A Succession of Loves, of Writing, and of Memory: Reverberations of Deleuze and Guattari Across In Search of Lost Time

Dylan Hoven
University of Central Florida

Part of the French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons

Find similar works at: https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd2023
University of Central Florida Libraries http://library.ucf.edu

This Masters Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Thesis and Dissertation 2023-2024 by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

STARS Citation
https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd2023/148
A SUCCESSION OF LOVES, OF WRITING, AND OF MEMORY: 
REVERBERATIONS OF DELEUZE AND GUATTARI ACROSS IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME

by

DYLAN HOVEN
Bachelor of Arts, University of North Florida, 2021

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of ENGLISH
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2024

Major Professor: Francois-Xavier Gleyzon
ABSTRACT

The theoretical oeuvre of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari often looks to *In Search of Lost Time* as a work that exemplifies or inspires their concepts. These chapters draw on their work regarding Marcel Proust as a conceptual basis for understanding *The Search*. Even so, their work on Proust is neither an exhaustive study of his novel nor a totalizing application of their philosophy. As a result, this study focuses on the successive loves of *The Search* as an element of the novel whose analysis is facilitated by the work of Deleuze and Guattari while not being a topic that they dedicate great focus to. By framing these successive loves in terms of their relationship to writing, to time, and to the positioning of the novel’s narrator, we can trace novel connections not just in Proust’s work, but also in the conceptual frame that Deleuze and Guattari have constructed in order to facilitate these inquiries.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I want to thank the members of my committee, Drs. Francois-Xavier Gleyzon, Christian Beck, and Bruce Janz, without whom none of what I have written would have been possible. Additionally, my parents have been supportive of me to such an extent that it is hard to imagine what my writing process over the past several months would have looked like without their involvement. Lastly, I am endlessly appreciative of my friends and peers who took the time to read my work and offer feedback, as their involvement was an invaluable part of my creative process.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION: THE SUCCESSION OF LOVES .......................................................... 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPINOZA: TO LOVE, TO WRITE, TO LIVE................................................................. 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BERGSON: TIME IN LOVE, LOST AND REGAINED ................................................... 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION.............................................................................................................. 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES ............................................................................................................ 64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION:
THE SUCCESSION OF LOVES

The extent to which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari reference Marcel Proust in their work is largely unparalleled by the work of other authors. Throughout *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, *In Search of Lost Time* appears as a case which illustrates the concepts they have laid out, but also as a work whose study is facilitated and expanded upon through those concepts. Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari have each authored monographs which are, in whole or in part, dedicated to analyzing Proust’s work. Their analysis of *The Search* is, in this sense, a composite one, spread in its various incarnations across the entirety of their œuvre. By studying this analysis, we can gain insight not just into Proust’s work, but Deleuze and Guattari’s as well, as their commentary on *The Search* reveals as much about their own writing as it does of Proust’s.

Deleuze and Guattari, though they have extensively applied their theoretical framework to *The Search*, have not done so exhaustively, nor did they aim to. If anything, they have shown how richly the connections between their work and Proust’s serve to provoke new lines of inquiry into one another. Claude Lefort, in his introduction to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible* writes that “the works of the past were never entirely decipherable and did not deliver us from the necessity of thinking the world as if it had to be thought for the first time.”¹ Proust, as he is read by Deleuze and Guattari, is not an author whose work becomes decoded or decipherable. Instead, his work is opened up to the plethora of new questions and possibilities that *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* provokes. None of the sporadic appearances of

---

*The Search* in their work serve as a final word on the text that might foreclose the possibility of further analysis; instead, these moments serve, as Lefort proposes, to present Proust’s work such that we, the reader, must necessarily continue to grapple with it. To Lefort, learning from Merleau-Ponty’s thought amounts to “learning from him to see where they lead him.”² What he learns from his encounters with Merleau-Ponty’s work, in this sense, amounts not just to reaching an understanding of his concepts, arguments, and conclusions, but further, to finding among his ideas provocations which remain in question for his work and for the reader.

Similarly, critically engaging with Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of *The Search* is a process of seeing where it leads us, not of finding our way to their conclusions, but of being led to open questions which emerge between Proust, Deleuze, and Guattari.

*What is Philosophy?* begins by setting out to define the concept. The manner in which Deleuze and Guattari introduce the question of the concept reflects Lefort’s disposition towards Merleau-Ponty. That is, they establish the concept in terms of its connection with the problems it is created to solve; “all concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning and which themselves can only be isolated or understood as their solution emerges.”³ Just as Lefort reads Merleau-Ponty in order to think a world which differs from the world as it was when Merleau-Ponty wrote, the concept, as Deleuze and Guattari describe it, emerges to confront the conditions to which it is immanent. However much the writing of those who precede us can prime our capacity to philosophize the world around us, it cannot, in advance, provide thought in the form it will need to take for us to conceptualize the world and the problems it presents us with. “Of course, everything changes if we think that we discover another problem;”

---

² Lefort, “Editor’s Foreword,” xviii.

the problems which we must confront, think, and philosophize are of a world which differs from
that in which Deleuze and Guattari reached this understanding of the concept.⁴ However much
we can rely on their work to help us in establishing a theoretical framework, we must wield that
framework for ourselves, to create our own concepts for a world of our own problems.

The conclusion of What is Philosophy? frames the philosophical production of concepts
in terms of a confrontation with chaos. “These are the Chaoids--art, science, and philosophy--as
forms of thought or creation. We call the Chaoids the realities produced on the planes that cut
through chaos in different ways.”⁵ Corresponding to concepts as philosophical productions are
the different modes of thought which are produced through art or science. Critical to the
production of thought are the planes where Deleuze and Guattari situate such productions. These
planes are not concepts, but instead “[images] of thought,” whose dimensions organize how
thought is brought into being.⁶ The plane necessary for the philosophical creation of concepts is
the plane of immanence, which is itself “prephilosophical” in the sense that it is laid out as a set
of dimensions which organize the presuppositions necessary to articulate a concept.⁷ Of far
greater concern regarding Proust is the plane of composition: the domain of artistic creation. The
units of thought which such a plane is tailored to create are not concepts but sensations: “a bloc
of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects.”⁸ Often, Deleuze and Guattari
explain percepts, affects, and their means of being brought together as a sensation by looking to
Proust: “when Proust seems to be describing Jealousy in such minute detail he is describing an

⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 16.
⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 208.
⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 37.
⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 40.
⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 164.
affect, because he constantly reverses the order in affections presupposed by opinion, according
to which jealousy would be an unhappy consequence of love.” 9 What is important here is not that
Proust serves as a poignant example to illustrate their conceptions of art and the plane of
composition, but instead that it is in part by reading Proust that they arrive at these conceptions.
They treat Proust as an interlocutor in the realm of composition in the same sense that they treat
Descartes as one with regards to immanence. Their analysis of Proust is thus not distinct from
how they articulate philosophical concepts; the aspects of their philosophy which they introduce
by analyzing *The Search* are concepts whose development only emerges as a consequence of that
analysis.

Analyzing *The Search* facilitates the development of Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical
framework in ways that again connect back to Lefort’s relationship with Merleau-Ponty. The
composite thought of sensations created by Proust do not save us from the necessity of thinking
the world anew. Deleuze and Guattari do not find concepts or sensations in *The Search* that are
ready made solutions to the problems they grapple with; instead, they read *The Search* as a
means of developing such concepts. For us, then, reading Proust, Deleuze, and Guattari,
represents not a look towards the past for answers, but a process of creation oriented towards our
own circumstances. It is not that they have nothing to teach us, but that whatever we can learn
from them will never suffice, on its own, to give us the concepts necessary for our world. This is
why François Laruelle, at the same time as he proposes a non-philosophy indebted to the work of
Deleuze and Derrida, treats them with doubt and suspicion: their ideas are only worthwhile as far
as they allow him to produce something, and as far as reading them enables him to create his

---

9 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 175.
own concepts. That is not to say that reading these authors necessitates a great divergence with their conclusions or counterintuitive interpretation of their work, but rather, that we cannot accept their word as final. We look back to the concepts and sensations of Proust, Deleuze, and Guattari not because they represent eternal, timeless truths about humanity, but because they articulate something particular about the contingencies of the world they live in, leaving behind works which can help us to do the same.

Our interjection between Proust, Deleuze, and Guattari is oriented around a succession of loves at the center of *The Search*. The Narrator, over the course of the novel, falls into several spells of infatuation, some of which proceed to affairs of love and jealousy, and each of which has a profound effect on his development as a character. Proust refers to this series in terms of a succession when he writes of “our love or our jealousy,” which will never be contained within a “single, continuous and indivisible passion,” instead being “composed of an infinity of successive loves.” But not only is the passion of love irreducible to a single beloved as its object, it also surpasses the subjectivity of a single lover; the defining loves of the novel are not just those of the Narrator, but of Charles Swann and the Baron de Charlus as well. These loves succeed one another over the course of the Narrator’s development beyond the boundaries of his subjectivity, with the loves of Charlus and Swann taking on the same degree of importance as those of the Narrator. Deleuze and Guattari account for the successive character of the novel’s loves in passing, and while it is never their central concern, their work still provides the tools to conceptualize how the serialization of love interfaces into the other elements of the novel alongside which it develops.

---


In *The Machinic Unconscious*, Guattari’s introduction to his analysis of *The Search* is focused not on the Narrator, but on Swann. He describes what we are calling the succession of loves in terms of its functionality as an assemblage. An account of “the assemblage: Swann-Charlus-the Narrator” is the means by which Guattari illustrates how the connections between these characters function as a productive force within the novel.\(^{12}\) Guattari sees Swann’s role in *The Search*, and in this assemblage, as a key juncture for introducing an anoedipal interpretation of the novel, so his description of the assemblage largely focuses on Swann. By reading the novel’s succession of loves in terms of an assemblage whose beginnings are in Swann’s love, Guattari deliberately rejects a psychoanalytic analysis of the succession wherein its first term would be the Narrator’s childhood need for his mother. Rather than reading love in the novel as a series of incarnations which refer back to this oedipal origination point, Guattari instead sees love as emanating from Swann’s “passionate ‘first attempt,’” of which following loves “[constitute] a transformational schizoanalytic revision.”\(^{13}\) What Guattari sets out to do in reading the novel as such is not to arrive at a more “correct” reading than an oedipal framework would allow, but a more productive one. By interpreting *The Search* and the succession of loves within it schizoanalytically rather than oedipally, Guattari finds a means to more fully confront the contingencies which make up the loves of *The Search*: “what good is it to wonder about the singularity of this face, the matter of expression of this musical phrase, the assemblage of this salon, the circumstances of this political conversion… with little authority and lots of bluff, one may be able to force all these details back into the framework of traditional psychoanalytic

---


\(^{13}\) Guattari, *The Machinic Unconscious*, 236.
interpretations.”

His analysis of the novel, and in turn of the unconscious, is traced through an attention to these details which a more classically psychoanalytic perspective would demand he overlook. The assemblage between Swann, Charlus, and the Narrator, whose roots lie in Swann’s love affair with Odette, offers a means by which Guattari can introduce the components of the novel around which his interpretation is oriented alongside the limitations of psychoanalysis as a means of recognizing the literary importance of those components.

Deleuze, in *Proust and Signs*, likewise notes the serial character taken on by the loves of *The Search*. For Guattari, the assemblage of the succession is one assemblage among many through which he traces the effects of Vinteuil’s little phrase; similarly, Deleuze explores the loves of the novel as an order of signs alongside other such orders which together make up the components of an apprenticeship through which the Narrator becomes capable of undertaking *The Search* as a project of writing. The “signs of love,” alongside the “worldly signs” of French high society and the “sensuous signs” of involuntary memory offer “partial revelations” whereby the Narrator can learn something he does not know, learning which eventually, through the revelation of time regained, becomes reintegrated into the system of artistic signs that is his writing.

