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## **The Concept of Storytelling and the Paradoxes of Literature: Between Bergson and Deleuze**

### **I. Interrogation of Storytelling**

Philosopher Gilles Deleuze's Bergsonian heritage is known, since works such as *Bergsonism* and *The Movement-Image* represent studies of Bergson's work inserted in the development of Gilles Deleuze's own reflections. A reiteration of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze for its own sake will not be pursued here, but what will be considered is Gilles Deleuze's reading of Bergson as a pattern of a continuous philosophical paradigm, which runs from the late nineteenth century to the twentieth century and which can clarify some contemporary literary categorizations. In the game of humanities and of literature, as it was formed at the turn of the century and has persisted throughout the twentieth, fidelity to a philosophical paradigm involving psychology and reflection on time can be read, which may cross more contemporary paradigms. This crossing does not dismantle or essentially alter the first paradigm. This is the explicit relevance of the literary reference, which, itself, serves as an articulation point to other paradigms derived from philosophy or from the humanities.

Let us twice invoke Gilles Deleuze: "creative storytelling has nothing to do with a memory, even amplified, nor with a phantasm" (1991, 161). "The Figure is like storytelling according to Bergson: it has a religious origin. But when it becomes aesthetic, its sensitive transcendence enters into a deaf or open opposition with the supersensible transcendence of religions" (1991, 183). Here are two notions of connection to Bergson, two refusals of Bergson: according to the refusal of remembrance, according to the one of the inseparability of storytelling and

#### **Key Words:**

- literary storytelling
- cinematic storytelling
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religion. This defines an ambivalence that accompanies, in Deleuze's work, the references to literature. Throughout the work of Deleuze, this ambivalence does not preclude references that are homogenous — a homogeneity that still owes much to Bergson. This game of ambivalence and of debt, as much as it is continuous, does not prevent the references to literature from remaining incomplete. The fact that the analysis of cinema prevails ultimately translates this fact: the literary reference excludes, when it is reported to the Bergsonian paradigm, the support of the generic and formal notion of literature, especially of the narrative notion. This information will be expressively included in the study of cinema: only the cinema allows the treatment of a representation that implies, under certain circumstances, the story and brings us back entirely to the Bergsonian paradigm of time and space. The reference to the literature considered throughout the work of Deleuze becomes, in the perspective of the Bergsonian paradigm, a paradoxical reference, because it is read according to a pragmatism, according to a return to the idea, according to a specific semiotics, according to the games of segments, of continuity and of discontinuity, which does not even imply the Bergsonian paradigm or suppose an arrangement of this paradigm. This reference is also paradoxical because it makes an assumption about the statement of literature, an assumption and a statement that dismantle the specificity of their object and place it under the generic sign of art, confusing it with a vital game whose characterization is, *ab origine*, foreign to literature. This double paradox is valuable in and of itself. It is also valuable in the context of the characterizations of literature proposed during the 1960s and 1970s. It leads, starting from this maintenance of the Bergsonian paradigm, to a query or to an equivocation on the symbolic status of literature. Recollection of the Bergsonian paradigm, explicit in the case of Gilles Deleuze, provides a reading, concerning the literature, of the refusal of hermeneutics, which is not necessarily a point of loyalty to the Bergsonian paradigm and which appears as an interpreter of the vulgate of the contemporary philosophy of literature.

## II. From Deleuze to Bergson: A Game of Distortion

Literature is a minor reference in Bergson's work, considered following the game of storytelling and according to a reference to religious mythology in *The two sources of Morality and Religion*. Literature is a continual reference in Gilles Deleuze's work, if we consider the literary essays of *The Logic of Sense*, of *Critic and Clinic*, of *Anti-Oedipus*, of *A Thousand Plateaus*, or *Proust and Signs*, of *Kafka*, and of *Toward a minor literature*. This reference follows the

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moments of Gilles Deleuze's thought. In a manner of illustration. In a manner of definition specific to literature. This definition can be read in accordance with chapter titles such as "Literature and Life" in *Critic and Clinic*. At the time of *Critic and Clinic*, such a vitalist characterization of literature is not frequent; it essentially contradicts the artificialist aesthetics and criticisms dominant in the West, inherited from symbolist artificialism and nourished by references to linguistics. This definition places the writing on the informel's side, the one of symbolism: "Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any liveable or lived experience" (Deleuze 1993, 10). Such a definition is inseparable from a recollection of Bergson: "There is no literature without storytelling, but, as Bergson had the knowledge, the storytelling, the myth-making function does not consist in imagining or projecting a self. It rather reaches these visions, it rises to these *becomings* or powers" (Deleuze 1993, 13). These *visions* are those of the literary characters: "Certainly, the literary characters are perfectly individuated and they are neither vague nor general; but all their individual traits elevate them to a vision that carries them in the Undefined as a becoming that is too big for them" (Deleuze 1993, 13).

