Difference and Repetition in Deleuze’s Proustian Sign and Time Machine

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Abstract

The French poststructural philosopher Gilles Deleuze is well-known as the author of *Difference and Repetition* (1969), but perhaps the best introduction to his thought on difference and repetition in literature is his *Proust and Signs*, which in its third edition (1976) provides accounts of both the interpretation and the production of signs in Proust’s *Recherche*. A sign is a difference that unfolds itself, and its unfolding is an ongoing repetition of its difference. The interpretation of signs proceeds via an unfolding of differences, and in the *Recherche* the signs of art reveal the truth of difference and induce a retroactive reinterpretation of all signs. The production of the signs of art entails the formation of a machine that emits repeating differences. Such a machine creates unity as an after-effect through the invention of transversals, which disclose connections between signs that the work of art alone can activate.

Key Words

Proust, Deleuze, Bergson, difference, repetition, philosophy of time

As the author of *Difference and Repetition* (1969), Gilles Deleuze is no doubt among French poststructural philosophers the figure most closely associated with those themes. Yet of all his works, it is perhaps his modest study of Proust, rather than the lengthy and difficult *Difference and Repetition*, that best affords an understanding of the complex relationship Deleuze establishes between these two concepts. This study also makes especially clear the relevance of the two concepts for literary analysis, as well as itself providing an instance of difference and repetition, in that each of the two large sections of *Proust et les signes* appears to be an autonomous reading of Proust’s entire *oeuvre*, as if Deleuze wrote two books about Proust, each a repetition of the other, but with profound differences. In his Preface to the third edition of *Proust et les signes* (1976), Deleuze explains that the first part, published as *Marcel Proust et les signes* in 1964, concerns the
“emission and interpretation of signs,” whereas part two, added in a second edition in 1970 and divided into chapters in 1976, concerns “the production and multiplication of signs themselves, from the point of view of the composition of the Recherche.” In both instances, the problem Deleuze addresses is that of the unity of Proust’s A la recherche du temps perdu, this mammoth search for, inquiry into, and research on lost time (and the regained time [“temps retrouvé”] of the seventh volume). What is the singleness of a novel that has as its subject something that by its very nature cannot be grasped as a whole—i.e., time? What is the “unity of this multiple, of this multiplicity, as a whole of these fragments: a One and a Whole which would not be a principle, but on the contrary the ‘effect’ of the multiple and its disconnected parts” (PS 195; 144)? From the perspective of the emission and interpretation of signs, the Recherche is “the story of an apprenticeship” (PS 10; 4) in signs, but one that must be viewed from the point of view both of an ongoing process of discovery and of a final revelation of the truth of signs in the work of art. From the perspective of the multiplication and production of signs, the Recherche is a machine that produces “unity effects” as well as changes in the reader. Time is the narrator’s object of investigation and the medium in which that investigation takes place, but time is also the active subject that produces signs and the unity effects of the Recherche, for “such is time, the dimension of the narrator, which has the power (puissance) to be the whole (le tout) of these parts without totalizing them, the unity of these parts without unifying them” (PS 203; 150).

The Emission and Interpretation of Signs

One of Deleuze’s basic goals is to challenge the common notion that involuntary memory and subjective association hold the key to an interpretation of the Recherche. Marcel’s madeleine is an important element of the novel, but it is only one kind of sign, and a careful reading of the seventh volume, Le temps retrouvé, makes it clear that the

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1 All translations of Proust et les signes (abbreviated throughout as PS) are my own. Page references are
truths revealed through signs concern more than mere psychological states. Signs for Proust are enigmas, says Deleuze, hieroglyphs that resist ready decoding. Signs both reveal and conceal, and to the extent that they function as signs, they deny immediate comprehension and induce a process of indirect decipherment. The contents of signs are enfolded within them, rolled up, compressed, disguised, and to interpret signs is to unfold them, to *explicate* them (Latin *explicare*: to unfold, to unroll). In this regard, the madeleine is indeed paradigmatic of signs, for as Marcel remarks, the explication of this sign is like “the game wherein the Japanese amuse themselves by filling a porcelain bowl with water and steeping in it little pieces of paper which until then are without character or form, but the moment they become wet, stretch and twist and take on colour and distinctive shape, become flowers or houses or people, solid and recognisable” (Proust I 51).

The madeleine, however, represents only one of four kinds of signs. First, there are worldly signs, the signs of social convention, polite conversation, proper form, etiquette, custom, decorum, etc. Worldly signs pose many enigmas: why is one individual admitted to a certain circle and another not, what delineates one coterie from another, what is meant by a certain oblique remark, furtive glance, or sudden blush. Such signs finally refer to nothing else, but simply “hold the place” of an action or a thought. They are vapid and stereotypical, “but this vacuity confers upon them a ritual perfection, a formalism, that one cannot find elsewhere” (*PS* 13; 7). Second are the signs of love, those of the beloved who expresses an unknown world. “The loved one implicates, envelops, imprisons a world that must be deciphered, that is, interpreted” (*PS* 14; 7). Indeed, multiple worlds are enfolded within the beloved, and to love is to explicate and develop those hidden, mysterious landscapes that seem to emanate from the beloved’s eyes. Necessarily, however, the lover is excluded from some of these enfolded worlds, and it is for this reason that jealousy and disappointment hold the truth of love. The beloved’s remarks inevitably deceive, for they always enfold worlds the lover cannot know. “The lies of the beloved are the hieroglyphs of love. The interpretation of amorous

to the French edition, followed by the corresponding pages of the English translation by Richard Howard.
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signs is necessarily the interpretation of lies” (PS 16: 9). Third are sensual signs, like the madeleine, the uneven paving stones of Venice, the stiffly folded napkin at the hôtel de Guermantes. These are the well-known signs of involuntary memory, whereby an implicated world unfolds from a sudden, unexpected sensate experience. As Marcel remarks of the madeleine, “in a moment all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann’s park, and the water-lilies on the Vivonne and the good folk of the village and their little dwellings and the parish church and the whole of Combray and its surroundings, taking shape and solidity, sprang into being, towns and gardens alike, from my cup of tea” (Proust I 51). Such signs bring overwhelming joy and force thought into action, demanding interpretation and explication. They reveal more than a mere association of ideas or confluence of reminiscences, for they disclose essences—an essence of Combray, of Balbec, of Venice—that go beyond any sense experience or memory. Yet these signs remain material, and the essences incarnate in them are fleeting, rare, and difficult to sustain. Only in the fourth kind of signs, the signs of art, are essences dematerialized and thereby rendered autonomous and self-sustaining. The signs of involuntary memory are important, yet not as ends in themselves, but as gateways to the signs of art, in which essences are revealed in their full and proper form.