Love, as a system of signs, is oriented towards the beloved as one who is “[individualized] in terms of the signs he bears or emits.” Signs of the beloved express other possible worlds, “worlds which have not waited for us in order to take form,” and the apprenticeship in love principally consists of the interrogation and interpretation of the beloved

---


as they signify a world beyond the self of the lover.\textsuperscript{17} Of course, Deleuze recognizes that the term of the beloved is instantiated across several characters whose loves each contribute to the portion of the Narrator’s apprenticeship that concerns love. Across the several lovers of Swann, Charlus, and the Narrator, each beloved among Odette, Jupien, Morel, and Albertine has a role to play in the development of the Narrator, but Deleuze also notes that the terms of this series are differentiated even over the course of a single love: “Albertine is the same and different, in relation to the hero’s other loves, but also in relation to herselfs.”\textsuperscript{18} The several Albertines through which the Narrator’s love passes are as different from one another as they are from the separate terms of Gilberte or Mme. de Guermantes. For Deleuze, the successive character of the novel’s loves serves to express the several worlds which are encountered through love, each of which is a deceptive bundle of signs to be interpreted.

Like Guattari, Deleuze sees Swann’s love affair with Odette as an origination point for the serialization of loves in the novel. Loves, as a series “[transcend] our own experiences, [acceding] to a transsubjective reality.”\textsuperscript{19} Thus, the loves of the Charlus and Swann which appear alongside those of the Narrator over the course of the succession are also critical to his apprenticeship, with “Swann’s love for Odette already [constituting] a part of the series that continues with the hero’s love.”\textsuperscript{20} By mere contingency, the series begins with Swann, but the contingent nature of Swann’s role as initiator does not lessen the impact he has in establishing circumstances of love which emanate across each other term in the series. More explicitly than

\textsuperscript{17} Deleuze, \textit{Proust and Signs}, 8.
\textsuperscript{18} Deleuze, \textit{Proust and Signs}, 68.
\textsuperscript{19} Deleuze, \textit{Proust and Signs}, 71.
\textsuperscript{20} Deleuze, \textit{Proust and Signs}, 71.
Guattari, Deleuze notes that “we may locate the origin of this series in the hero’s love for his mother, but here too we encounter Swann.”21 The potentially oedipal maternal component is undoubtedly a part of the succession, but Deleuze recognizes the Narrator’s love for his mother as a term whose comprehensibility always depends on Swann as the true origination point. It is Swann “who, from the start, possesses the law of the series or secret of the progression,” so it is through him, rather than an oedipal love of the mother, that the repetition in the series can be understood.22 While it is the Narrator whose apprenticeship sees the signs of love reinscribed through the creation of a work of art, the repetitive and serialized character of love in terms of signs begins not in the Narrator’s love, but with Swann’s. Furthermore, the Narrator’s capacity to create with regards to the series is not derived from a privileged subject position in relation to love, because the succession of loves finds its role in his apprenticeship through acts of interpretation that are never carried out in terms of a self or a subject, instead emerging from the series as it plays out dispersed between characters and beyond the question of subjectivity.

As an assemblage and as a component of an apprenticeship, the succession of loves is intimately connected with the production of a Narrator who is capable of writing. The importance of art with regards to the apprenticeship is more directly obvious in that the revelation of time regained is “identified with Art,” and through it, the loves of the novel become incorporated into a work of art where “all other signs are included” and “they find a place according to the effectiveness they had in the course of the apprenticeship.”23 The functionality of the succession as an assemblage is equally oriented towards art, but on different terms. The

21 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 71.
22 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 71.
23 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 84.
loves which are drawn into the assemblage are those that serve to progress towards the “birth of a ‘new Narrator,’ one who will be able to undertake the masterpiece of the Recherche.”24 But the manner in which the assemblage primes the Narrator to write his loves is not the same as the means by which the apprenticeship as a whole is oriented towards the vocation of the Narrator’s writing. The Narrator is unique in that he emerges from the succession capable of returning to its loves as objects of his writing, a transformation which fails to materialize in the cases of Swann and Charlus. What he achieves that they do not is “a type of becoming-woman, which constitutes the essential workings of his creation.”25 The discrete object of the succession as an assemblage is passage through all of its loves to the point where the Narrator cuts himself off from the women he loves in order to become capable of reintegrating those loves into his work. And so, the serial character of the novel’s loves is limited to the period of development where the Narrator is, like Swann and Charlus, incapable of distancing himself from his loves to a point where he is sufficient to write them.

The apprenticeship, on the other hand, is concerned with the realization of the Narrator’s writing as a system of thought. The act of creation which emerges from the revelation of time regained also establishes the image of thought that Deleuze and Guattari attribute to Proust. “What forces us to think is the sign,” writes Deleuze, “the sign is the object of an encounter, but it is precisely the contingency of the encounter that guarantees the necessity of what it leads us to think.”26 The orders of signs which make up the Narrator’s apprenticeship in this sense represent a problem which is resolved by the act of thinking that he carries out by writing. The succession

26 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 97.
of loves and the signs it emits are, to Proust and to the Narrator, a set of circumstances which
must be grappled with on the plane of composition, and doing so requires an image of thought
oriented around creation rather than philosophy. The Narrator as he emerges from his
apprenticeship is a writing Narrator in the sense that he has become capable of interpreting the
multiplicity of signs he receives through the creation of a work of art that establishes an adequate
form of thought to confront his circumstances. Through his apprenticeship, his loves become
reconfigured into his writing, but not in the same sense that the assemblage of the succession saw
him leave behind his loves in order to write them. The Narrator’s struggle to interpret the signs
of love, alongside the worldly and sensuous signs, over the course of his apprenticeship,
culminates in an act of creation whereby these signs are translated into thought; “to think is
always to interpret--to explicate, to develop, to translate a sign.”27 What differentiates the
succession of loves as an assemblage and as a part of the Narrator’s apprenticeship is a question
of scale. As an assemblage, the succession brings about its own end so that the Narrator can
return to the series to write it, while its place in the apprenticeship is as an element of the system
of thought that the Narrator realizes through his writing. The differentiated functions of the
succession of loves as an assemblage and as a component of the Narrator’s apprenticeship are
neither contradictory nor entirely integrated into one another, but instead, two different levels at
which the series of loves in the novel becomes reconfigured into writing.

At every level, the central loves of the series are those which are charged with a creative
capacity. The loves of Swann, Charlus, and the Narrator that are a part of this succession are
principally those whose elements can be reconfigured into the artistic production of The Search.
As such, Proust tends to account for an artistic potential within the loves of the succession, even

27 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 97.
when this potential lies dormant or unrealized. Swann’s love sees him return to an “essay on Vermeer” that he had abandoned in an earlier period of his life.\(^\text{28}\) In love with Odette, he returns to the essay with a new fervor for writing which ultimately fades as his love dissipates. “For Swann was once more finding in things, since he had fallen in love, the Charm that he had found when, in his adolescence, he had fancied himself an artist,” but of course, differentiated in that “the charm that lay in them now was conferred by Odette alone.”\(^\text{29}\) Swann’s love thus entails his rediscovery of a lost vocation of writing, but an incomplete rediscovery in that it remains beholden to the passion of his love. While Swann is unable to finish his essay, the role his love plays in drawing out his latent creative capacity is a crucial aspect of how he is incorporated into the series of loves which also contains Charlus and the Narrator. The manifestation of Swann’s creative capacity over the course of his affair with Odette frames that love in terms of an artistic potentiality which is a necessary component for the development of the succession of loves.

The Baron, on the other hand, never even attempts to write, but as his love affair with Morel collapses, the Narrator grieves that “if M. de Charlus had tried his hand at prose, to begin with on those artistic subjects about which he knew so much, the fire would have blazed, the lightning would have flashed, and the society dilettante would have become the master of the pen.”\(^\text{30}\) The Baron’s love, which had never threatened to transform into a creative endeavor, nevertheless contains within it an unrealized element of creativity. And so, as his love affair comes to a close, the Narrator mourns not just a loss of vitality and an “apparent resignation to death” that characterize the Baron’s disposition in the aftermath of his catastrophic affair, but


\(^\text{29}\) Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 338.

\(^\text{30}\) Proust, *The Captive & The Fugitive*, 292.
also a body of work which is doomed to forever lie dormant in the sad depths of the Baron’s unconscious. The seeming absence of an artistic disposition is what situates how the Baron’s love connects to writing, for this absence indicates not that he lacks creative potential, but instead that this potential lies unrealized. What the Narrator mourns is that, despite living a life so rich in loves which might be reconfigured into art, the Baron never finds circumstances sufficient to inspire such a transformation. While Swann’s creative energy was flawed by the constraints of his love, the Baron’s suffers from a love whose circumstances are inadequate to bring about the creative act to begin with, even if his love is ripe for artistic interpretation. And while the Narrator’s love affairs also collapse into failure, he becomes distinguished in that such failures become reintegrated into his creative process rather than being doomed alongside his love. It is not just the creative capacity of the Narrator’s loves which becomes realized in this transformation, but the creative capacity of the series as a whole, with the Narrator terminating the series as he becomes capable of translating its creative energy into a creative act.

The components of the succession of loves are not Swann, Charlus, and the Narrator, the characters who carry out its progression, but instead their individual loves which constitute its successive movements. There is nothing essential about these characters that leads them to be integrated into the succession, and it is only through loves whose particularities resonate with its ends that they come to be a part of it. The Baron scarcely appears in Swann’s Way, primarily operating as a corollary to Swann’s love affair; he is generally uncharacterized outside of the favors he does for Swann, largely in accompanying Odette to ensure her fidelity. Charlus, at this stage, is not fully incorporated into the succession of loves, for while he has a role to play as

---

31 Proust, The Captive & The Fugitive, 434.
“a sort of eunuch” whose influence over Odette Swann trusts, he has yet to be fully articulated as a distinct character who takes up loves of his own. It is only as a “Swann-Charlus split” is affected that the Baron’s love will come to play a crucial role in the succession; as the Baron “distances himself from Swann” and introduces a “new homosexual component” into the loves of the novel, he “[acquires] a novelistic identity which develops its own trajectory.” His relationships with Morel and Jupien elevate Charlus from marginal status to a character whose loves are rich in the signs which make up the Narrator’s apprenticeship; “the Charlus-Jupien encounter makes the reader party to the most prodigious exchange of signs.” Even the Baron’s loves are not predisposed to be incorporated into the succession; they are drawn into it as they present circumstances potent for the development of the Narrator and his writing. Charlus plays a role in *The Search* which exceeds the extent of his role in the serial loves of the novel, and it is as he falls into loves which supply raw materials to be remade in the Narrator’s art that his role becomes central to the development of the Narrator and the undertaking of *The Search* as a work of art.