The approximation with Bergson does not fail to be equivocal. Bergson recognizes the myth-making function of religion, of mythology, of literature; he places this function in the game of the natural development of man; he notes, however, that this function was not intended by nature (Bergson 1995, 208); he underlines: "Or, novelists and playwrights are certainly not necessary; the faculty of storytelling in general does not respond to a vital requirement" (Bergson 1995, 207). Storytelling, in Bergson's terms, essentially has a compensatory function (Bergson 1995, 220). The ambiguity introduced by Gilles Deleuze may be called triple. The reference to Bergson does not restore the definition of minor storytelling, which is proposed by Bergson. This reference transposes in the field of literature the compensatory function typical for religion. It does not retain Bergson's suggestion: the relationship between literature and religion assumes mythology and its fantasies, testifying that "humanity has left here a free game to its instinct for storytelling" (Bergson 1995, 204). The reference to Bergson, both accurate and inaccurate, attempts to give a purpose to literature and to play in an ambivalent way on the term of storytelling.

Storytelling is, in Bergson's work, the ability to invent, to say, to represent imaginary beings and actions. It finds its precise function in closed religion – to limit the dissolving power of reason, to contradict the evidence of morality, and to play "in human societies a symmetrical role

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to that of instinct in animal societies" (Bergson 1995, 218). In literature, it is the ability to "create the characters whose story we tell to ourselves" (Bergson 1995, 205), a free invention, to which Bergson does not lend a specific purpose, aside from the fact that humans feel the need to tell themselves stories: we should see in literature a kind of degradation of religious storytelling and an exercise of voluntary hallucination. By saying literature, life, storytelling, Deleuze transfers some mythological traits onto literature — the ability to create ambivalent, imaginary, formless beings — in the sense that they can be of several forms and of several functions, and this is what Bergson ascribes especially to religion — a game of compensation. The informal is expressed in literature, in Gilles Deleuze's terms, by the becoming-something of the character. The hallucination of the myth-making function probably belongs to the one who tells and hears the stories, but also, in a more curious way, to the character itself. This one is a vision, a power, a becoming. This syncretic resumption, in the characterization of the character, of the functional traits that Bergson attributes to religion and to mythology, lends a social, a cultural property to the compensatory function: "It belongs to the myth-making function to invent the people (Deleuze 1993, 14). This twisting of Bergson's source is a way to legitimize literature by recognizing a plenary function of the imaginary and by the notations of the informal and of the compensation, to restore the right of citizenship to the fact of narrating, to the character, placing both under the sign of a storytelling that is primarily *liberty to narrate*.

Therefore, the reference to life, which is Bergson's, makes life read as a determinant of storytelling and storytelling as an expression of life, since storytelling is a passage of forms, a vision of life, of beings and of things, which makes characters who are such visions and such powers of shape-changing be imagined — be hallucinated. Literature appears as the exercise and the representation of a metamorphosis, the one of the mentioned represented form, the one — we should say symbolic — of the writer, who thus appears as a writer — becoming, a becoming of time, of space. By this becoming, the writer is a writer of everyone, of the people. He is thus defined as compensation with regard to social, cultural symbolism. That is why he can be considered a minor writer, a becoming-writer, Kafka a becoming-writer of Central Europe, Melville a becoming-writer of America. He is both history and nature. This duality is not marked by a textual analysis, but by a vital unity constituted by the writer and the work, which is a contra-figure of the history — the history does not expose such a duality. The writer is a becoming and tells the innocence of a becoming, made of differences and singularities. This difference and this singularity can be understood by reference to what was said about the storytelling, following the

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reference to nature (Deleuze 1993, 80). The background of Bergson remains in the game of torsion.

The reference to Bergson causes, furthermore, that every storytelling is eyed, by Deleuze, as multiple, or as the possibility of multiplicity. It is sufficient to consider what Bergson says about mythology. The myth-making function is, in Bergson's work, a way of second function compared to the strictly natural myth-making function — that draws “the exact contour of need” from which it was released (Bergson 1995, 210). Outside this exact contour, the mythology is rich in many storytellings that act according to this “exact contour of need”. The storytelling of mythology is thus pluralist, as the storytelling of literature itself: the tales may be numerous in mythology, in literature; they have, in each of their field, the same finality.

Deleuze, faithful to Bergson on these points, gives a diversified and unified image of literature. Literary storytelling does not concern the divine; its various realizations are functionally equivalent; they can be summarized in terms of drawing an inaccurate outline of need: to restore the image of the fullness of life. Storytelling finds here its exact symbolic function: it appears as a process of action and of decision — which is itself the manner of nature and of becoming; on the contrary, culture provides situations and representations that exclude such a symbolism. It would thus be necessary to read Whitman and Melville, who express the American becoming. It would thus be necessary to read D.H. Lawrence who, against the Christian image of the Apocalypse, meaning the “delayed destiny” (Deleuze 1993, passim), symbolically restores maximum connections to man, in other words characterizes him as a fully natural and temporal being, a being of action and of decision. It would thus be necessary to read T.E. Lawrence and his storytelling of the body. In the words of Gilles Deleuze, to narrate is thus to caption: to provide a reading of a becoming, exactly compensatory and of the life itself. Bergson's implicitness or explicitness are inseparable here, while Deleuze refers to Anglophone writers, to what belongs exclusively to the Anglophone literary tradition — the identification of literature to life, as it can be read from Matthew Arnold to Henry James. Specific readings of Whitman, of Melville, of D.H. Lawrence, of T.E. Lawrence, and of Beckett can thus be given.