Proust’s “search for lost time” is a search for truth—the truth of signs—but truth is not to be found through good will and voluntary action. Signs impinge on thought, induce disequilibrium and disorientation. In reflecting on the sensation of the uneven paving stones, Marcel notes that it was “the fortuitous and inevitable fashion in which this and the other sensations had been encountered that proved the trueness of the past which they brought back to life” (Proust III 913). The ideas formulated by intelligence alone “have no more than a logical, possible truth, they are arbitrarily chosen. The book whose hieroglyphs are patterns not traced by us is the only book that really belongs to us. Not that the ideas which we form for ourselves cannot be correct in logic; that they may well be, but we cannot know whether they are true” (Proust III 914). Truth, then, is both fortuitous and inevitable, and its exploration proceeds through chance encounters with
signs that select the truth to be explored. To search for truth is to interpret signs, but the act of explicating the sign, of unfolding its hidden sense, is inseparable from the sign’s own unfolding, its own self-development. In this sense, the search for truth is always temporal, “and the truth, always a truth of time” (PS 25; 17). Hence, Deleuze distinguishes four structures of time, each with its truth, which Marcel encounters in his apprenticeship in signs. “Time which passes” is one form of “lost time” (temps perdu), the time of alteration, aging, decay and destruction. Worldly signs betray this time in the obvious form of the physical decline of various social figures, but also in the changing modes and fashions that preoccupy polite society. The passage of time is also evident in the signs of love, and not simply because the beloved grows old. “If the signs of love and of jealousy bring with them their own alteration, it is for a simple reason: love never ceases to prepare for its own disappearance, to mime its own rupture” (PS 27; 18). And in sensual signs too the decay of time can be felt, as in Marcel’s overwhelming anguish as he removes his boot and remembers his dead grandmother in Sodome et Gomorrhe (Proust II 783). Only in the signs of art is the time which passes overcome. Lost time can also take the form of “the time one loses,” the wasted time of worldly diversions, of failed loves, and even of sensual indulgences in such trivialities as the taste of a madeleine. And yet attention to more serious matters does not necessarily lead to truth, for hard work and deep purpose belong to the will, and truth reveals itself through the contingent encounter with signs. The wasted time of worldly, amorous and sensual signs proves finally to be a necessary part of Marcel’s apprenticeship, the mysterious means whereby an education in signs takes its course. “One never knows how someone learns: but however one learns, it is always through the intermediary of signs, in losing one’s time, and not through the assimilation of objective contents” (PS 31; 21-22). A third form of time is “the time one regains” (le temps qu’on retrouve), and this is a time grasped only by the intelligence. Proust seemingly discounts the use of intelligence in the search for truth, but this is simply when intelligence operates on its own, seeking logical truths ungrounded in the necessity of an encounter with signs. When intelligence comes after an encounter with signs, it is the sole faculty capable of extracting the truth of the
sign, and hence the truth of time. “The impression is for the writer what experiment is for
the scientist, with the difference that in the scientist the work of the intelligence precedes
the experiment and in the writer it comes after the impression” (Proust III 914). Through
retrospective analysis, the intelligence reveals that the empty signs of the world conform
to general laws, the deceptive signs of love reiterate a repetitive theme, and the
ephemeral signs of involuntary memory disclose immaterial essences. In this sense, lost,
wasted time becomes time one regains. But a fourth form of time exists in the work of art,
“time regained” (le temps retrouvé), time in its pure form, whose truth transforms all
worldly, amorous and sensuous signs. This pure time Marcel can only discover at the end
of his search.

Marcel’s apprenticeship involves four kinds of signs—worldly, amorous, sensual
and artistic— and the course of his search is structured by four forms of time—the time
that passes, the time one loses, the time one regains, and regained time. It also finds its
complex rhythms in necessary patterns of confusion and disappointment. Marcel
inevitably misunderstands signs in two ways. First, he assumes that the object of the sign
somehow holds its truth. He repeatedly sips his tea as if he could discover the secret of
Combray in the bowl itself. He pronounces the name “Guermantes” over and over again,
as if the syllables themselves held the prestige of Mme. de Guermantes. In his early
encounters with the world, “he believes that those who emit signs are also those who
understand and possess their code” (PS 38; 27). Such confusion is unavoidable, for
perception naturally attributes the qualities of signs to the objects from which they
originate. Desire, too, assumes that the object itself is desirable, and for that reason
lovers seek to possess the beloved. And intelligence likewise has an inherent tendency
toward objectivity in its belief that truth must be articulated and communicated. It is this
prejudice that leads one to seek truth through conversation, friendship, work and
philosophy— i.e., through the good will and voluntary action of traditional discursive
thought. But if a sign designates an object, it always signifies something else. Hence,
Marcel is perpetually disappointed in the objects of his quest, in the entities designated
by signs. For this reason, he frequently turns to a compensatory subjectivism, which constitutes the second error of his apprenticeship. If the secret of the sign is not in the object it designates, he thinks, perhaps it resides in a subjective association. But “everything is permissible in the exercise of associations” (PS 48; 35), anything may be linked to anything else. It may seem that involuntary memory teaches a lesson of subjective associationism, but if so, then the madeleine can show Marcel nothing about art, save that the power of the madeleine and the power of the Vinteuil sonata reside alike in arbitrary and ephemeral associations of a strictly personal and idiosyncratic nature. Such is not the case, however, for the secret of a sign lies in neither the designated object nor the interpreting subject, but in the essence enfolded in the sign.

What distinguishes the signs of art from other signs is that in art the sign is immaterial. True, the violin and piano emit the phrase of the Vinteuil sonata, but the artistic sign is an essence, an idea, not a material entity, despite its conveyance through a sonic medium. In worldly, amorous and sensual signs, the meaning of the sign is found in something else, but “Art gives us veritable unity: the unity of an immaterial sign and a completely spiritual meaning” (PS 53; 40-1). Deleuze argues that for Proust, an essence is “a difference, the ultimate and absolute Difference” (PS 53; 41). Deleuze finds a first approximation of what this might mean in Marcel’s remark that “style for the writer, no less than colour for the painter, is a question not of technique but of vision: it is the revelation, which by direct and conscious methods would be impossible, of the qualitative difference, the uniqueness of the fashion in which the world appears to each one of us, a difference which, if there were no art, would remain for ever the secret of every individual” (Proust III 931-32). Each individual expresses the world from a particular point of view, and “the point of view is difference itself, internal absolute