Likewise, Swann and Charlus play only partial roles in the succession in the sense that their activity within it largely ceases once their loves come to an end. While Swann’s love for Odette is an introductory term into the successive loves of the novel, the end of Swann’s love also represents the end of his significance in the developments brought about through the succession. Swann, of course, continues to play a role, but he is no longer at the center as other loves succeed his own. Over the course of the Narrator’s love for Gilberte, Swann is of great

---


importance not because of his love, but because he is Gilberte’s father, making him a crucial figure at the periphery of the love that the Narrator is in the midst of. In these circumstances, the Narrator will often view Swann alongside his wife in terms of “M. and Mme. Swann,” whose joint influence over Gilberte is of uniform concern to him.\(^{36}\)

The revelation that “they did not look upon our relations with a kindly eye,” when he is unwelcome in the Swann household, concerns Swann the father rather than Swann the lover, as his role in the succession of loves is, at this point, like that of Charlus during his own love, that of a secondary term in the love of another.\(^{37}\)

The internal motivations which motivate Swann’s actions have here become largely opaque to the Narrator, where before they had been completely transparent as a facet of his narrating Swann’s love. Swann’s opacity is not uniform, however, for though his consciousness is largely unobserved by the narrative voice at the center of the succession of loves, there are still moments where the memory of his love draws his voice back into the assemblage: “he recalled at times that he had once, years ago, tried to read through its envelope a letter addressed by Odette to Forcheville. But this memory was not pleasing to him, and rather than plumb the depths of shame that he felt in it he preferred to indulge in a little grimace.”\(^{38}\)

As the series of loves in the novel progresses, its movement towards a writing Narrator no longer centers around Swann, but there are still moments where his disposition towards his originary love re-emerges into the narrative voice of the novel, and his foundational role never ceases to have a profound impact on the loves which succeed it. Fundamentally, however, the end of Swann’s love represents a point at which the developments of his character cease to be important to the serial progression of the


\(^{37}\) Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 86.

\(^{38}\) Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 131.
novel’s loves, as he is no longer situated at a fulcrum between artistic creation and jealous passion.

The departure of Charlus and Swann from the succession of loves can be traced to discrete moments in the novel where each of them is left heartbroken to an extent that nullifies the aspects of their loves that made them suitable material for *The Search* as a work of art. At the home of the Marquise de Saint-Euverte, Swann will be drawn into a different assemblage than that of the succession, one which sets him free from the “black hole of passion” that is his love for Odette.\(^{39}\) This “new assemblage” of “Swann-returning-to-the-marquise-de-Saint-Euverte’s-Salon” has many of the components implicated in the Succession of loves; the split between Swann and Charlus and the intersubjective nature of the novel’s organization are here deployed not to initiate a creative endeavor as they are in the succession of loves, but instead to “dismantle the semiotic components which have been neutralized themselves after such a long time in a black hole effect.”\(^{40}\) For Guattari, this moment is significant because Vinteuil’s little phrase, which has been a key component in the development of the black hole that Swann’s love has become, here reappears “in its proper place,” not isolated as a phrase but situated within the piece as a whole: “Swann felt [the little phrase’s] presence like that of a protective goddess, a confidante of his love, who, in order to be able to come to him through the crowd and to draw him aside and speak to him, had disguised herself in a sweeping cloak of sound.”\(^{41}\) In these final moments of his love, Swann’s role at the center of the succession is in full force, and he glimpses

---


the “unlimited power of creation” manifest in the little phrase and as a potentiality he might strive towards in the aftermath of his dwindling love.\textsuperscript{42}

But this opportunity is one that Swann fails to seize; the ending of his love is also the end of the creative capacity which was latent in his love. “What is it that keeps Swann from committing himself to the path of experimentation and creation,” Guattari asks; why is it that all the component parts in play at this party result in “escape from the sexual component of the black hole of faciality” rather than the re-integration of all these components into the new undertaking of a work of art that appears later for the Narrator?\textsuperscript{43} The contingencies of the Saint-Euverte party remedy the jealous passion of Swann’s love rather than bringing about his ascendancy towards the vocation of writing, not because Swann lacks the capability for that vocation, but because the necessary circumstances for it have not presented themselves yet. The Narrator is not determined from the start as the only one capable of embarking on \textit{The Search} as an artistic undertaking, but it is with him as the center of the succession that the conditions for that embarkation will appear in full; “we will have to wait for the ‘recomposition of the septet…’ so that the becoming-woman of creation finally has access to a sufficient vector.”\textsuperscript{44} Swann leaves the party no longer trapped within the black hole of his passion, but also lacking the drive to interpret and create that made his love so instrumental to the succession to begin with: “something will remain definitively broken,” he “will never completely recover from this amorous crisis.”\textsuperscript{45} And so, Swann and Charlus leave their loves without reclaiming from them

\textsuperscript{42} Proust, \textit{Swann’s Way}, 495.

\textsuperscript{43} Guattari, \textit{The Machinic Unconscious}, 273.

\textsuperscript{44} Guattari, \textit{The Machinic Unconscious}, 273.

\textsuperscript{45} Guattari, \textit{The Machinic Unconscious}, 240.
the makings of a work of art. The ending of their loves is the ending of their role in the succession; when no longer in love, they have little significance in the movement of the novel towards a creative machinery capable of interpreting their loves.

The central principle which organizes the serialization of loves in *The Search* is that some loves are important to the development of a creative act while others are not. “Swann in Love” ends with Swann departing for Combray with the object of a budding romance with Mme. de Cambremer.46 This affair, unlike that with Odette, is of only minor importance in the novel, and does not figure within the succession of loves at all. It is a relationship “about which Proust gives us only fragmentary indications;” its passions never figure into the intersubjective web in which the novel’s primary relationships progress.47 Fundamentally, this relationship has nothing to teach the Narrator; the loves of the succession are distinguished by a richness of signs and material for interpretation which makes them suitable materials for a work of art. These loves in particular make up a struggle for thought which is ultimately realized by the Narrator through the revelation of time regained and the work that proceeds from it. The connections between these loves and the participation of the characters who undertake them represent the workings by which love is transformed into thought as a bloc of sensations.

The succession of loves is a facet of *In Search of Lost Time* that figures primarily, but not centrally, in Deleuze and Guattari’s work on *The Search*. What they have accomplished with the section of their oeuvre that is concerned with Proust is not the application of their ideas in the field of literary analysis, but instead the creation of an aspect of their philosophy which only becomes possible through reading Proust. We have isolated the succession of loves as a

---


discursive conceptualization dispersed among the ideas they develop alongside Proust, but what this focus facilitates is not a further extrapolation of those ideas. Instead, we can make the succession of loves resonate with other areas of their philosophy in order to read Proust anew. For the value of returning to Proust through Deleuze and Guattari emerges not from the potency of what they have already written but instead from the loose threads and open ends they have left for us. Scattered elsewhere in the work of Deleuze and Guattari are reverberations of thought which produce new possibilities of reading Proust. Just as they are drawn to *The Search* not because it delivers them to the necessity of thinking but because it provokes them towards the creation of new concepts, we are drawn back to Proust and their reading of him because they have left unexplored so many further avenues of thought that are possible through their work. The serial loves of *The Search* are one such avenue, and by exploring its points of resonance we can discover further frontiers of thought that lie between Proust, Deleuze, and Guattari.
Writing and love share a fraught and tumultuous relationship over the course of *In Search of Lost Time*. While the loves of the novel, as a series, are ultimately incorporated into the work of the Narrator’s writing, the development from love towards writing is not a progressive one, and it is only through contingent circumstances and discursive movements that the novel’s loves eventually become reconfigured through a creative act. Love and writing are not stably situated within the succession of the novel’s loves, but are instead passions charged with the power to bring about indeterminate outcomes. Among the social worlds of *The Search* and the characters who are drawn into the succession, we can find the circumstances in which the capabilities enabled by love and by writing are explored and discovered.

Walter Benjamin, in “The Image of Proust,” draws our attention to a struggle for happiness which courses through the entirety of *The Search*. Unlike Deleuze and Guattari, Benjamin is concerned with how Proust’s life translates into *The Search*, and as such views the novel in terms of an “autobiographical work.”¹ As a result, it is Proust who he sees as carrying out a “blind, senseless, frenzied quest for happiness” rather than the Narrator or another such character.² Benjamin describes Proust’s “paralyzing, explosive will to happiness” as an element of the novel that is somewhat obscure, “seldom comprehended by his readers.”³ As such, he aims to draw attention to happiness and Proust’s struggle for it as a pivotal and underexplored axis through which the novel can be understood. Benjamin’s insight reflects on the succession of

² Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 152.
³ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 152.
loves, for while our interest in it is not primarily geared towards reaching a greater understanding of Proust as an author, the will to happiness that Benjamin highlights still leads us to read the novel’s successive loves in terms of a struggle for happiness. While the serial loves of the novel culminate in the act of writing, the struggle of the succession is not principally a struggle to write, but a struggle that is resolved by writing. The agitated relationship between love and writing in the novel thus represents the movements of the succession of loves through which happiness might become possible.

For Deleuze, when the Narrator becomes capable of writing, he has discovered a life. More than a struggle for happiness, Deleuze sees the novel in terms of a struggle to live. While writing is the means through which this struggle is ultimately realized, both writing and love serve as attempts to discover a life over the course of the novel’s serial loves. In the work of Baruch Spinoza, Deleuze finds the tools through which we can conceptualize how the succession operates as a struggle to live and how love and writing serve as exercises of power through which such a struggle is carried out. Deleuze connects the idea of a life with Spinoza’s model of the body. Spinoza defines the body in terms of its “degree of power,” and its corresponding “capacity for being affected.” An individual’s power of acting, their degree of power as a body, is affected in terms of “actions, which are explained by the nature of the affected individual,” and “passions:” factors which “originate outside the individual” as means of modulating their “power of being acted upon.” To fall in love or to begin writing, in The Search, is to be acted upon through love or writing as passions that manifest different capacities in terms of affection. Discovering what sort of life these passions enable amounts to distinguishing between them as

---

5 Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 27.
joyful or sad passions. Joyful passions are those through which “our power of acting is increased or enhanced,” while the “sad passions,” by contrast, “represent the lowest degree of our power, the moment when we are most separated from our power of acting.” Love and art represent passions of indeterminate character in that their affective power is not determined in advance; only by falling in love or beginning to write can the power of acting enabled by these passions be discovered. The succession of loves represents, in this sense, a series of experiments in terms of passion, a test of what the body can accomplish through love or through writing, and what sort of lives these passions bring about.

Over the course of The Search, the loves of the succession become distinguished as sad passions, insufficient as a means to constitute a life. The key to understanding the inadequacies of love across the series lies in the contingent circumstances of each love, for the passions of love and writing have nothing to do with love and writing in general: they are endeavors that are particularized among contexts in which they appear. Sodom and Gomorrah ends with a revelation. The Narrator, leading into this finale, has “irrevocably decided not to marry Albertine,” and is “only waiting for an opportunity for a final rupture.” However, as he attempts to engineer the circumstances for such a rupture, he mentions to Albertine his interest in the work of a musician: Vinteuil. Albertine responds by informing the Narrator of her intimate acquaintance with Vinteuil’s daughter and her friend. This seemingly insignificant detail, which Albertine only mentions in passing, awakens in the Narrator an “image which [he] had kept in reserve for so many years:” that of Mlle. Vinteuil with her friend as he witnessed them at

---

The ensuing outburst of memory leads the Narrator to “the notion of Albertine as the friend of Mlle. Vinteuil and of Mlle. Vinteuil’s friend, a practising and professional sapphist,” engulfing him in an outburst of grief and jealousy: “behind Albertine I no longer saw the blue mountains of the sea, but the room at Mountjouvain where she was falling into the arms of Mlle. Vinteuil with that laugh in which she gave utterance as it were to the strange sound of her pleasure.” With this realization, the Narrator’s commitment to bringing about a rupture with Albertine dissolves entirely, and he instead conspires to “prevent her from being alone, for some days at any rate,” a commitment which quickly escalates to the more damning resolution: “I absolutely must marry Albertine.” The Narrator’s epiphany regarding Albertine’s sexuality is a defining moment in their love affair; his controlling impulse in response to this realization subsequently becomes the defining characteristic of their relationship for the course of The Captive.