Literary storytelling continues to respond to specific needs — for example, to respond to the need of an image of oneself in a world without others, as Michel Tournier does in the *Limbo of the Pacific*. These needs imply many tales; they are, however, a sole storytelling because these needs are of a single nature and of a single world. Literary storytelling is still relevant by this same pluralism, because it makes the singularities act in a way so they could draw paths, make

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contradictions, displacements — briefly, they are many representations of the time, of the space, of the forgetfulness, of the body. What may be the specific elaboration of the literary tale, what may be its singularity, is exactly functional: this is not separable from the implementation of a natural anthropology. The fact that literary storytelling does not involve belief does not exclude a mode of identification to that story. Deleuze says that every art and literary storytelling are “interiorized” (Deleuze 1993, 88), and Bergson noted that certain people, “without creating themselves fictional beings, are interested in fictions as they would be interested in realities” (Bergson 1995, 206) — this does not mean that we take the fiction for reality, but that we interiorize it, to the point that we no longer distinguish ourselves from what we are becoming, precisely that storytelling. This movement is also reversed: this internalization can be a way to be in the world. Deleuze finds, in the field of literature, one of the purposes of the myth-making function of mythology.

Despite the torsion of the reference to Bergson, Bergson’s background allows a linking of storytelling and the imaginary and thus a new relevance to the literature. In Deleuze’s terms, literary storytelling, as the religious and mythological storytelling in Bergson’s work, is comprehensive: on the one hand, pluralistic; on the other hand, tuneable with every man and with every reality, without losing its character of fable. This double quality explains that literature is defined as an effective becoming, for the writer as well as for the reader, and that the literary character is also defined by such a becoming. This double quality is not separable from the relationship with the real and with the imaginary. The fable is undoubtedly a fable, unverifiable in this; however, it is read in terms both of real and of imaginary in the measure that, against the refusal that Deleuze makes of the notion of fiction tuneable, the fiction is for the subject the opposite of the authenticity — , real and unreal may be disposed of according to an undistinguishable game, which defines the imaginary (Deleuze 1995, 93). If the imaginary is that exchange at work in the literary fable, it can be read as actual and as virtual. This ambivalence takes the Bergsonian concepts that Bergson does not apply to literature. They imply that literary storytelling is implicitly defined by Deleuze as what needs to be taken literally, because it is both actual and virtual. More precisely, it is an image, almost in the sense of visibility, actual and virtual. This explains why the readings of Proust, Kafka, D.H. Lawrence, T.E. Lawrence, Whitman, and Melville are readings following the unreality of these texts and following the actualization of their writing. The actualization does not mean a reading following a referent, but a reading following the series that make these images. Deleuze is describing the abandonment of

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representation (Deleuze 1969, 94). He is also saying that literary storytelling means to “search the conditions not of a possible experience, but of a real experience. This is where we find the experienced reality of a sub-representative area (Deleuze 1969, 95). The Bergsonian background becomes an opportunity to articulate a manner of the plenary power of storytelling; this one excludes every discussion on the belief and on the reference and derives literature as something that may enter into reality by storytelling and by the imaginary: “The writer sends real bodies. In the case of Pessoa, those are fictional characters, and yet not so fictional, because he gives them a writing, a function. But he does not do mainly what the characters do” (1995, 183). We can still recall the Bergsonian definition of the image and the imagination. The image is not on the side of a mentalism, nor on the side of a simple perception or of an effect of perception; it is inseparable from the duality of the mental and of reality — this duality is not a problem since the organ of perception and of the imagination, the brain, is in the world. The storytelling is an actuality.

### III. Storytelling and the Plenary Definition of Literature

Indeed, Deleuze projects on his literary references the essence of his philosophical logic and of his Bergsonian recollections. The hypothesis of storytelling is, clearly, a large hypothesis. Furthermore, it allows the ambivalences to be formulated; it also allows the characterization of literature following Bergsonian notions, which are not yet explicit. Thus, storytelling is directly readable, and it is not objectionable in itself because it is itself a meaning and it is in perfect continuity with the idea retained from Bergson that man immediately settles into meaning. Thus, the indications of various effective literary becomings are the reformulation, in terms specific to Deleuze's reading, of what he himself notes with regard to Bergson: becoming is the substance; it is both continuity and heterogeneity in an external game concerning space, in an internal game concerning time. Literature is becoming and becomings: this multiplicity refers to a *continuum*; literature is defined, in fact, as it is defined in Bergsonian terms, as a game of duration and of its qualitative multiplicity. Storytelling and literature do not directly evoke by themselves, apropos themselves, the indication of the story, since they are self-synthesis, as Deleuze remarks about the duration defined by Bergson (Deleuze 1966, 21, *passim*). Placing literature in the game, which is a game within time and about time, a game of the imaginary and of the inseparability of the real from the unreal, makes reference to Deleuze's reading of Bergson: the duration continues to be divided into a multiplicity; it goes from the virtual to its actualization. In

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order to define literature's position in relation to reality, Deleuze uses the definition of the real as read in Bergson's work: "The real is not just what is cut following the natural articulations or the differences of nature, it is also what is recut, following the paths converging toward the same ideal or virtual point" (Deleuze 1966, 21).