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2 Of Swann’s first reaction to the Vinteuil sonata, Proust writes: “An impression of this order, vanishing in an instant is, so to speak, *sine materia*. Doubtless the notes which we hear at such moments tend, according to their pitch and volume, to spread out before our eyes over surfaces of varying dimensions, to trace arabesques, to give us the sensation of breadth or tenuity, stability or caprice. But the notes themselves have vanished before these sensations have developed sufficiently to escape submersion under those which the succeeding or even simultaneous notes have already begun to awaken in us” (Proust I 228).
difference” (PS 55: 42). Yet this does not amount to subjectivism, for the world that is expressed is not a function of the subject that expresses it. The subject does not produce the world and its internal absolute difference; the subject and the world emerge together through the unfolding of that difference. “It is not the subject that explicates the essence, it is rather the essence that implicates itself, envelopes itself, rolls itself up in the subject” (PS 56; 43). Every subject is like a Leibnizian monad, which contains within itself the entire world, though in an obscure fashion. The world unfolds, explicates itself in monads, and the world is enfolded, implicated within each monad, the individual monad’s expression of the world being limited by the illumination of its particular perspective. As Leibniz often remarks, the world is like a city and the monads its inhabitants, whose various views of the city are different views of the whole. But in Proust there is no “pre-established harmony” to ensure the unity of the world and its monads. Every subject expresses a different world, and only in art can these worlds be put in communication with one another. As Marcel remarks, “through art alone we are able to emerge from ourselves, to know what another person sees of a universe which is not the same as our own and of which, without art, the landscapes would remain as unknown to us as those that may exist in the moon. Thanks to art, instead of seeing one world only, our own, we see that world multiply itself and we have at our disposal as many worlds as there are original artists, worlds more different one from the other than those which revolve in infinite space” (Proust III 932).

When listening to the Vinteuil sonata’s dialogue of piano and violin, Swann muses that “it was as at the beginning of the world, as if there were as yet only the two of them on the earth, or rather in this world closed to all the rest, so fashioned by the logic of its creator that in it there should never be any but themselves: the world of this sonata” (Proust I 382). Deleuze argues that for Proust every work of art is a beginning of the world, “a radical, absolute beginning” (PS 57; 44). In each work one finds what Marcel discerns in the faces of adolescent girls, “a play of unstable forces which recalls that perpetual re-creation of the primordial elements of nature which we contemplate when
we stand before the sea” (Proust I 967). But in addition to a play of the unstable forces of primordial nature, a beginning of the world entails a beginning of time, and this is the time disclosed in the work of art—a qualitatively different form of time, the regained time, *le temps retrouvé*, of essences. Deleuze notes that some Neoplatonic philosophers designate an originary state of the world before its unfolding in the act of creation by the term *complicatio*, “the complication which envelops the multiple in the One and affirms the One of the multiple” (*PS* 58; 44). The *complicatio* is outside normal, chronological time, but it is not timeless; rather, it is “the complicated state of time itself” (*PS* 58; 45). The *complicatio* is time wrapped up within itself, a pure form of time, which subsequently unfolds itself in the various dimensions of actual temporal experience during the process of creation. The work of art is a radical, absolute beginning of the world, then, in the sense that the essence revealed in it effects “the perpetual re-creation of the primordial elements of nature,” and in the sense that essence partakes of a *temps retrouvé*, a complicated time, or time as pure form, as condition of possibility of time.

How, then, are essences embodied in art?, asks Deleuze. Essence manifests itself in the physical materials of artworks, but “art is a veritable transmutation of matter” (*PS* 61; 46), and the means whereby art transmutes matter is style. In *Le temps retrouvé*, Marcel considers the way in which the heterogeneous sensations and associations of a particular moment combine present stimuli and past memories in a single experience. He reflects that the writer may describe in great detail the individual objects of a given scene, “but truth will be attained by him only when he takes two different objects, states the connection between them—a connection analogous in the world of art to the unique connection which in the world of science is provided by the law of causality—and encloses them in the necessary links of a well-wrought style; truth—and life too—can be attained by us only when, by comparing a quality common to two sensations, we succeed in extracting their common essence and in reuniting them to each other, liberated from the contingencies of time, within a metaphor” (Proust III 924-25). At its most fundamental level, then, style is metaphor, in that it forges the “necessary links” between different objects. But style is more than a mere play of words. The link between different
objects is a common quality, which is the expression of an essence, “petrified in this luminous matter, plunged into this refracting milieu” (*PS* 61; 47). An essence is “the quality of an original world” (*PS* 61; 47), and through the “necessary links” of style an artist can “extract” from different objects “their common essence” and liberate them “from the contingencies of time.” But Deleuze insists further that if style is metaphor, “metaphor is essentially metamorphosis” (*PS* 61; 47). If within matter art forges necessary links through common qualities, it also induces a transformation of matter. As in the paintings of Elstir, the sea becomes land and the land sea, the aqueous land forms and geological ocean waves functioning as pliable masses traversed by unfolding forces. Style, “in order to spiritualize matter and render it adequate to essence, reproduces the unstable opposition, the original complication, the struggle and exchange of primordial elements that constitute essence itself” (*PS* 62; 47).

If essence is a beginning of the world, it also is an ongoing power of creation. Essence is both an originary difference and an individualizing force, which “itself individualizes and determines the matters in which it incarnates itself, like the objects it encloses in the links of style” (*PS* 62; 48). Essence is a difference that repeats itself, a continuing process of self-differentiation and self-individuation that plays through the world that unfolds in the work of art. Difference and repetition, rather than opposing one another, “are the two powers [*puissances*] of essence, inseparable and correlative” (*PS* 63; 48). Difference, as quality of a world, “only affirms itself through a sort of auto-repetition that traverses various milieus and unites diverse objects; repetition constitutes the degrees of an original difference, but diversity also constitutes the levels of a no less fundamental repetition” (*PS* 63; 48). Essence, then, is a beginning of the world, a play of primordial elements and unstable forces in a complicated time, but also a beginning that continually repeats itself in an ongoing re-beginning of the world it causes to unfold. In the artwork, matter is transmuted, dematerialized, and rendered adequate to essence. As a result, the signs of art are transparent; their meaning is the essence that plays through them. Style, as the artistic force that encloses signs in necessary links and transmutes
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matter, is one with essence, the power of difference and repetition that unfolds a world. “Identity of a sign, as style, and a meaning as essence: such is the characteristic of the work of art” (PS 64; 49). Buffon says that “le style, c’est l’homme même,” but style is not simply the invention of the artist-subject. Style is the self-differentiating difference that unfolds itself in a world that includes the subject as point of view, that necessarily passes through the subject, but that far from originating in the subject, merely constitutes the subject as component of that world. In this sense, “style is not the man; style is essence itself” (PS 62; 48).