The passion of the Narrator’s love for Albertine was on the verge of dwindling into nothingness when a spasm of jealousy imbued his passion with a renewed vigor which lasts until Albertine’s death. The Narrator’s jealous love, in which he is primarily concerned with controlling Albertine, leaves him paralyzed. Love’s inadequacies as a sad passion are intimately connected with the persistence of jealousy over the course of the succession of loves. Deleuze points to the “tiny thrill of joy” experienced by the jealous lover as he “[deciphers] one of the beloved’s lies,” but this thrill contains nothing of the joy outlined in Spinoza’s Ethics. Instead,

---

8 Proust, Sodom and Gomorrah, 702.
9 Proust, Sodom and Gomorrah, 703, 705.
10 Proust, Sodom and Gomorrah, 711-724.
the Narrator’s persistent, frantic efforts to decipher the signs emitted by Albertine through the lens of his jealousy render the passion of love restrictive and disempowering. When Albertine says that “I may go and see the Verdurins tomorrow. I don’t really know whether I will go, I don't particularly want to,” her lack of concern is read by the Narrator in reverse: “I shall go to the Verdurins’ tomorrow, it’s absolutely certain, I attach the utmost importance to it.”\textsuperscript{12} Correspondingly, the Narrator becomes fixated on thwarting the endeavors about which Albertine lies: “I would see that this visit to Mme. Verdurin did not take place.”\textsuperscript{13} The Narrator’s persistent attempts to control Albertine and limit her movements place obvious restrictions on her, but his jealousy also represents the sad passion of his love in that it likewise limits his own power to act. “The desire to know at all costs what Albertine was thinking, whom she saw, whom she loved,” writes Proust, “how strange that I should sacrifice everything to this need.”\textsuperscript{14} Just as Swann’s love took the form of a “black hole of passion,” so does the Narrator’s, with jealousy rendering the passion of these loves so centralizing as to disallow all other orders of meaning.\textsuperscript{15}

Jealousy is thus a defining facet of the succession of loves. But the persistent link between love and jealousy in the novel is also a particularized element of the loves serialized in the succession. That is to say, while the central loves of \textit{The Search} fall into constricting patterns of jealousy, the rule of jealousy as an aspect of love concerns only the discrete series of loves in the novel and not the nature of love in general. Part of what holds the succession together as a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Proust, \textit{The Captive & The Fugitive}, 112.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Proust, \textit{The Captive & The Fugitive}, 120.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Felix Guattari, \textit{The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis}, trans. Taylor Adkins (Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2011), 259.
\end{itemize}
continuous series is the equivalency between its various loves as far as they are determined to be sad passions, delimiting the power of the lovers who undertake them. As a result, what Proust shows us of jealousy and love in the succession is not eternal truths of love, but instead specific circumstances of love in a struggle to live that is being carried out across the succession. Under the conditions of the succession, jealousy is not a contradiction of love, but a stage at which love becomes totalizing and all encompassing. And so, the problem presented by jealousy is not that it corrupts or destroys love, but that it is a realization of love as a disagreeable passion; at so many different junctures, the serial loves of the novel with threaten to dissipate, only to be reinvigorated by pangs of jealousy which intensify the totalizing force of love. Throughout *The Captive*, the Narrator constantly comes to “occasions where my jealousy had revived my love for her,” moments where the passion of his love subsists only through the interrogative force of his jealousy. The loves of the succession do not need to be saved from jealousy in order to be properly realized; it is as these loves proceed into jealousy that they achieve their highest stage.

While the jealousy that emerges over the course of the successive loves of *The Search* renders the effects of those loves restrictive and debilitating, the sad passion of love is not entirely without value in the Narrator’s apprenticeship. In fact, the violent drive to interpret the lies of the beloved is what makes the signs of love so productive as an avenue of the Narrator’s development. Both in love and in writing, the Narrator is driven towards interpretation, but only writing supplies a means to live through the interpretation which constitutes it. What differentiates writing as a joyful passion whose pursuit serves to constitute a life lies in the thought which is accomplished through writing. Re-encountering the signs of love in his art, the Narrator takes up acts of “translating, deciphering, [and] developing” which constitute “the form

---

of pure creation." In love, the Narrator, Swann, and Charlus struggle for truth as if it lies beneath the surface of the signs which make up their loves, while, through the revelation of time regained, the Narrator discovers a life whereby his interpretation of signs is instead oriented around his making them into something new through their incorporation into his art. But the interpretive act of writing does not emerge out of an opposition to the loves that precede it. “We never know how someone learns; but whatever the way, it is always by the intermediary of signs, by wasting time, and not by the assimilation of some objective content,” writes Deleuze, for, the loves of The Search, alongside the other “unproductive” orders of signs supply not just raw materials for the Narrator’s art, but also the pedagogy through which he learns to produce a work through interpretation. The succession of loves is propelled by the sad passion of jealous loves, made up of controlling inquiries which simultaneously strengthen the force of love while decreasing the power of the lover. The joyful passion of writing emerges out of a more complete interpretive mode which supplies a means to live for which love could never suffice on its own.

The life that the Narrator finds in writing in many ways parallels the will to happiness that Benjamin located in Proust, though life and happiness as such are notably different concepts. While Deleuze sees the struggle for life as an element of the novel carried out by the Narrator and Benjamin sees happiness in the novel as struggled for by Proust himself, they both foreground the power of an interpretive act of creation in this struggle. Deleuze writes: “the work of art is born from signs as much as it generates them; the creator is like the jealous man, interpreter of the god, who scrutinizes the signs which in truth betrays itself.” The work of art

17 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 97.
18 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 22-23.
19 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 98.
to which Deleuze refers is *The Search* as a diegetic object rather than the work within our world; he is commenting on *The Search* as it produced by the Narrator within the fictional world of the novel rather than as Proust’s life’s work. While Proust has given us a work which speaks to the life enabled by the work of art, it is not his own life that art has yielded, but that of his Narrator. Benjamin, on the other hand, situates the will to happiness within the novel in Proust’s creative act: “it is this elegiac idea of happiness--it could also be called Eleatic--which for Proust transforms his existence into a preserve of memory.” For Benjamin, it is Proust’s preserve of memory that is the creative reservoir of *The Search*, rather than the Narrator’s apprenticeship.

Where it is essential to distinguish between these two perspectives is in that Proust and the Narrator cannot be equated in terms of what *The Search* accomplishes. Both Deleuze and Benjamin recognize that, whatever power art has to yield the Narrator a life, it was insufficient to fulfill Proust’s will to happiness: “so close a complicity with life and the course of the world as Proust’s would inevitably have lead to ordinary, indolent contentment on any basis but that of such great and constant suffering.” The creative force of Proust’s art was not enough to save him from his own suffering. “Was this salvation through art necessary,” write Deleuze and Guattari, “for neither Swann nor Proust was saved.” Benjamin teaches us to recognize the will to happiness imbued in *The Search* as Proust’s work, but this is a will towards a happiness unrealized. Art yields to Proust’s Narrator a far more potent tonic, and though the life discovered by the Narrator is not an equivalent to happiness as Proust himself struggled for it, being


conscious of the will to happiness in the novel nevertheless helps us be sensitive to the Narrator’s struggle for life, and to the joy ultimately yielded by the vocation of his art.

Crucially, love and writing are tested as passions circumscribed by the social circumstances of the French high society. In order to understand the power of writing as a joyful passion and the limits of love as a sad one, it is also necessary to confront how the degrees of power brought about through these passions are exerted against the limitations of the social worlds of the novel. As love and writing are undertaken in an attempt to overcome those limitations, they serve as grounds for lines of flight. A line of flight is a means of escape, a path through which the dominant codes and norms of a social order can be subverted through their gaps and inconsistencies. “Lines of flight, for their part, never consist in running away from the world, but rather in causing runoffs;” embarking on a line of flight does not amount to determining a means of existence entirely apart from a dominant social order, but of finding the breaks in the rigidity of social systems that allow for new and creative undertakings: “there is no social system that does not leak from all directions.”23 The dimensions of writing or loving as means of living are thus represented not just in the possibilities that they bring about over the course of the succession of loves, but also in how those possibilities serve as an escape from the circumstances of French high society.

The social milieux of The Search play a constitutive role in the undertaking of writing and love as escape attempts. The lines of flight which are traced among love and writing are not innate possibilities of love and writing, but instead emanate from them as passions whose modulations of power are particularized by the discrete social worlds of the novel. Two competing paradigms largely make up the relevant dimensions of French society: a bourgeois

23 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 204.
milieu and an aristocratic milieu. The bourgeoisie are primarily represented by the Verdurins, whose upstart salon is characterized by an obsessive rejection of “bores:” the members of a society into which they are incapable of gaining entry.24 The Guermantes, by contrast, are local aristocrats at the height of a social strata which is defined in large part by the exclusion of those such as the Verdurins. Herein lies a conflict of class which underlies the entirety of the novel: the aspiration of the nouveau riche to become eminent in the field of taste whose arbiter is the aristocracy. Every attempt at discovering a joyful life is carried out adjacent to the dimensions of this conflict, and the attempts which prove successful are those capable of finding a means to live between the shifting social boundaries that connect the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie.

The persistence of this conflict stems in part from the fact that the bourgeois middle classes, even, and perhaps especially, those with tasteful aspirations, signify their taste along a different order of signs than the aristocracy. This is why misunderstanding is more characteristic of encounters between these competing classes than animosity: “nine Tenths of the men of the Faubourg Saint-Germain appear to a large section of the middle classes as crapulous paupers… The middle classes pitch their standards in this respect too high, for the failings of these men would never prevent their being received with every mark of esteem which they themselves will never enter.”25 This is where Deleuze identifies the realm of “worldly signs” within The Search.26 These characteristic misunderstandings stem from the fact that this world of signification is defined by a lack of homogeneity. That is, the worldly signs are both subject to


26 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 5.
frequent changes in terms of their significance, but are also emitted and received along drastically different strata of society. These signs, in which both the Guermantes and the Verdurins traffic, are critically concerned with “[understanding] why someone is ‘received’ in a certain world, why someone ceases to be so,” and the struggle between them is waged over the stakes of who will be the “legislators” or “high priests” of such constantly changing or opposed meanings. The aspirations of the nouveau riche, the Verdurins, amount to a struggle to become the ones who reside at the center of this worldly order of signs, to be those whose salon is the most eminent and whose tastes radiate the furthest across French society.

Nearly every character in the novel will become implicated, to some extent, in the struggle which radiates from the aspirations of the Verdurins. This struggle takes on critical significance for the escape attempts of the succession of loves, as all of those for whom the outcome of this conflict takes on great significance become dreadfully and irreparably miserable. In the case of Mme. Verdurin herself, the realization of bourgeois worldliness clearly carries with it the burden of perpetual unhappiness. For if, at the outset of the novel, the Verdurin Salon is characterized by a paranoid fixation on all that is “boring” and all those who are “bores,” it is a fixation on the boring as a topic of discussion and a paranoia centered around the social standing of the Verdurins, without any need for the signifier of the bore to attach itself to a material signified. The characteristic worldliness of the Verdurins is exemplified in their obsession with “bores,” as “the worldly sign” manifest in the bore “does not refer to something,” but instead “stands for” it, claims to be equivalent to its meaning.” The primary importance of the “bore” is

27 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 5.