Literature's position in relation to reality is reformulated by Deleuze in terms of the pragmatics of language and of action, for example in *A Thousand Plateaus*; it allows the specification of becoming-literature. The action and the language designed as action find, in fact, the game of time, of the actual and of the virtual, of the idea. Reading literature following the games of multiplicity, the qualitative games, the games of intensity, indirectly uses the notations of the quality and of the Intensive, as derived from Bergson; at the same time, this reading implies the crossing of data derived from both psychoanalysis and reformulated notions of discourse as a machinic whole. Literature is storytelling that goes with other storytellings; it calls for an actualization that is a kind of displacement by which it is embodied according to a different reality than the one it can evoke. This is the exact definition of *becoming-literature*. This becoming-literature can be read both in the storytelling, a figuration by itself of the virtual and of the embodiment of literature, and following the situation of the work. It is finally interpreted — according to an implicit reference to Bergson (Deleuze 1966, 19), which must be recomposed following the references to psychoanalysis, to the phenomenology of the body, to the possible that carry every representation and every evocation of man — as the figuration of what passes as the human condition, its time, its duration, its becoming; as the figuration of this incorrectly analyzed mixture that is the human being. It is sufficient to recall the essays on Proust and on Kafka: Proust — the figure of the Hermaphrodite is a figuration of this incorrectly analyzed mixture; Kafka — the indications of the becoming-animals and of the proliferation of the series are such a figuration. Storytelling can be a storytelling of a kind of human teratology — as with Kafka's *Metamorphosis* — , of a human disorder — as with Fitzgerald and Zola. It remains, however, readable only according to a complex ontology. We must repeat the definition of the real that *Bergsonism* gives. This reading of Deleuze's literature can be called a plenary reading. The literature is without a doubt a scriptural elaboration. However, it cannot be defined according to an opposition to the real, according to an artificialism, not to be confused with the expression of the writer, although it can manifestly be such an expression — thus by Fitzgerald: it figures the virtual and its actualization, the multiplicity and the synthesis of the real. This plenary reading, a metaphysical reading, resumes the monist reading that Deleuze makes of Bergson, and it is

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actualized following the descriptions of the condition, of the situation, and of human practices. That is why semiotics — in *Proust and Signs* — is a manner of expressing the real and the idea; psychoanalysis is a way putting into words the becoming-human Other — *Kafka* —; linguistic analysis is a way to suggest the possibility of an Other-man — “Bartleby” of Melville in *Critic and Clinic*.

This reading of literature, proposed by Deleuze, according to the implicit or explicit references to Bergson and according to more properly descriptive data, which are summarized in the conclusion of the figuration of the rupture, can be interpreted in two ways. First interpretation: this reading describes the subject and the world, excluding any general definition and any radically unique approach of the subject. In philosophical terms, in terms of the humanities and in literary terms, it repeats the disqualification of the concept of nothingness and negativity by Bergson. Following the game of thought itself, the subject can only be described positively, and nothingness should be declared unthinkable. In *Proust and Signs*, style is equated with showing the thinkable and with the index of the subject's singularity. Second interpretation: this reading can also be regarded as a way to replace the subject within the meaning, to make of this subject the measurement of the degrees of meaning. This double reading characterizes this subject, as it was described starting from Bergson, as it was described starting from the literary storytelling, following the paradox of a universal singularity. It is equally phantasmatic to consider the subject following its unique singularity as much as following the universal categories, but it is not phantasmatic to consider it following its particularity and multiplicities, real and virtual. That is the characterization of D. H. Lawrence, T. E. Lawrence, Melville, Whitman, and Kafka. This reading and this characterization explain that the subject of literature can be read following both its radical difference and its capacity to draw its place within the idea or within the meaning.

Literature, in this game of direct and indirect references to Bergson, in this game of recalling the humanities, becomes the place of a specific hermeneutics. It makes sense. The approach to meaning defined as an *Other* approach to meaning. This is why Deleuze is talking about a minor literature, about literature and the clinic, and, more essentially, in an extrapolation derived from the thesis of Bergson, an essential disguise of meaning, which is partially linked to the reformulation of the characterization of time and temporal experience:

Because if both presents, former and current, form two coexisting series based on the virtual object that they are displacing by themselves and in relation to themselves, *neither of these series can anymore be distinguished as the original and as the derivative*. They involve various terms and subjects, in a complex intersubjectivity, each subject in front

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of its role and its function in its set timeless position that it occupies in relation with the virtual object. As for that object itself, it can no longer be treated as an original object. (Deleuze 1969, 169)

The shift of the Bergson reference to a problematology is explicit here: any response to a question is without a doubt a formal solution of the question, but also an update of the explicitness of the question. So, to tell the time, the subject and the object, means only to tell the question of the object, of the subject, in a game of problematology, which Bergson does not formulate and which *Difference and Repetition* states: "Learning is the name suitable for subjective acts made against the objectivity of the problem, while the knowledge refers only to the generality of the concept or to the calm possession of a rule of solutions (Deleuze 1969, 214). The reading of Proust given by Gilles Deleuze is not a reading according to the pursuit of lost time but according to the pursuit of truth, which is, in fact, a problematology. To read in D. H. Lawrence the refusal of the Apocalypse, the refusal of a represented destiny, is like reading the refusal of absolute knowledge and of the knowledge of a time that would be the Apocalypse. Literary storytelling is an exercise of the distance between the question and the response, of the persistence of the question, and the indication of a return to the real, because the real is defined according to several series, because it is also the virtual.