The Reinterpretation of Signs

If Marcel’s apprenticeship in signs leads him from the material signs of the world, love and the senses to the immaterial signs of art, his full understanding of art in turn makes possible a new understanding of sensual, amorous and worldly signs. This is especially the case with the signs of involuntary memory, which only receive an adequate analysis in the last volume of the Recherche. Initially, it seems that involuntary memory is simply a matter of an unconscious association of ideas, a resemblance between a present and a past sensation. But the overwhelming joy Marcel experiences is more than the result of an encounter with a childhood reminiscence. First, it is a revelation of a different form of time, “the being in itself of the past” (PS 72; 56). Deleuze argues that in this regard, Proust is Bergsonian. Bergson notes that the present would never pass if it were a simple point in time. In order that the present move toward a future, there must be a continuity between any present moment and the moment immediately preceding it, a coexistence of present and past within an ongoing movement. From this Bergson concludes that at every moment of the present there is a coexisting past moment, but he asserts further that the past moment is part of a single past that includes all past moments as a continuous, coexisting whole. The past is like a cone, whose base extends infinitely

3 Deleuze discusses Bergson’s virtual past at some length in chapter three of Le Bergsonisme, especially pp. 45-57.
back in time, and whose tip is its point of coexistence with the present. Yet if the past coexists with the present, the two exist in qualitatively different ways. The past has a virtual existence, whereas the present has an actual existence. Both are real, but the virtual past has never been actual. Hence, when one remembers, one does not bring into the present the trace of a moment that was once present and has now fallen into the past. Instead, one makes a qualitative leap into the field of the virtual past, where all past events coexist with one another in a single temporal dimension. This Bergsonian virtual past, Deleuze claims, is very much like the past Marcel explores through involuntary memory. “A moment of the past, did I say? Was it not perhaps very much more: something that, common both to the past and to the present, is much more essential than either of them?” (Proust III 905). In the simple present, the senses languish. “But let a noise or a scent, once heard or once smelt, be heard or smelt again in the present and at the same time in the past, real without being actual, ideal without being abstract, and immediately the permanent and habitually concealed essence of things is liberated” (Proust III 905-06). Involuntary memory, like the Bergsonian past, is “real without being actual, ideal without being abstract,” an experience of a temporal dimension that exists “in the present and at the same time in the past.” Through involuntary memory, a minute “has been freed from the order of time” (Proust III 906); access has been granted to “a fragment of time in the pure state” (Proust III 905).

But there is more to Proustian involuntary memory than the disclosure of a virtual past. There is also a revelation of essences as enfolded and unfolding differences. Rather than simply fashioning a resemblance between two sensations, involuntary memory reveals “a strict identity: the identity of a quality common to two sensations, or a sensation common to two moments, the present and the past” (PS 74; 58). When Marcel savors the madeleine, its taste is a quality common to two different moments. But he experiences more than a simple association of Combray and the taste of the madeleine. In the voluntary exercise of memory, the taste and the reminiscences of Combray are contiguous to one another, but external. Through involuntary memory, however, the
context in which the madeleine was tasted in the past becomes internal to the present experience. Involuntary memory “internalizes the context, it renders the former context inseparable from the present sensation” (PS 75; 58). Combray surges forth within the present taste of the madeleine. In this sense, within the identity of a common quality—the taste of the madeleine—a difference is internalized, the past Combray as present. But that Combray is itself a difference, not the Combray as experienced in the past, but an essence of Combray, as it could never be experienced: “not in reality, but in its truth; not in its external and contingent relations, but in its internalized difference, in its essence” (PS 76; 59). Involuntary memory, then, is the analog of art, in that a necessary link between two different things is forged through a common quality, which internalizes their difference. The common quality proves to be an essence unfolding a world and “a fragment of time in the pure state.” Yet the signs of involuntary memory differ from those of art in several ways. The matter in which they are embodied is more opaque, less pliable, than in art. They are tied to locales—Combray, Balbec, Venice—and specific sensory objects, and they are evanescent and difficult to sustain. The time they disclose points toward the complicated, originary time of art, but the time of involuntary memory is not the “regained time” of art. It “arises abruptly in a time already deployed, developed. At the heart of the time that passes, it rediscovers a center of envelopment, but this is only the image of original time” (PS 78; 61). Finally, whereas in works of art the selection and relation of different elements “are entirely determined by an essence that incarnates itself in a ductile or transparent medium,” in involuntary memory relations depend on a contingent association. “Thus essence itself is no longer master of its own incarnation, of its own selection, but is selected according to givens that remain external to it” (PS 80; 63).

The truth of signs is “fortuitous and inevitable” (Proust III 913), involuntary rather than freely chosen, necessary rather than contingent. In art, there is an adequation of sign and meaning; essence unfolds according to its inner necessity, and the world it discloses is not one the artist selects, but one that unfolds the artist as part of that inevitable world. And in this adequation of sign and meaning, essence singularizes, in that it produces a
singular point of view, “individual and even individualizing” (PS 77; 60). Though sensual signs to a large extent are “fortuitous and inevitable,” they are more contingent and general than the signs of art. The essences they reveal depend on external circumstances for their selection, and the worlds they disclose are common worlds between two moments, slightly more general than the singular worlds of art.

In amorous and worldly signs, essences take on forms that are increasingly contingent and general, at their limit tending toward a “law.” Essence discloses itself in amorous signs as a theme, a general motif that plays through the moments of love and arranges them in series. And in worldly signs, essence finds its most general and contingent embodiment, not in series, but in “the generality of the group” (PS 100; 79). Worldly signs initiate Marcel’s apprenticeship, but their significance is only evident at the end of his search. Signs require a double reading, one in terms of a progressive understanding, a second in terms of a retrospective comprehension. The unity of the Recherche Deleuze finds in Marcel’s apprenticeship in signs. As he unfolds the signs of vapid, worldly exchange, the signs of deceptive, jealous love, the arresting signs of involuntary memory, and the immaterial signs of art, he gradually comes to see signs as implicated essences. In his quest for the truth of signs, he discovers as well different forms of time, the time of decay, the time one wastes, the “fragment of time in a pure state” liberated in a sensate experience, the complicated, originary time of art. He passes through various disappointments and illusions, mistakenly locating the truth of signs in the objects they designate or the subjects who perceive them. But once the signs of art are comprehended, other signs are transformed. All signs implicate, enfold essences, though those essences are expressed in different signs at varying degrees of generality and contingency, in matter of diverse levels of malleability and resistance. In the work of art, an individualizing, singular difference repeats itself in a transmuted matter, disclosing an autonomous world and point of view. In the sensual sign, a common quality internalizes an essential local difference and a virtual past. In the signs of love, a general theme repeats itself in an individual’s sequence of passions, in the subdivisions
within a particular relationship, in transsubjective networks of affections, and in the parallel series of the sequestrated sexes. And in worldly signs, essence reveals itself in the general laws of ritual form and broad group affinities.