28 Proust, Swann’s Way, 267.

29 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 6.
to serve as a semiotic unit around which the little clan is oriented. Such worldly fixations are
categorized by their “vacuity,” signs which are “at each moment” subject to “alteration,
change,” and whose frivolity demands constant vigilance from those who wish to remain
competent in their significance.30 And so, Mme. Verdurin is characteristically miserable in her
paranoiac vigilance to keep up with the pace of the constantly changing worldly signs which she
emits and receives. The dreadful sadness of her investment in the worldly signs is made nakedly
apparent when the Narrator encounters her at the end of the novel, during the war: “and the terror
of being bored would doubtless, for want of bores, have entirely abandoned Mme. Verdurin had
she not, in some slight degree, replaced the vanishing bores by others recruited from the ranks of
the former faithful.”31 Mme. Verdurin has accomplished everything she set out to: her salon has
ascended beyond all those of the Faubourg Saint-Germain and it is she who is the vanguard of
taste in wartime Paris. And yet, she cannot leave behind her fixation with the social position of
those she has now surpassed. The discrete goals which Mme. Verdurin sets out with at the start
of the novel can be realized only in a world of frivolous signs, leaving their accomplishment
doomed to be nothing more than a continuation of the miserable social paranoia which brought
about her successes to begin with.

It would be a mistake, however, to characterize the Verdurin salon as an apparatus which
is only capable of producing misery and paranoia. In fact, something of the opposite is the case,
for, while the salon and its fashionable machinations are a source of persistent anxiety for the
Verdurins themselves, many members of the little clan emerge from it with a contradictory
disposition. For the Verdurins, the goals they have set out to achieve in hosting their salon are

30 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 18.
31 Marcel Proust, In Search of Lost Time Volume VI: Time Regained, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence
antithetical, for them, to the possibility of joy, but the salon itself nevertheless facilitates the germination of joyful passions for many of those who pass through it; “as a collective assemblage, their salon will ‘select’ some of the greatest artists and writers of their era.”32 Let it not be mistaken that the primary function of the Verdurin salon is anything other than to realize the social aspirations of the Verudrins; however, the primacy of these “moves in the direction of fashionable ways” in no way contradicts the persistent leakages in the salon which allow it to, at the same time, constitute the origin of so many lines of flight.33 It is no coincidence that those such as Cottard and Elstir, who will become masters of medicine and art respectively, find their start among the little clan. The power of the collective assemblage which makes up the Verdurin salon is in this sense not that it consistently selects for gifted writers and artists, but rather that it promotes within itself the development of artistic talent. In spite of its centrality in the miserable social conflict of the novel, the Verdurin Salon also serves as the origination point for innumerable routes of escape from that misery.

And so, while both the Verdurin salon and the aristocratic salons which are its opposition occupy a centralizing position as the loci of social conflict in the novel, proximity to this conflict, though inevitable, produces a plurality of material outcomes. The success or failure of love and writing as the lines of flight is contingent on how well they account for the social limitations against which they are exerted. Love’s inadequacies, its inability to serve as the basis for a life, in part emerge from the failure of love to yield an escape route that can seep through the cracks of French high society. Swann, Charlus, and the Narrator, as they are incorporated into the succession, share an indeterminate relationship to both the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, but


their loves prove insufficient to account for the pitfalls of either milieu in order to traverse them. None of them properly assimilate into the Verdurin salon; they are too “reluctant to lay aside all worldly curiosity” for the Verdurins, and incapable of “tempering their calumnies with obvious pleasantries.”

But while each of them fails to earn full membership within the little clan, they likewise find themselves unsatisfied with their secure positions within the Faubourg Saint-Germain. While both the Narrator and Swann will earn figurative “naturalization papers” into the aristocracy, Charlus is a born and bred aristocrat, yet even he is not satisfied to remain a tastemaker among the Guermantes. Likewise, The Guermantes Way is in large part concerned with the Narrator’s falling in and out of love with Mme. de Guermantes as he enters into fashionable society.

He will, in the aristocratic milieu, become newly capable of interpreting the worldly signs in which it traffics, a capability which in turn entails a loss of the mystical quality those signifiers held when they were beyond his reach. Never will the worldliness of society be sufficient, but neither will love yield an escape route capable of navigating the conflict between Verdurin and Guermantes.

Love’s shortcomings as an escape route exhibit the chance to fail inherent to lines of flight. For while lines of flight represent leakages and breaks that are an inevitable facet in the composition of a society, the success of a line of flight is not given in advance. Alongside the chance at escape and the creative energy of flight lies another possibility: “the line of flight blasts two segmentary series apart; but it is capable of the worst, of bouncing off the wall, falling into a black hole, taking the path of greatest regression, and in it its vagaries reconstructing the most

---

34 Proust, Swann’s Way, 265, 377.

35 Proust, Swann’s Way, 269.

rigid of segments.”\textsuperscript{37} Just as the capabilities enabled by the passions of love and writing were indeterminate and needed to be carried out in order to become known, the efficacy of love and writing as the grounds for lines of flight can only be determined immanent to the processes through which they constitute such lines of flight. The Verdurin Salon, as a staging ground for lines of flight, persistently sees them fall into regressive trajectories, particularly in terms of loves which emerge in the salon but are insufficient to constitute an escape from its miserable social atmosphere. Several loves of the succession pass through stages facilitated by a connection to the Verdurin salon, and in each case this connection proves disastrous in terms of love’s capacity to constitute an escape attempt. Loves for Morel and Odette in particular manifest in terms of their involvement in the Verdurin salon, but they never prove capable of overcoming the limiting social factors the salon presents. In this sense, the progression of these loves in the context of the salon showcases both the inadequacy of love as the basis for a line of flight from the bourgeois milieu, but also the incapacity of the salon to function as an incubator for loves as joyful passions. The contrasting affinity of the salon for artists at the center of an “aesthetic revolution” emerges from how such a revolution aligns with the Verdurin’s goals in the realm of taste.\textsuperscript{38} Artists with roots in the Verdurin salon, even if they cultivate their skills only to move beyond the social world of the little clan, hold growing significance in French society which makes them instrumental in the ascendancy of the Verdurins. By contrast, the Verdurins treat loves which develop in their salon as threats in need of immediate pacification: “the Verdurins, who were not in the least afraid of a woman’s having a lover, provided that she had him in their

\textsuperscript{37} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, 205.

\textsuperscript{38} Guattari, \textit{The Machinic Unconscious}, 247.
company, loved him in their company and did not prefer him to their company.” This proves problematic for Swann and Charlus not because they are insufficiently loyal, but because it places constraints on the capacity of their love as far as it can be exercised among the bourgeois milieu where its development takes place.

They are, if anything, more loyal than the more properly initiated members of the little clan but remain unwilling to participate in worldly significations of this loyalty. Alongside his blossoming love for Odette, Swann will grow fond of the Verdurins to the point that “there was probably not a single one of the ‘faithful’ who loved them, or believed that he loved them, as dearly as did Swann.” And yet, this love is the consequence of “too exclusive an affection for Odette,” and, more importantly, is undertaken by a socialite who is unwilling to “set a good example by openly renouncing those ‘bores’ in the presence of the faithful.” What the Verdurins demand of Swann is not that he love them, but instead that he exhibit his love with the proper signs; “nothing funny is said at the Verdurins’, and Mme. Verdurin does not laugh; but Cottard makes a sign that he is saying something funny, Mme. Verdurin makes a sign that she is laughing.” Any loyalty towards the Verdurins can be disregarded, for, though Swann, Charlus, and the Narrator each have a great capacity for interpreting such signs, they refuse to express their loyalty within the boundaries of this realm of worldliness. Swann, at the peak of both his love for Odette and his involvement with the Verdurins, is bound for catastrophe; the Verdurin’s antipathy towards his love and the more general inadequacy of his loyalty share a root cause:

---

attempt to use love as an exercise of power to overcome the worldly bonds of high society.

Swann’s love is problematic for the Verdurin’s not only because it is “too exclusive,” but also in
that his capacity to love is exerted in opposition to the worldliness which organizes their place in
French society.\(^{43}\) While the Verdurins are not causally responsible for love’s escalation into
paranoid jealousy, in these cases, their interference undoubtedly accelerates the process.

What is revealed by the circumstances of the Verdurin salon is, in this sense, not a rule of
loves failures, but the particularity these failures always take on as far as they arise within the
social strata of bourgeois French society. Love’s dysfunctionality as a line of flight emerges from
its incompatibility with the constraints of bourgeois sociality; the loves of the succession prove
incapable of passing through the gaps in the social world of the Verdurin salon. As a result, the
Verdurins are, to varying degrees, instrumental in the closing off of love as a line of flight in the
cases of Swann and Charlus. The Baron proves the more exemplary case, for the Verdurins are
the architects of the circumstances which render the conditions of his love and jealousy so
disastrous as to make a recovery impossible. The Baron’s love for Morel leads him, like Swann,
to move among the “faithful,” though he maintains an upper class disdain for them even as he
goes to far greater lengths than Swann to involve himself in their ambitions.\(^{44}\) The culmination of
this endeavor is his arranging of a “a great musical ‘jamboree’” at the Verdurins, centered
around a performance of an unpublished work by Vinteuil and featuring Morel.\(^{45}\) This outing
brings the tasteful hopes of the Verdurins together with the development of the Baron’s love for
Morel, yielding results which thoroughly demonstrate their incompatibility. The Baron’s


\(^{44}\) Proust, *The Captive & The Fugitive*, 426.

\(^{45}\) Proust, *The Captive & The Fugitive*, 265, 299.
reputation allows him to draw aristocrats, the likes of which the Verdurins have never attracted, to this party, but the guest list proves the first clash of dispositions, as his exclusivity irritates Mme. Verdurin in its exclusion of nearly everyone among the numerous guests she wishes to invite.\textsuperscript{46} Here, in full force, the question of loyalty comes into conflict with the issue of worldly signification: Charlus has brought a boon to the salon of untold proportions, and yet, his capacity to move in aristocratic society puts him at odds with Mme. Verdurin, even as it is that very capacity which he is deploying in her favor.

The Verdurins clash not merely with the Baron, but with the entire aristocratic milieu that he brings into contact with their salon. The bad manners of the Baron’s nevertheless aristocratic guests leads them to largely ignore their hosts in favor of him. What this pitfall reveals is not an enduring incompatibility of the Verdurin salon with the aristocracy, for we will see later that their ambitions produce fruitful entry into aristocratic circles under the proper circumstances, but instead the inadequacy of these current circumstances for realizing their ambitions. As the Verdurins bristle against the aristocrats that Charlus has drawn into their salon, the Baron’s relations with Morel begin to crumble, a collapse in which the Verdurins play an instrumental role. The humiliation of the Verdurins at the hands of poorly mannered nobility and the vengeance that they inflict on the Baron are thus intimately connected outcomes of the discontinuity between the Baron’s love affair and the upstart Verdurin Salon: for, “what caused M. de Charlus’s downfall that evening” was not the machinations of the Verdurins, but the “ill-breeding… of the people whom he had invited.”\textsuperscript{47} This affront to the Verdurins proves to be little

\textsuperscript{46} Proust, \textit{The Captive} & \textit{The Fugitive}, 305-317.

\textsuperscript{47} Proust, \textit{The Captive} & \textit{The Fugitive}, 326.
more than a momentary hiccup in their social ascendancy, but the vengeance which they inflict on Charlus is a blow from which he never fully recovers.