Literary storytelling is read, in the terms of Deleuze, according to a step beyond Bergson, but also according to Bergsonian intuitions; it does not fulfil any program; it cannot separate the various fields and states of the real; it is, however, *a way of specific emphasis in the approach to the real*. It can take the aspect of a phantasm, as Deleuze knows when he is referring to Lewis Carroll, about Kafka; it can take an aspect of unique stories, properly fictive, as Deleuze knows when he is referring to Proust; however, it is not a fiction, insofar as it is thinkable, which means insofar as it does not provide a substitute of the real. It is both the purpose and the means. That is why the subject being said in that storytelling is, on one hand, following the unity that makes its own alterations — it is sufficient to recall Whitman — and, on the other hand, a figure of the thinkable — the realisation of the game of singularity and of universality, whose most typical expression is style.

#### **IV. From Proust to Kafka: Twice the Sign, Twice Bergson**

The reading of Proust and of Kafka follows these same principles. This reading, like other readings of writers proposed by Deleuze, does

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not, however, come at the end of the question posed by the literary storytelling. It is not enough to say that every storytelling and the thinkable are examples of a process of rationalization that cannot evoke a supposed universal Reason. There remains the question of the rationality of storytelling, which cannot exclude the storytelling's report of time and duration.

The book on Proust is, in the form of the expended edition, a heterogeneous and paradoxical book: it does not allow a reading of continuous argumentation between the first part, "Signs", and the second part, "The Literary Machine". It assumes, in its first part, a reading following the necessity of learning about the signs, which can be interpreted according to a Bergsonian implicitness and according to a problematological approach, and, in its second part, a reading following the figure of the body — although, in an approach that implicitly notes a problematology: "There is no Logos, there are only hieroglyphs. *Thinking is thus interpreting, is thus translating.* The essences are both the thing to translate and the translation itself, the sign and the sense" (Deleuze 1996, 124). The meaning is already there; however, it should be translated starting from the sign that is the thought itself. There is less some new semiotics than there is a double implicit notation: the thinkable and the thought are taken in their proper meditation; this meditation coincides with the multiplicity of the thought. Deleuze characterizes the thought as Bergson characterizes temporal multiplicity. Thus, the sign is a hieroglyph that remains, not by some mystery or some enigma, but by the meeting that is the sign — a meeting that evokes, each time, this implementation of the meditation, the sign, and the thinkable. To describe the hero-narrator as a spider or as a body without organs, acquiring a particular organ according to the exercise of such ability, to describe it as universal schizophrenic, amounts to pronouncing three things at once and to reversing the propositions of the first conclusion. This hero-narrator represents this incorrectly analysed mixture that is the human being, the becoming-man, and rejects every narrative dispositif that could be read as a representation of time. From one to the other conclusion, there is no exact continuity. It is substituted with the game of boxes and vases, — these signs that make sense — which means a game of spatial segments that does not exclude the unity of the statement and which distances the examination of the relation between story and time.

Both readings are formulations of what is literary storytelling, according to the logic of the Bergsonian antecedents, according to a step beyond these antecedents. The first step beyond: without denying the signification, the first conclusion suggests a proper treatment of the meditation of the signification; the signification is its own meditation and

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the meditation is the signification, which must be repeated. The second step beyond: the vitalist notation, attached to the literary storytelling, which controls the notation of the man-becoming, leaving place for the figure of the narrating body, a kind of a common place of every event that is mentioned in the story. The substitution of the second reading for the first assumes an observation: *In Search of Lost Time* should not be interpreted as the pursuit of truth, but as the figure of totalizing singularity or of unique totality. It is, ultimately, to emphasize the pluralist character and the summary function of storytelling, which assumes a subject narrator who responds to such a character and to such a function, and which excludes the distinction between the hero and the narrator: the assumption of the "pure" narrator would act against the characterization of the storytelling because it would prohibit the assumption of a synthesis that constitutes the entire narrative of *In Search of Lost Time*. Finally, it means to take explicitly the act of what is the notation of the first part of *Proust and Signs*: "Proust's work is not based on the exposure of the memory, but on the learning of signs!". The learning of the signs is only a learning of the thinkable.

This refusal of the exposure of the memory and of its two approaches to storytelling form a question. The semiotic assumption, from which the notation of the learning is inseparable, and the writing itself of *In search of lost time* do not justify fully the refusal of the exposure of the memory. It is, in fact, an implicit observation of *Proust and Signs* in the first part: the story cannot be a presentation of time, of its qualitative multiplicity, of its synthesis, as understood by Bergson; the story is a synthesis only by a specific hermeneutics attached to the characterization of the hieroglyphs, which neither implies thought of time nor exposure of the memory itself. The question remains: what about, under these conditions, the story itself of *In Search of Lost Time* and the game of memory where should be recognized, according to Deleuze, a truncated memory in terms of the memory defined by Bergson and presented in *Image-movement* and *Image-time*? The assumption of the hero-narrator spider, because it does not distinguish between the narrating world and the narrated world, because it confuses the narration and the action, because it makes this hero-narrator spider a figure of synthesis in and of itself, suggests that the question of the story is an irrelevant question as is, therefore, the one of the synthetic figuration of time. These steps beyond Bergson are a way to propose the formulations of the literary storytelling that can not go against the writing of the thought of Bergson. From Bergson, from his conception of time and of duration, anything on what could be a representation of time and game of the memory in the story cannot be learned. Deleuze does not attach himself to characterize what might