In one sense, the unity Deleuze delineates is a thematic unity, the “thought” or “content” of the *Recherche*. In another, however, the unity of the apprenticeship in signs characterizes the *Recherche* in its “form” and its formation. The interpretation of signs is an unfolding and explicating of enfolded, implicated difference; but the interpretation of signs simply follows the course of the sign’s own movement. “For the sign develops, unrolls itself at the same time that it is interpreted” (PS 110; 89). Marcel’s explication of the signs of his apprenticeship is the unfolding of the signs of the *Recherche*, signs of art that disclose a singular world and point of view. An essence differentiates itself through a transmuted matter, transforming worldly, amorous and sensual signs into the signs of art, enclosing them in the necessary links of style. The world of essences disclosed to Marcel at the end of the novel is the *Recherche* that has unfolded in his search for the truth of signs. It is a truth in time, the course of a gradual revelation, a truth about time, in its multiple guises, and a truth of time, an artwork unfolding in its own complicated, originary time. “Thanks to art, instead of seeing one world only, our own, we see that world multiply itself and we have at our disposal as many worlds as there are original artists” (Proust III 932). One such world is the *Recherche*.

**The Multiplication and Production of Signs**

In 1970, Deleuze adds a second section to his study of Proust, turning his attention, he says, from the emission and interpretation of signs to the multiplication and production of signs. In part one he shows that the unity of the *Recherche* does not reside in involuntary memory but in the story of Marcel’s apprenticeship in signs. Yet there is much that might be misunderstood in this statement. Is the *Recherche* simply a *Bildungsroman*, whose coherence stems from its narrative trajectory? Not if we mean that the novel’s shape derives from a necessary or logical sequence of lessons. Deleuze
systematizes the kinds of signs, the forms of time, and the types of illusions that Marcel encounters, but Marcel’s movement toward understanding proceeds by fits and starts, haphazard turns, regressions, and reiterations, sporadic leaps and loops. And his retroactive reinterpretation of signs in the light of the revelation of art, besides forcing a rereading of the *Recherche*, offers no single map of the territory traversed but multiple possible reroutings. Is the *Recherche* then unified by a semiotic system? Not if we keep in mind that signs are hieroglyphs that enfold differences, that signs impinge on thought in fortuitous yet inevitable fashion, and that signs disclose not a common world of universal communication but singular worlds of art. And finally, is the *Recherche* in fact unified? An essence may be an individuating difference that repeats itself, and the world it unfolds may be singular, but is essence or that world One? What might it mean to speak of the *unity* of the signs of the *Recherche*, given the nature of signs as Deleuze describes them?

Proust’s thought is an *antilogos*, Deleuze argues. The *logos*, the thought of the dominant Western philosophical tradition, always presumes a Whole that contains the Parts and a truth that precedes its decipherment. “To observe each thing as a whole, then to conceive of it in terms of its law as the part of a whole, the whole itself present through its Idea in each of its parts: is this not the universal logos, this taste for totalization?” (*PS* 127; 93-94). In the logos, intelligence always comes first, and no matter what path thought takes to the truth, thought only discovers what was there from the beginning. In Proust, by contrast, intelligence comes after, and there is no preexisting truth that thought rediscovers. There is, however, a degree of Platonism in Proust, Deleuze notes, but the differences between the two figures are instructive. Both are concerned with memory and essences, and both acknowledge the involuntary origin of genuine thought. In Book VII of the *Republic*, Socrates observes that thought is only provoked or awakened through contradictory perceptions, degrees of hardness and softness, or bigness and smallness, whereby one might say of the same thing that it is
both hard and soft, big and small. Yet this troubling fusion of qualities is identified as a state of the object, which imitates the Idea to a lesser or greater extent. The endpoint of rememoration is the Idea, a stable Essence that separates the contradictory qualities, and that endpoint is already presupposed at the onset of thought’s encounter with the contradictory perception. In Proust, by contrast, the contradictory sensation is internal, not in objects or the world. Memory intervenes “because the quality is inseparable from a subjective chain of association, which we are not free to experiment with the first time we undergo it” (PS 132; 97). But the essence discovered is not subjective. It is not something viewed, “but a sort of superior point of view. An irreducible point of view, which signifies at once the birth of the world and the original character of a world” (PS 133; 98). The point of view is not that of an individual subject, but a principle of individuation. “Herein precisely lies the originality of Proustian reminiscence: it goes from a state of the soul, and of its associative chains, to a creative or transcendent point of view—and not, like Plato, from a state of the world to viewed objectivities” (PS 134; 98).

If Proustian reminiscence arrives at essence, it is not an essence as preexisting order. In Proust, the question of objectivity and unity raised by Plato receives what Deleuze identifies as a “modern” formulation, one that he sees as essential to modern literature. For the modern writer, there is no order in the states of the world, nor in the essences or Ideas which the world might be said to imitate. The world is fragmented and chaotic, and only in the work of art can a certain coherence be attained. “Precisely because reminiscence goes from subjective associations to an originary point of view, objectivity can no longer exist except in the work of art: it no longer exists in significant contents as states of the world, nor in ideal significations as stable essences, but solely in the formal signifying structure of the work, that is, in style” (PS 134; 98-99). In Proustian reminiscence, a chain of associations impinges on the subject. The chain of associations

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4 Republic, VII, 523a-524b. On contradictory sensations, see also Philebus 24d and Parmenides 154-55. Deleuze discusses these passages in “Platon et le simulacre” (appendix to Logique du sens, pp. 292-307), and in Différence et répétition, pp. 1180-86.
is pursued until it breaks, and then there is a leap outside the subject, and an individualizing point of view is established from which retrospectively issues an unfolding world that includes the subject and the chain of associations.

A part, or a fragment, Deleuze notes, can be of value because it refers to a whole, “or, on the contrary, because there is no other part which corresponds to it, no totality into which it can enter, no unity from which it has been wrested and to which it can be returned” (PS 136; 100). A work about Time cannot relate fragments to a whole, since time is untotalizable. Indeed, Deleuze asserts that time is best defined in terms of fragments and parts: “Perhaps this is what time is: the ultimate existence of parts of different sizes and forms which do not allow themselves to be adapted, which do not develop at the same rhythm, and which the flow of style does not carry along at the same speed” (PS 137; 101). If a unity exists in the work of art, it comes from the formal structure of the work, without external reference, and the element that produces the work’s unity is itself a part. In Le temps retrouvé, Marcel finds enlightenment about involuntary memory in a line from Chateaubriand’s Mémoires d’Outre-tombe: “A sweet and subtle scent of heliotrope was exhaled by a little patch of beans that were in flower; it was brought to us not by a breeze from our own country but by a wild Newfoundland wind [par un vent sauvage de Terre-Neuve], unrelated to the exiled plant, without sympathy of shared memory or pleasure” (Proust III 959). That which puts the subject and the heliotrope in contact with one another is without relation to the plant—a wind from a New World. It is an anomalous part that connects other parts, without pertaining to a whole. In this consists Proust’s modern conception of reminiscence: “an anomalous associative chain is only unified by a creative point of view, which itself plays the role of anomalous part in the ensemble” (PS 138; 102). The creative point of view, Deleuze indicates, is like a seed crystal (“like a fragment that determines a crystallization” [PS 138; 102]). There are certain chemical solutions that remain in a liquid state until an individual crystal is added to the solution. In some cases, the solution can form different crystals depending on the nature of the seed crystal introduced. Once the initial crystal is
added, a process of crystallization begins, and a cascade of individuations transforms a metastable, amorphous medium into a stable crystalline solid. What Bergotte admires in Vermeer’s View of Delft is not its unity, but the “little patch of yellow wall, with a sloping roof” (Proust III 185); Swann and Odette value the “little bit” of the phrase from the Vinteuil sonata (Proust I 238); Marcel focuses on the detail of the dragons carved on the capital of the Balbec cathedral. If there is a unity in these artworks, it comes not from a preconceived plan or an organic necessity, but from the anomalous parts, which like seed crystals induce a process of transformation and reconfiguration.