The finale of the party occurs when the Verdurins pull Morel aside, offering gossip regarding the Baron’s morality and sexuality; when the Baron returns to their company, “with the alacrity of a man who has skillfully organised a whole evening’s entertainment for the purpose of an assignation with a woman,” he is greeted with venom by Morel, who, under the Verdurins influence, cuts off their relations entirely.\footnote{Proust, \textit{The Captive \& The Fugitive}, 418-424.} Charlus is unable even to offer a retort in the form of his typically overwrought and elegant outrage, and, subsequently becoming ill beyond recovery, likewise lacks the capability to mount any effort at reconciliation. From here, the possibility of escape has been entirely foreclosed upon, with the regression of the Baron’s love as a line of flight leaving him incapable of either embarking on another love or extracting from his suffering anything which might lend itself to an emancipatory process of creation. The ending of the Baron’s love affair with Morel is likewise the end of his role in the succession of loves; there is nothing left for the Narrator to learn from Charlus now that he has been left impotent and incapable of setting out on any undertaking which might yield a life or a possibility of escape.

Love and writing, as passions and as the grounds for lines of flight, are situated in the succession of loves in terms of conceptual personae. For while the failure of the Baron’s love and the Narrator’s revelation of time regained are moments in the succession that emerge out of personally contingent circumstances, the undertakings of love and art are incorporated into the series as shared undertakings whose dimensions surpass the Narrator, Swann, and Charlus as individuated characters. What we learn about love and writing apply to a lover and a writer
whose names supersede those of the characters that are sites of their expression. Deleuze and Guattari propose conceptual personae as the positions from which philosophers speak in order to articulate their concepts; “I am no longer myself but thought’s aptitude for finding itself and spreading across a plane that passes through me at several places. The philosopher is the idiosyncrasy of his conceptual personae.”

The movements of the succession of loves are determined by the capabilities of personae rather than the capabilities of characters. For their capacity to love is the same capacity whether we see it expressed in Swann or in Charlus. And, furthermore, the succession of loves is not concerned with creating a character capable of writing, but instead with bringing its characters to arrive at a writing persona. “The destiny of the philosopher is to become his conceptual persona or personae,” write Deleuze and Guattari, and it is through their personae that philosophers find the capacity to think and generate concepts.

Likewise, the Narrator’s vocation to write, as a system of thought, is articulated not by the Narrator as an individual but through the Narrator as a writer persona that is realized at the culmination of his apprenticeship. The definitive relationship through which the succession of loves progresses as a series lies not between love and art but between the personae of lover and creator; “this is why Proust sets in opposition to the traditional pairing of friendship and philosophy a more obscure pairing formed by love and art.”

The continuity of the different lovers who traverse the succession of loves lies in that each of their loves is the expression of the same lover persona, and while only the Narrator arrives at the capability to write, it is from the


50 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 64.

position of a creator persona who draws his work not from the self of the Narrator, but from the entire series.

Through the lover and creator personae, the succession of loves serves as an assemblage through which love and writing can be explored as means to live and grounds for lines of flight. But within the succession and through these personae, love and art take on particularized forms that can be contrasted with other manifestations of love and art that remain alien to the succession. As a result, encounters with love and art will not always be productive in the Narrator’s apprenticeship; for there are so many loves and so many works of art that take on forms distinct from those around which the succession of loves is oriented and from which he has nothing to learn. Elstir in many ways seems to express all of the attributes that would lead him to be incorporated into the succession of loves. His indeterminate social positioning can be seen in his passage through the Verdurin salon to later become an artist whose works grace the home of Mme. de Guermantes. The Narrator’s introduction to him in Balbec exhibits his capacity in the realms of love and art. And yet, these similarities never go beyond resemblance; Elstir, unlike Swann or Charlus, has no place in the course of the succession of loves: “Elstir cannot communicate to him any truth that could spare [the Narrator] from serving his personal apprenticeship and from passing through the signs and disappointments to which he is doomed.”52 If Elstir’s creative capacity has brought him to an abundance of joyful passions, the life he lives is one produced by a different love and a different creative act from those which define the development of the Narrator.

While the component parts which make up Elstir’s creative capacity in many ways mirror those which compose the Narrator’s, these elements are configured to perform entirely distinct

52 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 31.
functions. Elstir’s love and his art operate on different axes compared to those performed across the succession of loves. That is to say, the particularity of this love or this art as the mechanisms of flight which emanate from the succession of loves becomes apparent when faced with love and art that produce a different set of effects, as is the case with Elstir. If we are to speak of Elstir in terms of personae, those of the lover and the writer as particular terms of the succession of loves are inapplicable; the Narrator, upon being introduced to Mme. Elstir, is incapable of deciphering her charms, finding her “common without being simple,” unable to comprehend what warrants the “tenderness and veneration” with which Elstir charges his exclamation: “my beautiful Gabrielle!”

It is only when he has “become familiar with Elstir’s mythological paintings” that he will understand the “certain ideal type” expressed both by Gabrielle and “by certain lines, certain arabesques which reappeared incessantly throughout [Elstir’s] work.” The Narrator discovers an ideal towards which Elstir strives in both love and in art, finding as well a lover-creator for whom the effects of love and art differ entirely from his own. With regards to the Narrator’s apprenticeship, this discovery has no pedagogical function; it is telling that Elstir’s role in the succession of loves consists of introducing the Narrator to Albertine and later serving as a pretext for his entry into the Guermantes salon: Elstir’s artistic or amorous capabilities are far less important than has role of initiating the Narrator into these worlds through which his apprenticeship must pass. What the narrator must learn in order to become an artist cannot be acquired from Elstir, for Elstir has nothing of the raw materials which the Narrator finds among the other loves of the succession.

---


The successive loves of *In Search of Lost Time* have nothing to teach us about love or art. As the series culminates in the revelation of lost time and the Narrator discovers a life in art, the question of what kind of life one is capable of producing remains an open one, for the Narrator’s revelation does not suffice to answer that question for us and for our lives. Deleuze and Guattari, as they address this question in their own work, do so by offering not an answer, but a method. They respond to the question of what a body can do not in discrete terms of the body’s capabilities but instead with a practice for testing those capabilities at their limits. Proust, likewise, provides a method rather than an answer; the discovery of life in the succession of loves teaches us not how to live, but how to struggle for a life. The dimensions of the struggle that yields a life in *The Search* is in so many ways composed of circumstances and contingencies which are the relics of a social order that no longer has bearing on any of us. And yet, this struggle is an educational one, not because we have anything to learn from these circumstances themselves, but because we have something to learn in witnessing the capacity it takes to confront them.
BERGSON:
TIME IN LOVE, LOST AND REGAINED

The succession of loves, as a structure, proceeds in anticipation of the arrival of the Narrator as he is capable of writing. The fact that it is the Narrator from whose position this entire struggle is recounted indicates that it is likewise from his position that the capacity to write this struggle will eventually materialize. In this sense, there are two Narrators present over the course of *The Search*, who are brought together in the revelation of time regained: the Narrator who narrates and the Narrator who is narrated. These two aspects of the Narrator and his ability to write situate the succession of loves in terms of its relationship to time.

Principally, what separates the novelistic voice of the Narrator from his role as a character in the novel is the framing device of remembrance. Because the novel is presented as a series of recollections, there is necessarily narrative distance between the Narrator as he recounts the events of his past and as he figures within those events. With regards to the succession of loves, this narrative distance structures a particular relationship in time between love and writing. While, through the revelation of time regained, the Narrator’s loves become reinterpreted through his work, this work is carried out in the remembrances of *The Search*, meaning that even when we encounter his loves as an impediment to his capacity to write, the project of his writing is already being carried out. In this way, the tension between writing and love, with love simultaneously forestalling the possibility of writing while also serving as its raw materials, gains a particular temporal character because of how it is inscribed in memory. We can see this at work in moments where the Narrator’s loves directly interfere with his ability to write. Over the course of his earliest love for Gilberte, the Narrator’s parents “would have liked to see the
intelligence that Bergotte had discerned in me manifest in some outstanding piece of work.”¹ The Narrator is likewise “firmly resolved upon setting down definitively to work,” but is constantly postponing the undertaking of his work, “confident that the day after tomorrow I should have written several pages.”² Instead, he passes his days with the Swanns: “scarcely had I sat down at my desk than I would get up and hurry round to them. And after I had left them and was back at home, my isolation was apparent only, my mind was powerless against the stream of words on which I had allowed myself to be mechanically borne for hours on end. Sitting alone, I continued to fashion remarks which might have pleased or amused the Swanns.”³ In this moment, the Narrator’s love makes writing an impossibility, but at the same time, we encounter his love through an act of remembrance in which his love has been reinterpreted through writing. This is characteristic of the loves of the succession, which anticipate the revelation of time regained in that they are recounted to us from a narrative position wherein The Search as a project of writing is already underway.

In addition to the structural significance of remembrance, however, issues of memory are an insistent motif within the novel’s plot. We need look no further than the beginning of Swann’s Way, where, as sensations of the Narrator’s childhood in Combray are resurrected by the taste of a madeleine, the issue of involuntary memory is first raised.⁴ Deleuze focuses on memory at this level, situating the “sensuous signs” of involuntary memory alongside the

² Proust, Within a Budding Grove, 210-211.
worldly signs and the signs of love as a stage in the Narrator’s apprenticeship.⁵ And while the interpretive acts provoked by love and the world of French society become reintegrated into the Narrator’s vocation of writing, involuntary memory presents signs that are privileged in that they are the nearest to the signs of art and that it is their interpretation which brings the Narrator to arrive at the revelation of time regained. Deleuze identifies the connection between involuntary memory and art in terms of essences: “we must not regard art as a more profound means of exploring involuntary memory. We must regard involuntary memory as a stage, which is not even the most important stage, in the apprenticeship to art. It is certain that this memory sets us on the path to essences.”⁶ French high society, the loves of the succession, and involuntary memory each emit signs which demand interpretation, but it is in the deciphering of sensations re-encountered through involuntary memory that the Narrator experiences generalized essences whose potency he will discover in full among the final stage of his apprenticeship: that of the signs of art.

The weight of involuntary memory in the Narrator’s development leads Deleuze to draw a connection between Proust and Henri Bergson in terms of memory. “If there is a resemblance between Bergson’s conceptions and Proust’s,” Deleuze writes, “it is on this level--not on the level of duration, but of memory. That we do not proceed from an actual present to the past, that we do not recompose the past with various presents, but that we place ourselves, directly, in the past itself.”⁷ The sensations of involuntary memory are in this sense shared between two moments; the flavor of the madeleine “contains a volume of duration that extends it through two

---


⁷ Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 58.
moments at once.” But critically, the two moments between which the sensations of memory extend are not two presents; involuntary memory does not rise up out of a connection with two succeeding or segmented presents, but instead from a connection between the present and a pure past with which it is contemporaneous. Deleuze places great emphasis on the fact that, in Bergson’s philosophy, “the past and the present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements which coexist,” and he connects this concept to Proust in terms of involuntary memory. But the overlapping conception of memory between Proust and Bergson results in two different problematics; for Bergson, “it is enough to know that the past is preserved in itself,” preserved as a pure and virtual past which continues to be alongside the present. For Proust however, his line of inquiry does not stop here, and the interrogative disposition that the Narrator takes up in response to the sensations of involuntary memory leads him to question “how the past, as it is in itself, could also be saved for us.” In seeking the answer to this question, the inadequacy of the sensuous signs becomes apparent as the generalized essences accessed through involuntary memory lead the Narrator towards the individualized essences found among the signs of art. And so, Proust’s conception of memory differs from Bergson’s in terms of a problematic that propels the Narrator, through involuntary memory, towards art and the revelation of time regained.