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be the relation between the figuration of the time, of the duration, of the dynamic of the story. He lends, in the first place, an explicit aim to *In Search of Lost Time*, the pursuit of the truth, which goes against the idea that the story, before being defined according to a purpose, has its own dynamic. In the final version of his reading of *In Search of Lost Time*, he no longer specifies the purpose of the story. This one can only be a game of spatial arrangements, which are the measures of the game of time and memory. The inevitable of the notation of the semiotic prevalence remains: this prevalence allows passing from the measure of the space to a qualitative game, one of perception and one of the statement evoked by that perception. A paradox remains ineradicable. The learning of the signs is temporal; but its progress is reportable only to a purpose of the thought or to the statement of the narrator-spider, who, in fact, contradicts the notation of the learning: this narrator is co-present with all signs and with their significations, which are spatial notions. It is in this perspective that the games on the boxes and vases should be considered, which are games on metaphor and metonymy, read following a spatial logic.

Literary storytelling cannot therefore represent, according to Deleuze, the synthesis of time. The opposite argument may be held about *In Search of Lost Time*. Without even considering the game of the temporal re-figuration of *In Search of Lost Time* and its possible power of temporal synthesis as understood by Bergson, it is sufficient to emphasize that the right of the narrator is inscribed in the game of distension and extension of the memory; this narrator recognizes himself equal to himself in everything that he describes and by full right in the memory of himself and of others. That the literary storytelling cannot, according to the thesis of Deleuze, be made of memory, of time, results from the substitution of the actual power of synthesis of thought or of the man mixed in himself, this schizophrenic hero-narrator, with the power to synthesize the duration. The essay on Kafka confirms this approach to the storytelling, which refuses temporal synthesis. The narrative game excludes temporal synthesis and nevertheless has a purpose, certainly equivocal: "The Verdict, which turns around the theme of the writing, stages the subject of enunciation, which remains in the paternal store and the friend of Russia, not only as recipient but as a potential subject of the statement that does not perhaps exist outside the writing<sup>2</sup>". We should read here, in fact, the notation of the construction of a game on the real and on the virtual, which inevitably involves the drawing of a movement. The segmentation can only be described according to a movement that is only the spatial figuration of that which can be a temporal figuration: "This method of acceleration or segmental proliferation combines the finished, the contiguous, the continuous and

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the unlimited<sup>3</sup>". This means, in fact, to resume, in terms of space, the analysis that Bergson does of the relation between space and time, without reaching to the concept of duration.

Literary storytelling cannot be a figure of the synthesis of time; it is called, however, a "becoming", a figure of "becoming", life itself. This duality, if we refer to the single notations on time, to the duration, which Deleuze proposes, has nothing Bergsonian. The explication of this limit given for a Bergsonian reference is diverse. There is in *Proust and Signs* an explicit anti-Bergsonian perspective: the notation of the lie, which corresponds to a game of the subject with the other, and excludes the recognition of the common field of duration; the negative characterization of love and of friendship, of the other; the negative figuration of this mixture that is man. All this does not consider Bergson's theme of the opening. This opening will be noted, however, in the essay on Kafka, in the studies on D. H. Lawrence, T. E. Lawrence, Melville and Whitman, without specifying the game of the figuration of the temporal synthesis. We must mention the ambivalence of Deleuze in the treatment of the references to Bergson.

Thus, this ambivalence and the questions it raises: is the treatment of memory congruent with the treatment of becoming — of this man who is upcoming by constant alteration? Is literary storytelling congruent with what it assumes as vitalism, in the measure where its proper purpose is following the game of idea and art? We can sometimes conclude on the congruence, sometimes on the lack of congruence. This ambivalence has as its source a double treatment of literary storytelling. The hermeneutics, which stages *Proust and Signs*, defines a game on the visible and on the expressible: the sign is visible, it is a "meeting", says Deleuze; it raises a statement, precisely the diverse stories of *In Search of Lost Time*. This game is an actual game, which tells the truth of the sign, a partial truth. The sign is itself the figure of the duality between the real and the virtual, which can be passed only through art and literature. Recognizing storytelling's function of staging the visible and enunciable as well as of passage to art and literature amounts to two things. Literary storytelling is not of the order of the single concept. That is why its hermeneutics is properly a hermeneutics of the sign. This hermeneutics of the sign — and the sign can be, in the terms of *Proust and Signs*, a strictly defined sign, an object, a monument, the Other — is separated from a reading of the sign according to the Bergsonian characterization of perception and memory, because it is built precisely on the distinction between seeing and knowing and because it presents the unity of vision and of this knowledge as passage to the idea. This game is implicit to the work. This is interpreted at first as the statement that literary storytelling is a series of