Rather than focus on the Whole, Deleuze insists that an analysis of the Recherche begin with its parts: “the disparity, the incommensurability, the disintegration of the parts of the Recherche, with their ruptures, hiatuses, lacunae, intermittences that guarantee its ultimate diversity” (PS 140; 103). Two basic figures characterize the relationships between the work’s parts: boxes and closed vessels, the first concerning the relation contents-container, the second the relation parts-whole. Signs are like unopened boxes with hidden contents, their secrets encased, enveloped, enfolded within. This is the figure of implication and explication that Deleuze explores at length in the first part of his study.

But what he stresses in the second half is the lack of common measure between contents and container and the fragmentation that affects both contents and container in the process of interpretation. The boxes to be opened include things, beings, and names—the madeleine, Albertine, the word “Balbec,” for example. The box of the madeleine is actually not the madeleine itself, but its sensual quality, its flavor, and its content is not the chain of associations surrounding Combray, but the essence of Combray as it has never been lived. Though the content unfolds from the container, the emergence of Combray as essence entails a break in the associative chain, and the spontaneous appearance of a pure point of view, outside that of the empirical subject. The memory of

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5 Gilbert Simondon uses the crystal as a paradigm for the process of individuation in his L’individu et sa genèse physico-biologique. Simondon stresses that individuation precedes the existence of the individual, the process of the formation of the crystal proceeding always along the surface of the entity in formation, the formed entity coming into existence only after the process of individuation has ended. Deleuze makes frequent reference to Simondon, as we noted earlier.
Combray is so distant that its supposed revival is actually a new creation, from which a resurrected self arises. Combray as essence is thus incommensurable with the box from which it issues forth. The box of Albertine contains the landscape of Balbec, while at the same time the Balbec landscape encases Albertine. But again, “the chain of associations only exists in relation to a force that will break it” (PS 145; 107), for the narrator, the self that opens the box, finds himself captured by the world he unfolds, placed in the landscape and emptied of self. A superior, non-personal point of view arises from the rupture in the associative chain, as the world that includes Albertine, the landscape and the dispossessed Marcel unfolds. The box of “Balbec” contains the mystery of the place, but when Marcel projects that content on the real city, as inevitably he must, the link between the syllables and their hidden secret is broken. In all three instances, the content is incommensurable with the container: “a lost content, which one regains in the splendor of an essence that resuscitates a former self, an emptied content, which brings with it the death of the self, a separated content, which throws us into an inevitable disappointment” (PS 147; 108). In each case the content explodes the container, but in each also the content shatters as it unfolds. Even in the great work of art, such as the Vinteuil septet, the content sustains a conflict of parts: “A phrase of a plaintive kind rose in answer to it, but so profound, so vague, so internal, almost so organic and visceral, that one could not tell at each of its re-entries whether it was a theme or an attack of neuralgia. Presently these two motifs were wrestling together in a close embrace [les deux motifs luttèrent ensemble dans un corps à corps] in which at times one of them would disappear entirely, and then only a fragment of the other could be glimpsed” (Proust III 262).

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6 “... but as for Balbec, no sooner had I set foot in it than it was as though I had broken open a name which ought to have been kept hermetically closed, and into which, seizing at once the opportunity that I had imprudently given them, expelling all the images that had lived in it until then, a tramway, a café, people crossing the square, the branch of the savings bank, irresistibly propelled by some external pressure, by a pneumatic force, had come surging into the interior of those two syllables which, closing over them, now let them frame the porch of the Persian church and would henceforth never cease to contain them” (Proust I 710).
The second figure Deleuze delineates is that of the *vase clos*, the French term for a chemical retort, or sealed glass vessel. Marcel remarks that the “Méséglise way” and the “Guermantes way” existed “far apart from one another and unaware of each other’s existence, in the airtight compartments of separate afternoons [*inconnaissables l’un à l’autre, dans les vases clos et sans communication, entre eux d’après-midi différents*]” (Proust I 147). In *Le temps retrouvé*, Marcel observes of the multiple associations inseparable from a given sensation that “the simplest act or gesture remains immured as within a thousand sealed vessels [*comme dans mille vases clos*], each one of them filled with things of a colour, a scent, a temperature that are absolutely different one from another, vessels, moreover, which being disposed over the whole range of our years, during which we have never ceased to change if only in our dreams and our thoughts, are situated at the most various moral altitudes and give us the sensation of extraordinarily diverse atmospheres” (Proust III 903). The sealed vessel “*marks the opposition of a part with a vicinity without communication* [un voisinage sans communication]” (PS 149; 110), each vessel like the Méséglise way or the Guermantes way, a distinct element contiguous to another element, hermetically enclosed and separate from the other, and yet determined in its situation through a relation of non-communication. Though self-enclosed, however, the sealed vessel does not itself constitute a whole. Each vessel is capable of splitting into other vessels, each world into sub-worlds, each Albertine into micro-Albertines, each self into multiple selves. Hence, the identity of a given sealed vessel is “only statistical” (PS 152; 112), determined by the percentage of aggregate elements dominant in a particular mixture. Yet, though each vessel exists in a “vicinity without communication,” nonetheless movement between vessels is possible through *transversals*, “those star-shaped cross-roads in a forest where roads converge that have come, in the forest as in our lives, from the most diverse quarters” (Proust III 1082-83). The Méséglise and Guermantes ways were separate worlds for Marcel, “and then between these two high roads a network of transversals was set up” (Proust III 1083). But transversals do not totalize or unify; rather, they open passages that affirm difference. As Marcel says of a railway trip, “the specific attraction of a journey lies not in our being
able to alight at places on the way and to stop altogether as soon as we grow tired, but in its making the difference between departure and arrival not as imperceptible but as intense as possible” (Proust I 693). The journey, then, is the transversal of places, a passage that renders maximum intensity to the difference between multiple locations.