While Deleuze’s application of Bergson to The Search is limited to the scope of involuntary memory, our concern with the structural significance of remembrance is another

---

8 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 59.
10 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 59.
11 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 59.
realm ripe for interpretation through Bergson’s concepts. The recollections which make up the plot of *The Search*, however, entail a different act of remembrance than that which is carried out through involuntary memory. This difference lies in how the reminiscences that plot the novel actualize the past into recollection-images while involuntary memory engages with sensations that grant access to a fragment of the past in itself. Distinguishing between the past in itself or as an image emerges from how Bergson conceptualizes the difference in kind between the present and the past as far as they are contemporaneous to one another. Bergson emphasizes that the difference between “actual sensations and pure memory” is not a “mere difference in degree,” but instead a difference in kind: “in our view, the difference is radical.”12 While the relation between present and past sensations is fundamental to the operation of involuntary memory, the function of involuntary memory is not to grant access to these sensations or any resemblance between them, but instead to the “internalized difference” of an essence that transcends sensation.13 On the other hand, there is only a difference “in degree between recollection-images and perception-images.”14 Such a process of remembrance transforms the virtual field of pure past into images which appear alongside perception-images in the actual field of the present. We can see, then, that the difference between involuntary memory and the narrative frame of recollection lies in that involuntary memory is concerned with the pure past and its relationship to the present alongside which it coexists while the remembrances of the narrative are instead actualized recollections that take the form of images.


13 Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 60.

14 Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 58.
That the past actualizes in the form of an image is not to say that recollection engages with the past on the level of representation. Images play a crucial role in *Matter and Memory*, as an ontological category between thing and representation. For Bergson, both idealism and realism offer inadequate conceptions of matter. Neither the idealist “representation” nor the realist “thing” offer categories sufficient to describe matter as we perceive it: “it is a mistake to reduce matter to the perception we have of it, a mistake also to make of it a thing able to produce in us perception, but in itself of another nature than they.” And so, Bergson sees the image as a common-sensical notion capable of reconciling this contradiction; conceiving of objects as images accounts for both their qualities as we perceive them but also the persistent existence of such objects beyond our perception: “for common sense, then, the object exists in itself, and, on the other hand, the object is, in itself, pictorial, as we perceive it: image it is, but a self-existing image.” While the narrative function of remembrance *The Search* is to realize the past as a recollection-image, this image is not a mere representation of the past but an actualization of it. “Memory passes into something else by becoming actual,” Bergson writes, and this something else now exists accompanying the other images of the present as “the very materiality of our existence.” This is the sense in which remembrance composes a narrative made up of images, and it is by actualizing his past into images that are material in the present that the Narrator takes up his vocation of writing.

The revelation of time regained serves as a point in the novel where the issue of memory and the structure of memory come into contact with one another. Like Swann’s escape from the

---


black hole of his love affair with Odette, the revelation takes place at a party, though this one is hosted at the Princesse de Guermantes’s. When the Narrator arrives, he has given up all hope of becoming capable of writing: “I possessed proof that I was useless and that literature could no longer give me any joy whatever, whether this was my fault, through not having enough talent, or the fault of literature itself.” Like other moments in which the Narrator laments his inability to write, this one is burdened by the fact of its having been written; the impossibility of writing is actualized in a written act of recollection. But this instance in the series of the Narrator’s struggle to write is differentiated both in terms of the intensity of his grief and its proximity to the actual emergence of the Narrator’s capability to write through the revelation of time regained. “It is sometimes just at the moment when we think that everything is lost that the intimation arrives which may save us;” the Narrator’s lamentations are interrupted by the intrusion of involuntary memory:

And at that moment when, recovering my balance, I put my foot on a stone which was slightly lower than its neighbor, all my discouragement vanished and in its place was that same happiness which at various epochs of my life had been given to me by the sight of trees which I had thought that I recognised in the course of a drive near Balbec, by the sight of the twin steeples of Martinville, by the flavour of a madeleine dipped in tea, and by all those other sensations of which I have spoken and of which the last works of Vinteuil had seemed to me to combine the quintessential character.

The uneven stones of the Guermantes courtyard are sensations of involuntary memory that go on to inspire in the Narrator a newfound fervor for art, but at the same time, they evoke the entire series of involuntary memory in the novel as encounters with pure past, though only this last instance is sufficient to bring him to the threshold of the creative act.


What differentiates the sensations of the uneven stones is the Narrator’s response to involuntary memory in this instance. “But if on that occasion I had put off the task of searching for the profounder causes of my emotion, this time,” he declares, “I was determined not to resign myself to a failure to understand them.”20 Up until this point, the Narrator’s strong emotional response to involuntary memory has seen him confront a “riddle of happiness” that he is incapable of solving.21 The uneven paving stones however, and the flurry of following sensations that awaken further outbursts of involuntary memory, instantiate involuntary memory in circumstances where the Narrator feels he cannot rest until he reaches a full understanding of their essence. What he finds, and what ultimately restores his faith in art, is the immanent and internalized difference of involuntary memory. The fundamental relationship of the two moments between which involuntary memory is shared is one of difference: “the essential thing in involuntary memory is not resemblance, nor even identity, which are merely conditions, but the internalized difference, which becomes immanent.”22 The critical understanding which the Narrator reaches, at this moment, concerns not the essence of Combray or Venice, but of the phenomenon of involuntary memory itself experienced as immanent difference or as pure time. The Narrator describes “a vast difference between the real impression which we have had of a thing and the artificial impression of it which we form for ourselves when we attempt by an act of will to imagine it,” and while his differentiation reflects how Bergson differentiates between pure memory and the act of recollection, this ultimately draws the Narrator further, to encounter the immanent difference inscribed between the two moments of shared sensation in involuntary


22 Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 60.
memory: “the being within me which had enjoyed these impressions had enjoyed them because they had in them something that was common to a day long past and to the present, because in some way they were extra-temporal.” 23 From the beginning, the Narrator has been capable of grasping the pure past of Combray as it arises from the sensations of the madeleine, but here his encounter with involuntary memory leads him not to such a generalized essence, but instead to “the very being of the past in itself,” to the revelation that through the sensations of the madeleine he becomes an “extra-temporal being.” 24 The revelation of time regained is thus brought about by a unique instance of involuntary memory in which the Narrator finds not the essence of another Combray or Venice, but instead locates immanent difference as the essence of involuntary memory.

And so, the revelation of time regained traces its origins within involuntary memory, but regarding art, the Narrator’s revelation leads him to pursue a work which is not inscribed in pure time but instead in the act of recollection. For in his newfound understanding of involuntary memory, the Narrator also comes to understand that interpretation of its sensuous signs is insufficient: I had not known pleasure at Balbec any more than I had known pleasure when I lived with Albertine, for the pleasure of living with her had been perceptible to me only in retrospect.” 25 The essence of each past moment grasped through involuntary memory offers only a fragment of lost time which the Narrator, and having encountered its extra-temporality, now longs to reclaim in full. It is in the work of art that the Narrator finds the possibility of rediscovering “fragments of existence withdrawn from time,” taking up an act of interpretation.

that can fully incarnate essence in contrast with the partial and fleeting sensations of involuntary memory.\textsuperscript{26} The “individual and even individualizing” essences of art emerge from how the Narrator internally situates lost time and his capacity to regain it.\textsuperscript{27} In discovering the pure difference at the heart of involuntary memory, the Narrator also discovers that this difference is internally constituted; in the cases of Balbec and Albertine, the Narrator’s recollection of them represents an encounter with an essence that he has internalized and which cannot be attributed to Balbec or Albertine in themselves. This essence is constituted by the moments shared across the duration of involuntary memory, and these moments are inscribed in the Narrator himself. So, it is by reconstituting his past in terms of the impressions it has left on him that the Narrator carries out the vocation of his art.

Interpreting the signs with which involuntary memory has confronted him drives the Narrator, in this instance, past involuntary memory and into the genesis of his creative act. From the very beginning of his revelation, the Narrator is ready to begin this undertaking though unsure what form it will take: “all anxiety about the future, all intellectual doubts had disappeared, so now those that a few seconds ago had assailed me on the subject of the reality of my literary gifts, the reality even of literature, were removed as if by magic.”\textsuperscript{28} In this way, the many pages dedicated to his growing understanding of pure time also represent the development of his artistic disposition. When he takes note that “the returning memory can throw no bridge, form no connecting link between itself and the present minute, if it remains in the context of its own place and date,” he addresses a problem not just of time and his past but also of aesthetics:

\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\item Proust, \textit{Time Regained}, 268.  
\item Deleuze, \textit{Proust and Signs}, 61.  
\item Proust, \textit{Time Regained}, 255.  
\end{enumerate}
in terms of the “work of art” that he is now “ready to undertake, this distinctness of different events would entail considerable difficulties.” As such, the revelation of time regained is a sort of “violence of a sign” that does not just make the Narrator’s art possible, but makes it an absolute necessity whose dimensions he must lay out. For Deleuze, every order of signs in the novel presents this sort of violence; the Narrator’s drive to interpret the signs of his love or the earlier sensuous signs all apply a pressure to interpret, “a desire for truth, a will-to-truth.” But the violence done to thought in the instance of the uneven paving stones is different in that it has not just driven the Narrator towards a truth, but has upended the Narrator’s mental lassitude by presenting him with a problem that demands a solution in the form of a creative act. The ultimate significance of involuntary memory in the revelation concerns its role in presenting the Narrator with such a problem, whose solution he cannot find within involuntary memory, but instead within the signs of art to which this problem leads him.

How to grasp the fragments of pure time he has witnessed through involuntary memory and how to reclaim the lost time of his days past: these are the questions which propel the Narrator towards an answer which takes the form of a work of art. But arriving at the Necessity of this work still leaves the question of what form it might take, and, more importantly, how this form will be constituted in time. The particularized being of the Narrator as he experiences extra-temporal impressions of pure time figures greatly in this section of the novel: “the being which had been reborn in me when with a sudden shudder of happiness I had heard the noise common

---


to the spoon touching the plate or the hammer striking the wheel.”

Because the time he seeks to reclaim is internally constituted, the Narrator rediscovers it within himself, but this time is lost in that, through being internalized, it becomes obscure and inaccessible. Involuntary memory, in this sense, brings the Narrator to a mode of existence in which he can encounter the virtual past through sensations that dislodge him from the stupor of his everyday life: the spoon, the hammer, or the uneven paving stones. But here is the exact moment where Proust diverges from Bergson: it is not enough for the Narrator to discover the virtual field of his past, the reality of his past as he has internalized it; he feels the need to reclaim it and to save his past not just for himself but for others as well. So while the sensations of involuntary memory manifest a “trueness of the past” that the Narrator has internalized, he grapples with “the joy of rediscovering what is real” not just in terms of encountering pure memory, but more importantly in terms of taking up a creative act through which he can materialize his access to the past. To this point, he speaks of a work of art in terms of a translation. The impressions one experiences are outwardly inaccessible as a rule of their internalization, but attempts to externalize them tend to be inadequate: “I realised that the words in each case were a long way removed from the impressions that I or Bloch had in fact received.”

Ideally then, his work would serve as a work of translation in that it would not just save the past for him, but in the process would also render its truth and reality so as to be accessible to his audience. In this sense, his work of art is, on the one hand, a means for him to reclaim impressions lost within him, but also to render those impressions in a work through which they become accessible to others.