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representations that enter the enunciable<sup>4</sup>. This is also interpreted as the consequence of the fact that temporal experience, which is not explicitly the experience of duration, is one of the pure and empty forms of time. To retain the sign, its perception, its relation to the past, means to understand it in its proper difference. The enunciable is a game of the thing itself and the passage to the idea, attached to that enunciable, the formulation of the difference to which the sign is identifiable. This excludes the notions of duration, a treatment of the visible, of vision, the approach of storytelling as a figuration of perception, of representation and of knowledge. Except what concerns the figure of the hero-narrator monster, which must be read together with the characterization of the work of modernity — *The Book* by Mallarmé, *Finnegan's Wake* by Joyce — this game of the enunciable and of the visible remains inseparable from the test of the empty time. That is why the sign is called, as after Proust, a "hieroglyph sign", a kind of monument. The vitalist quality of literary storytelling can be rewritten only by the evocation of the narrator-monster: perceiving, imagining, telling are here the vitalistic acts, which no longer imply the sign as it was expressed. It concludes: every literary storytelling must be held to be exactly current and must include, for example through its hero-narrator, such an actuality. Out of this, storytelling is submitted to the duality between the visible and the enunciable.

These distortions of the Bergsonian antecedents reject every idealist approach to the vision — the vision requires no transcendence — and preserve a status of the temporal game — time confirms the hieroglyph sign. Ambivalence can be read: the resumption by Deleuze of the Bergsonian thesis allows a reading of the specificity of storytelling; this resumption is altered in order to give a definition of representation that is both autonomous and essential, of the sign, at the price of a truncated reading of the Proustian temporality, and of the abandonment of examining the status of the image and of the perception by Bergson. This forgetfulness of Bergson, while it constitutes the main condition of the interpretation of literary storytelling, leaves open the question of the relation between perception, representation, story and time, and their representations in the work. Or, this question is the one of the work-becoming, of the writer-becoming, as *Critic and Clinic* characterizes them. In order to clarify this question, Deleuze returns here to the notion of the "novelistic"<sup>5</sup>. This notion should be understood as a variation of the one of storytelling, as a way to exclude the explicit question of the story and its power of temporal figuration from the examination of storytelling, and as an opportunity to bring literature and literary expression to their power of totalisation, inseparable from the act of suspense, understood in the double meaning of a gesture of waiting

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and a gesture of suspension. To express the awaiting means to replace the literary object in a temporal game; expressing the suspension returns to identify the novelistic totalisation with the exercise of the virtual — to virtualise the figures of man and language. Despite the fact that the “Re-presentation of Masoch<sup>6</sup>” places this virtual under the sign of delirium, the novelistic should not relate to the delirium. Doing so is to invite a treatment of delirium as a figure of the virtual, to define, by a reference to the virtual, the novelistic, this aspect that seems to be the most free of charge in storytelling, certainly the one that does not appear reportable to a game of the story or of the explicit coding, as that which combines various images, representations, at the point of disorienting every intuitive determination of what can be the object of these images and representations. An unknowable unity is not further suggested, one which is read in Proust’s work in the figure of the Hermaphrodite, which would characterize this object.

The ambivalent references to Bergson result from the fact that Deleuze first reads literary storytelling according to a game of unity and duality. It is one, and it expresses the unity and the singularity of the thinkable. This expression, as evidenced in *Proust and Signs*, is only possible by the sign, a temporal sign, a hieroglyph sign. As with the thinkable, two types of names are needed, one of actuality and one of the past. The assumption of a plenary temporal figuration is thereby excluded: learning the signs is learning this duality. The restitution of Bergsonian logic — implicit in *Kafka. Toward a Minor literature* and explicit in *Critic and Clinic* — is partly due to the abandonment of this notion of learning — the question ceases to be one of the meeting of the sign and the recognition of the duality of the expression, of the unity and the singularity of the thinkable, in order to become one of the multiplicity of literary storytelling: this one is beyond every lie and out of the game of its own fiction.

The reversal that suggests the essay on Kafka is explicit: without a doubt, there is in the work of Kafka something like a paralysis of time, and consequently some possible parallel with Deleuze’s reading of Proust. But this is not essential. The critical intention is no longer to justify art ontologically, but to consider how literary storytelling can help to read signs of the real and be this sign itself, which is different from signs of the real. Machinic arrangement has substituted the notation of the hieroglyphic sign — which is a literal reading of Kafka. Thus, in *The Penal Colony*, the notation “the machines are mortal” is condensed in “the killing machine”. Kafka’s writing is essentially predicative, which can be translated, in terms of temporal expression, by the impossibility of continuity. The sign of the law is in itself the expression of the law. No sign is redeemable by thought, by the game of thought. No sign is false,

