasure in this relation between concept and intuition. For Deleuze, however, taste takes us back not to a supersensible humanity, but to the transcendental sensible from which we are composed. For Deleuze this is answered not in an art of figuration, which would use our already given units and

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<sup>29</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 230.

measures, nor in pure abstraction – mere form – nor in colourism – pure affect. Analogical language is the production of terms or signs, the creation of relations:

Extensity can emerge from the depths only if depth is definable independent of extensity. The extensity whose genesis we are attempting to establish is extensive magnitude, the *extensum* or term of reference of all *extension*. The original depth, by contrast, is indeed space as a whole but space as an intensive quantity: the pure *spatium*.<sup>30</sup>

In Proust we therefore move beyond the signs of love – the signs of a world that is not given, that is not laid out before me as so much shared and communicable information – to sensuous signs, or those affects that produce relations (the taste of Madeleine that produces a sense *that* something is being felt but not *what* is being felt):

An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory – this new sensation having had the effect, which love has, of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it *was* me. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal. Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I sensed that it was connected with the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature.<sup>31</sup>

But the novel as such, this work of art that gives these affects and resonances a form, allows us to think the pure past: the potential for an intensity to be grasped in its capacity to produce relations, to compose lines of time. This is time in its pure state: not a quantity of any determined form that allows us to establish a measure, nor a pure intensity without relation, but an intensity in its emergence as a quantity, as a potentiality for becoming. It

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<sup>30</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 230.

<sup>31</sup> Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised, D.J. Enright (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 31.

is love that will allow us to tie that suffering or relation of not-having to an other, but it is also love that will tie the narrator to what he will eventually see both in Swann and in a series of girls sacrificed to unrequited passion. Happiness is not the blissful union of love, but the enjoyment of sacrificing the prudence of ongoing time:

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.<sup>32</sup>

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32 Proust, 52.