---


33 Proust, *Time Regained*, 274.

Returning to the prior circumstances of his life in order to translate them into a work of art is the means by which the Narrator reclaims the time lost in years gone by. The Narrator comes to discover that time he thought wasted, in frivolous society or in love, now comes to represent the materials from which he will compose his art. “All these materials for a work of literature were simply my past life,” he writes, “I understood that they had come to me, in frivolous pleasures, in indolence, in unhappiness, and that I had stored them without divining the purpose for which they were destined or even their continued existence.” And in this way, the question of how the Narrator might realize internally constituted impressions of his past has been answered in advance by the novel which precedes it. Just as the succession of loves anticipates the revelation of time regained as a means through which the tension between love and art will be resolved, the revelation itself points towards a creative act which has already been realized over the course of *The Search*. Through time regained, we can thus see how the earlier recollections of the novel are oriented in time. The revelation serves as an inversion point, where the difference in kind between present and past brings the Narrator to the threshold of a creative act in the present which actualizes the past into images which differ from that present only by degree. The past remains virtual as far as the Narrator encounters it through the involuntary irruption of memory, but it is only by drawing an actuality out of this virtual field of memory that the Narrator can realize it in a work of art. The recollections which make up the prior events of *The Search*, then, recover the time of the Narrator’s past, but not by placing us in the past directly, instead actualizing the virtual of the past as a recollection-image constituted in the present.

---

The successive loves of the novel, alongside the other recollection-images of *The Search* are thus necessary images in that they are tailored towards the needs of the present and the necessity of the Narrator’s art. In this way there is a commonality between Deleuze’s understanding of the violence against stagnant thought which makes art necessary and the means by which recollection actualizes the virtual field of the past. “There has to be a necessity, in philosophy and elsewhere; otherwise there is nothing,” Deleuze states, “a creator is not a preacher working for the fun of it. A creator only does what he or she absolutely needs to do.”

Of course, in *The Search* this necessity appears in the form of the revelation of time regained as “something that does violence to thought, which rests it from its natural stupor and its merely abstract possibilities” and instead forces the narrator into the interpretation of his creative act.

But because the form this art takes is that of recollections, it is composed in terms of time and the needs of the present which correlate with levels of the past: “we place ourselves not simply in the element of the past in general, but in a particular region, that is, on a particular level which, in a kind of Reminiscence, we assume corresponds to our actual needs.” The necessity of the creative act and the needs of present reminiscences are brought together in the Narrator’s art because its composition takes place on the level of recollection-images. This is why the sensuous signs of involuntary memory are not enough for the Narrator to reclaim lost time and instead compel him towards the signs of art; “memory, which summons forth old perceptions, is obviously not enough to get away from lived perceptions,” Deleuze and Guattari assert, “we write not with childhood memories but through blocks of childhood that are the becoming-child.”

---


37 Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 97.

38 Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 62.
of the present.” And so, the blocks of childhood, blocks of love, and other sensations composed in *The Search* are brought forth in the present in order to actualize a level of the past that corresponds to the Narrator’s needs as an artist.

While only the Narrator becomes capable of writing through the revelation of time regained, the needs of his art also call forth levels of recollection which correspond to Swann or Charlus. The succession of loves, as a level of *The Search* which takes place dispersed beyond the subjectivity of the Narrator, materializes in recollection-images which likewise exceed the Narrator’s experience. As a result, Swann and Charlus, alongside the Narrator, are implicated in the particular anticipatory relationship of the succession of loves to the revelation of time regained. For while involuntary memory brings about the revelation, the prior instances of involuntary memory in the novel do not have baked into them the same presumption of writing that is characteristic to the novel’s successive loves. That is to say, the series of the novel’s loves is interwoven with a parallel series of failures to write, which uniquely positions love against the eventuality of the Narrator’s revelation. While the loves of the novel do not have a unique relationship to time in terms of their realization as recollection-images, these images are unique in their inextricability from the Narrator’s development as a writer. The serial loves of the novel are differentiated among the other time lost in that recollections of love also recall love’s serial interventions into the process of writing, and as such seem to contradict their place in the composition of the novel.

Given their positioning within love’s serialization, Swann and Charlus also contribute to the time lost in love, though it is only the Narrator who regains this time in the vocation of his

---

work of art. What is important here is not just that the Narrator realizes an artistic potential that remains obscure to Swann and Charlus, but that his work also differentiates him in terms of his relationship to the time he had lost. The Narrator, with the passage of time, is able to return to his loves to compose them as recollection-images which in turn engender the sensations of his work. The Vinteuil sonata, though it set Swann free from his love, “was incapable of creating new powers and making Swann a writer that he was not.” Which is to say, that while Swann is capable of escaping from the black hole of his love, he remained incapable of returning to that love in order to realize its transcendent power on the plane of composition. Of course, despite this failing, the power of the loves undertaken by Swann and Charlus is attested to by their installation in the succession of loves alongside those of the Narrator as further recollection-images entwined with his own as raw materials of his art. While only the Narrator is saved through his revelation, the time he regains is not his alone; just as the loves of Swann or Charlus anticipate an act of writing which is ultimately carried out by the Narrator, his writing returns to Swann and Charlus to compose a recollection-image in which their loves hold the same significance as his own. We have figured the serial loves of The Search largely in terms of their progression towards writing, but the act of writing itself is in turn oriented towards those loves as they can be returned to as a means for materializing a particular sensation or image of love.

While time lost across the succession of loves both contributes to the Narrator’s progression towards writing and also becomes reintegrated into the composition of his work, Swann figures not just in the Narrator’s development and his vocation, but also in the revelation of time regained itself. The revelation is the point of contingency whereby the Narrator, rather than Swann or Charlus, becomes capable of writing. And while the Narrator speaks of his life as

---

40 Proust, Time Regained, 272.
if it were “destined” to form the “reserve” of materials for his work, the circumstances of the revelation affirm that there is nothing inevitable about his ascendancy towards creation.\textsuperscript{41} Swann appears as a figure for whom all the elements that become reconfigured through the Narrator’s revelation were available, and yet, Swann never finds the circumstances of a revelation that might transform his time lost into the material for a work of art. While this comparison arises in terms of the parallel circumstances by which he is freed from his love and the Narrator finds the necessity of his art, it also arises in the revelation itself as the Narrator addresses Swann’s circumstances alongside his own. In part, this is continuous with the connection between the Narrator and Swann as they are serialized in the succession; the Narrator draws upon Swann’s experiences alongside his own for the purposes of progressing his revelation: “remembering with what relative indifference Swann years ago had been able to speak of the days when he had been loved, because what he saw beneath the words was not in fact those days but something else.”\textsuperscript{42} But beyond just Swann’s role more generally in the succession, his appearance in the Narrator’s revelation casts him as a contrasting figure in terms of his failure to interrogate the signs of art. “Was this perhaps the happiness which the little phrase of the sonata promised to Swann,” the Narrator asks, “and which he, because he was unable to find it in artistic creation, mistakenly assimilated to the pleasures of love?”\textsuperscript{43} Of course, the Narrator was as enamored as Swann with the pleasures of love which, for so many years, drew him away from writing, but he is differentiated by the circumstances of the Guermantes party, which brings him to the threshold of creation. And while the Vinteuil sonata nearly brought Swann to this same threshold years ago

\textsuperscript{41} Proust, \textit{Time Regained}, 304.

\textsuperscript{42} Proust, \textit{Time Regained}, 259.

\textsuperscript{43} Proust, \textit{Time Regained}, 272.
at the Saint-Euverte party, these were not sufficient circumstances to reveal to Swann “the truth that was made for him.” Between these two instances we can see that neither the Narrator’s revelation nor Swann’s creative impotence were inevitable, and in each case they arrived not at a predestined fate but at a response to their particular circumstances. Just as Swann’s circumstances offered a presentiment regarding a creative act he was yet incapable of undertaking, the full realization of that act in the Narrator’s revelation recalls Swann and his place in the succession that brought the Narrator to arrive at this point.

However, the Narrator is prefigured as a writer by the relationship in time between the succession of loves and the revelation of time regained. That is to say, while there is nothing that predestines the Narrator to realize the latent creative capacity of the succession of loves rather than Swann or Charlus, the fact that the novel is composed of his remembrances and not theirs installs him from the beginning as the figure whose writing the series anticipates. The paradoxical tension by which the Narrator’s failures to write have been inscribed in writing thus also frames the serial loves of the novel in terms of the eventuality of writing as it will be taken up by the Narrator. So, while the Narrator’s ability to write emerges from his response to contingent circumstances, those circumstances are also the means by which the succession of loves becomes integrated into the work of the novel to begin with. As a result, the Narrator occupies a privileged position in the series because he is situated not just in terms of his loves, but also as the figure from whose position the series as a whole is recounted. While the development of the series towards an act of writing is distributed between each of Swann, Charlus, and the Narrator, the Narrator uniquely occupies the point of transference whereby

---

these developments are, over the course of The Search, becoming the sensations and images that make up a work of art.

The successive loves of In Search of Lost Time anticipate an act of writing which has already taken place. As a series, they are oriented towards the production of a writing Narrator, but paradoxically emerge composed as recollection-images in the work of a Narrator who already writes. In this way, the Narrator’s work of art precedes the revelation of time regained while at the same time proceeding from it. To regain the time he has lost over the course of his life, the Narrator revisits his life laid out on the plane of composition. In doing so, he actualizes the succession of loves, alongside the other raw materials of his life, as images or sensations in the present rather than as pure past. The present compositional needs of the Narrator’s vocation demand that he draw on the virtual field of his past in order to save it, not just for himself, but for us as well, so that we can be confronted by the full power of that past actualized as a block of sensations, as a work of art.
CONCLUSION

Deleuze and Guattari taught me how to read Proust. When I first read *In Search of Lost Time*, I had spent the previous several years engrossed in their work, and as a result, my initial response to Proust was primarily shaped by their philosophy. While, to some degree, this was a consequence of the many instances where they place their work in conversation with Proust, the concepts which guided my reading of the novel were rarely those which Deleuze and Guattari presented in direct connection to it. So many concepts that I had encountered in *Anti-Oedipus* or *A Thousand Plateaus* appeared differently when refracted through Proust’s novel, and so much of the novel itself gained further dimensionality considered in terms introduced by Deleuze and Guattari. While, on the one hand, this drew me to the monographs, essays, and other materials that they committed exclusively to analyzing Proust, my interest in the affinities between Proust, Deleuze, and Guattari emerged largely out of the web of open-ended connections between their work.

In turn, this informed the approach I wished to bring to *The Search* as a topic of writing. In my preliminary research, I found little scholarship dedicated to expanding Deleuze and Guattari’s perspective on Proust into areas of their work where *The Search* was not already in focus. So even while they had already composed such an extensive oeuvre dedicated to analyzing Proust, I felt that Deleuze and Guattari had left innumerable unexplored avenues within their philosophy into which analysis of *The Search* could still expand, producing new ways of thinking not just about Proust but about their own work as well. To this end, returning to *The Search* with their methodology in no way entailed the application of their concepts to the novel; rather, it was necessary to proceed in terms of making Proust resonate with the plurality of voices that populate their philosophy. The question, then, was never how any given concept
shaped an interpretation of Proust, but instead how Proust’s writing vibrates in affinity with a concept and what we might learn from their harmony.

As such, the succession of loves serves as a site for the exploration of the possibilities it enables, and in this way, it is largely arbitrary. For, while the novel’s serial loves allow us to locate a Spinozist Proust, a Bergsonist Proust, or a Proust in flight, these are merely the modalities of thought that emerge from this particular line of inquiry. There will always be further affinities elsewhere, not just between Proust, Deleuze, and Guattari, but also emerging from the world which is changing around them. Though they do not continue to write, we must continue to think. The Proustian literary machine and the DeleuzoGuattarian literary machine remain open, and they will continue to provoke us so long as reading them serves to propel us towards new points of resonance and new modes of thought.
REFERENCES