To interpret signs that are boxes is to open them and unfold their contents, but to interpret sealed vessel signs is to choose from among those vessels connected through transversals, “to elect, to choose a non-communicating part, a closed vessel, with the self which is found therein” (PS 154; 113). The purest form of this choice occurs when one awakens from sleep. Sleep is the transversal that connects multiple moments, that makes multiple worlds and selves spin in a circle around the sleeper. Upon awakening, the sleeper chooses a self and world. “One is no longer a person. How then, searching for one’s thoughts, one’s personality, as one searches for a lost object, does one recover one’s own self rather than any other? Why, when one begins again to think, is it not a personality other than the previous one that becomes incarnate in one. One fails to see what dictates the choice, or why, among the millions of human beings one might be, it is on the being one was the day before that unerringly one lays one’s hand” (Proust II 86).

And who chooses? Not the self that is chosen. Rather, an apersonal choice, a pure act of interpretation, takes place. “Then from those profound slumbers we awake in a dawn, not knowing who we are, being nobody, newly born, ready for anything, the brain emptied of that past which was life until then…. Then, from the black storm through which we seem to have passed (but we do not even say we), we emerge prostrate, without a thought, a we that is void of content” (Proust II 1014). The “we that is void of content” is the interpreter, the selection that selects a closed vessel and the self within, but also the selection that confirms a transversal that connects closed vessels without unifying them. “The ‘subject’ of the Recherche finally is no self, but this we without content that distributes Swann, the narrator, Charlus, distributes them or chooses them without totalizing them” (PS 156; 114).

Boxes are figures of the incommensurability of containers and contents, yet such
that the contents reside within the containers; closed vessels are figures of non-communication, yet such that vessels are in the vicinity of one another. A force of incommensurability holds containers and contents together, a force of non-communication connects vessels in a vicinity. And both those forces are the forces of time, “this system of non-spatial distances, this distance proper to the contiguous itself, to the content itself, distances without intervals” (PS 156; 115). Lost time introduces distances between the contiguous, as when one forgets and can longer bring once-related things together. Regained time brings distant things in contiguity with one another, as when one resurrects a long-lost memory and revives it in the present. But in both cases, a contiguous distance is maintained, a distance without interval, and this is precisely what a transversal is—a passage without interval that affirms a difference. Time, then, as the system of distances without interval, is the true interpreter and the great transversal: “time, the ultimate interpreter, the ultimate act of interpretation, has the strange power of simultaneously affirming pieces which do not form a whole in space, any more than they form a whole through succession in time. Time is exactly the transversal of all possible spaces, including the spaces of time” (PS 157; 115).

**Machines**

In the explication of the contents of a box-sign, a break in an associative chain takes place, and an apersonal point of view emerges, from which a self and world unfold. In the choice of a closed vessel, a “we without content” selects and reveals a network of transversals. Both the apersonal point of view and the “we without content” produce something, a truth that pertains to signs but does not preexist their interpretation. To interpret is neither to discover something that is already there, nor to create something ex nihilo; rather, it is to produce an effect, to make something happen. In this regard, the modern work of art “is essentially productive, productive of certain truths” (PS 176; 129). In that it is essentially productive, says Deleuze, the modern work of art is a machine, something that does not mean so much as it works, as it does something. “To the logos,
organ and organon whose meaning must be discovered in the whole to which it belongs, is opposed the anti-logos, machine and machinery whose meaning (whatever you want) depends solely on its functioning, and its functioning on its detached pieces. The modern work of art has no problem of meaning, only a problem of usage” (PS 176; 129).

The Recherche is a machine, a producer of truths, and the production of truths takes place through the interpretation of signs. To interpret is to produce thought within thought, to put thought into motion through the disorienting impingement of a sign. “Imagination, the reflective faculty [la pensée] may be admirable machines in themselves but they may also be inert. Suffering sets them in motion” (Proust III 946). The sign produces thought, instigates interpretation, but interpretation in turn produces apersonal points of view from which truths emerge. In the Recherche, those truths are truths of time. Deleuze identifies four kinds of time in the first part of his study, two types of temps perdu—the time that passes and the time one loses—and two types of temps retrouvé—the time one regains and regained time. In part two, however, he asserts that the movement of the text forces us to isolate three orders of time: the lost time most clearly evident in the proliferating series and general laws of amorous and worldly signs; the regained time of essences as disclosed in artworks and involuntary memories; and the time of “universal alteration, death and the idea of death, the production of catastrophe (signs of aging, illness, death)” (PS 179; 132).

To each of these orders of time and their orders of truth corresponds a machine. The first machine produces the truths of lost time, the truths of general series and laws, but it does so only through the fragmentation of objects, through the production of heterogeneous boxes and closed vessels, “a production of partial objects as they have been defined previously, fragments without totality, disintegrated parts, vessels without communication, sequestered scenes” (PS 180; 133). The first machine, then, produces partial objects and the related truths of series and groups. The second machine produces resonance, most notably in involuntary memory, when two moments are put in resonance with one another, but also in art, as in the Vinteuil sonata when the violin and piano echo.
one another, or in the Vinteuil septet when the instruments engage in their “corps-à-
corps.” The second machine, however, does not depend on the first, thereby merely
setting the first machine’s partial objects in vibratory communication. Each machine
forms its own fragments and its own order of truth and time. The first produces series
and laws along with partial objects, whereas the second machine produces “the singular
Essence, the Point of View superior to the two moments that resonate” (PS 183; 134), as
well as the pieces that interact and the full time with which they are imbued. The third
machine produces the truths of universal decay and the idea of death through a forced
movement that makes time itself palpable. At the end of the Recherche, Marcel finds the
greatest challenge to his artistic project in the ubiquitous catastrophe of inevitable
decline and death, an order of time that seems totally unproductive and capable of
obliterating everything produced by the other two machines. What Marcel finally
discovers, however, is the idea of death and a third experience of time. In contemplating
the aged men and women he had known decades earlier, Marcel senses a sudden dilation
of time as the past figures he had remembered are pushed back “into a past that was more
than remote, that was almost unimaginable,” a past that makes him “think of the vast
periods which must have elapsed before such a revolution could be accomplished in the
geology of a face” (Proust III 982-83). The past and present undergo a forced movement
of mutual repulsion, and in the great space of this dilated time, a confusion sets in
whereby one can no longer tell the living from the dead. “In these regions of advanced
age death was everywhere at work and had at the same time become more indefinite”
(Proust III 1025), the uncertainty of who is still living and who already dead making of
the living and dead alike simply one species of beings in a perpetual process of dying.
Yet the inhabitants of this time also grow to enormous proportions as they occupy this
dilated time, “for simultaneously, like giants plunged into the years, they touch epochs
that are immensely far apart, separated by the slow accretion of many, many days”
(Proust II 1107). And time, “which by Habit is made invisible,” is suddenly allowed “to
become visible” (Proust III 964). Universal decay, then, does not prove to be the totally
unproductive catastrophe it at first appeared to be, for the third machine does produce
something—an idea of death, a sensible revelation of time as a forced movement of maximal dilation.

Three machines function in the Recherche, a partial object machine, a resonance machine, and a forced movement machine. But what holds the machines together, what gives this assemblage of machines its unity? The essential point, says Deleuze, “is that the parts of the Recherche remains broken, fragmented, without anything being lacking” (PS 193; 142-43). If we look to the Essence of the Recherche for its unity, we find only an additional part, for the essence, the “individuating point of view superior to the individuals themselves, appears alongside the chains, incarnated in a closed part, adjacent to that which it dominates, contiguous to that which it makes visible” (PS 194; 143). Further, the essence of a work of art is a difference that repeats itself, a point of view that in individuating itself fractures into multiple points of view. Nor is the unity of the Recherche to be found in its style, for style is “the explication of signs, at different speeds of development, following associative chains proper to each of them, attaining for each of them the point of rupture of the essence as Point of view” (PS 199; 147). Style is the process of the unfolding of signs, and it generates effects through the three machines, producing partial objects, resonance and forced movements, but style is not itself a totalizing force. The Recherche does have a unity, but a unity of its particular assemblage of fragments, a “One and Whole which would function as effect, effect of machines, rather than act as principles” (PS 195-96; 144). Marcel remarks in La prisonnière that the great works of the nineteenth century are “always incomplete” (Proust III 157), yet they somehow possess a kind of retrospective unity. Balzac’s Comédie humaine was constructed in pieces, with no controlling plan and no organic necessity, yet at the end of the process Balzac looked on his books and decided “that they would be better brought together in a cycle in which the same characters would reappear, and touched up his work with a swift brushstroke, the last and the most sublime. An ulterior unity, but not a factitious one…. Not factitious, perhaps indeed all the more real for being ulterior, for being born of a moment of enthusiasm when it is discovered to exist among fragments
which need only to be joined together; a unity that was unaware of itself, hence vital and not logical, that did not prohibit variety, dampen invention. It emerges (but applied this time to the work as a whole) like such and such a fragment composed separately’” (Proust III 158). The unity effect is an after-effect, a last stroke of the brush that induces a retrospective unification, as a seed crystal induces a process of crystallization that transforms a metastable chemical solution into a particular configuration of stable forms. The last stroke is like an individuating essence, and like style (for in the work of art there is a full adequation of essence and style), an added part that institutes an after-effect of a unity of the multiplicity. But what makes possible such an effect is an interconnection of the parts, a means of communication between non-communicating closed vessels and boxes with incommensurable contents. Deleuze argues that in the modern artwork, since the world exists as a fragmented chaos, the “very special mode of unity irreducible to any ‘unification’” can arise only from “the formal structure of the work of art, insofar as it does not refer to anything else” (PS 201; 149). But that formal structure consists of a network of transversals, distances without interval that affirm the differences they connect.7 “The new linguistic convention, the formal structure of the work, is thus transversality.... For if a work of art communicates with a public, and even gives rise to a public, if it communicates with other works by other artists, and gives rise to those to come, it is always in this dimension of transversality, where unity and totality are established for themselves, without unifying or totalizing objects or subjects” (PS 202; 149-50).

The difference between parts one and two of Deleuze’s study of Proust, between the “emission and interpretation of signs” and the “multiplication and production of signs,”

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7 Marcel recalls at one point a journey by train, during which he saw a beautiful pink sky framed in the window. As the train turned, the sky disappeared, but he found it again framed in a window on the opposite side, this time red, “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, and to obtain a comprehensive view and a continuous picture of it” (Proust I 704-05). Deleuze comments that “this text indeed invokes a continuity and a totality; but the essential point is to know where these are elaborated—neither in the point of view nor in the thing seen, but in the transversal, from one window to the other” (PS 153; 153).
is finally one of degree and emphasis rather than substance. The emphasis in the first part is on what one might regard as a reader’s activity, that of receiving and processing signs, whereas part two would seem to stress the writer’s activity of generating and configuring signs. Yet the interpretation of signs proves to be an unfolding of signs, and that unfolding simply follows the sign’s own explication of itself. The interpreter’s explication of a sign is instigated by the sign’s impingement on the interpreter, and the final interpretation of signs through the work of art involves the establishment of an apersonal point of view from which unfolds a world that includes the interpreter as a constituent component. One can say, then, that the sign produces the onset of interpretation, produces each moment of the process of interpretation, and produces the interpreter as element of an explicating world. It would seem inevitable, therefore, that an apprenticeship in signs would lead not simply to the revelation of art as the truth of signs, but also to the vocation of the interpreter as artist, as active and autonomous producer of signs. Yet if Deleuze speaks of the production of signs throughout *Proust et les signes*, he adds a crucial concept in part two which helps dispel possible misunderstandings—the concept of the machine. Interpretation generally implies meaning, and though Deleuze stresses in part one that interpretation is not decoding but unfolding, there is always the danger that explication will be seen as an uncovering of the deep, hidden meaning of the sign. With the notion of the machine, however, Deleuze makes it clear that signs have no deep significance but only a function, and that function has no purpose other than to operate and produce effects. In the *Recherche*, there are indeed truths of signs and their orders of time, but these are produced by machines—the partial object machine, the resonance machine, and the forced movement machine. The “meaning” of a sign may reside in the apersonal point of view from which it issues, but that “meaning” finally is simply a difference that repeats itself, a force of individuation and differentiation—again, a machine.

If there is a purpose to the production of signs, it would seem to lie in the work of art, in that for the modern artist, the world is a fragmented chaos, and the only wholeness
and unity available is that which may be constructed in art. But Deleuze is not advocating any salvation through art, nor is he embracing a conventional aestheticism or formalism. The work of art does not stand over against the world as an independent creation. It is produced through an engagement with the unfolding signs of the world, and it functions in the world as an effect-producing machine, a machine that turns readers into “readers of themselves,” that brings into existence a universe “entirely different from the old world, but perfectly clear.” The work of art has a unity, perhaps, but it is a unity of a given multiplicity. Unity is an effect produced by an added part—a final brushstroke, an apersonal point of view, a seed crystal—an element that retroactively induces a whole as result rather than cause. The formal principle of that whole is transversality, the distance without interval that interconnects incommensurable and non-communicating parts and intensifies their differences rather than suppressing them. The order of art, then, is no retreat from the world, but a response in kind, the production of a world of transversally connected fragments that unfold from a self-repeating difference. The modern work of art is a Joycean “chaosmos,” a chaos-made-cosmos, but a particular cosmos constructed according to the formal principles of chaos, the singular, individual cosmos of the artist, but one produced through the same explication of multiplicity that operates throughout the chaotic world.

Works Cited
   (Abbreviated throughout as *PS*)

**About the Author**