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since it is exactly the expression of what it represents. This reading of Kafka is a literal reading, faithful to Kafka's reading of the machine, a reading according to a game of distension and dismantlement. Dismantlement is a Deleuzian term that refers to undertaking the characterization of the machine. By distension, we are describing the movement that assumes this dismantlement. This distension is, in fact, a drawing of the segments and of the series of movement. Against these literal signs, Deleuze reads the space of these signs and their dismantlement, and therefore the writing, the narrative and novelistic universes of Kafka, following the unity and the multiplicity that figures one who proceeds to such a dismantlement, following the unity and the multiplicity that represents such a dismantlement. Deleuze thus formulates two of the most constant institutions of his philosophy: the work of Kafka can be read as a topology, understood doubly — as a closed universe, as what cannot be completely protected, as what contains in itself the relation to the rest of the universe. This articulation, which explains why we describe the segments, the movements, the finished, the contiguous and the unlimited, is the only truth that can be assigned to this closed universe. The demonstration uses two implicit references: one of the force, of the intensity of the desire, — where there is a persistence of Foucault and of Bergsonian vitalism; and one of the space that exposes the relations that is the movement — where can be read the evidence that is the counterpart of the machine-sign and which involves the reference to Bergson: "The truth is that the movements are very clear as an image and that there is no need to look into the movement for another thing to see" (Bergson cited in Deleuze 1983, 86). The Bergsonian antecedent commands here a literal reading of Kafka, in the same way as the hieroglyph signs required only a literal reading of Proust. The literal reading is the refusal of a hermeneutics; it identifies the storytelling, which does not provide a reading of any part of the whole or of any whole that is organisable. Still, in a Bergsonian approach, Deleuze will identify this with life, while treating the cinema (Deleuze 1985, 109).

## V. Characterizing Literary Storytelling

Literary storytelling provides a reading of life, the status of signs, and figures of movement. In this perspective, the Bergsonian references are less those of memory and duration than those of life and movement: because it is a statement, literary storytelling cannot prevail, in Deleuze's argument, over the status of the image, as defined by Bergson and included in *Image-Movement* and *Image-Time*. Although it is a statement, storytelling finds, however, the power of the image, by

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the figure that it gives to movement. Movement, as it is described, is related to the unity of the movement of differences. Inseparable from the desire — where there is a reference to Spinoza — it reports the finitude of the subject and binds it to infinity. The desire is difference; it implies our inadequacy before things. Henceforth, the story, which remains an imprecise notion in *Proust and Signs*, is defined beyond any narratological perspective, as that which describes action according to movement; once that has been marked, this inadequacy is the justification of the movement.

The Bergsonian reference, which has in the work of Deleuze its own value and function, is an analyzer of modern literature. It places this literature out of an explicit hermeneutics that would privilege the statement itself. Therefore, a depth of memory cannot be read in Proust's work. The reference to Bergson places this literature out of an explicit symbolism. Therefore, hieroglyph signs, which are their own symbolization, can be read in Proust's work, at the same time as any symbolic interpretation ultimately means a kind of *terra incognita* — it is sufficient to recall here what was said about jealousy. The essay on Kafka allows us to specify this exclusion of an explicit symbolism, whether as strictly symbolic, or as simply allegorical: there is only the common language — this language, a machine of situations and the law.

Through Bergson, a limit to literary storytelling is noted. Because storytelling is a statement, it cannot itself be duration and memory, which are their own actualizations and images; it cannot be an image. Somehow, literary storytelling cannot function as an image can. Or it can only produce a similar effect by representing or by formulating the conditions of the image: those of phantasm, those of perception, those of memory, those of movement that are like an image, those of the linguistic separation that is the separation of the statement. It may still achieve such an effect by representing that by which the statement is given as visible — the meeting of the sign that can be written and stated, as well as the hieroglyphic sign, the meeting of the discourse that becomes its own visibility — as well as the discourse of the law. Literary storytelling can then be called an answer to a vital need — one of finding vision in the discourse. It would be functional only in the double condition of marking its vanity and encouraging this literary reading that allows the step-beyond the statement, without making an assumption of a hermeneutics.

However, this Deleuzian resumption of Bergson leads to a paradoxical approach to literary storytelling. This resumption cannot suggest what is beyond its statement, and it cannot be the figuration of time, because it does not have the immediate images that would be those of duration, of time. However, it is the storytelling of various moments of

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time. What is interesting about the paradox lies neither in the limited reading of literary storytelling, which allows references to Bergson, nor in the measure of fidelity or infidelity of the references to Bergson, but in the question that is thus raised with regard to literature. Literary storytelling can narrate. Narration is undoubtedly the presentation of a certain chronology, of a certain history. But narration cannot exclude either spatial representation or thought of the temporal series. Storytelling can figure the temporal series; it cannot figure their common actualization; it cannot think its own time. The limits that Deleuze recognizes in literary storytelling, starting from the resumption of Bergson, help recall that thought of time is a thought of the virtual, and that storytelling, except being a storytelling of the image — thought, is exclusive to any approach to the immediate information of the consciousness. In other words, storytelling cannot remember the figure either of the subject and the experience of time, or of perception and the game of interiority. What this amounts to is that storytelling is always a treatment from the outside of the time and the subject.

The Bergsonian reference, in addition to its own value, appears in Deleuze's work as a way to describe the manner of alienation that is a concern in modern literature, of which Proust and Kafka are exemplary: with regard to time, to the subject itself, and therefore, to the difficulty in ascribing a game of truth to that literature — unless considering *the literality of the storytelling itself*, to take it literally. That should be done with Proust and Kafka; it is what they have represented in their works. But, by a strange turn of vision, the fact that Proust and Kafka read literally — the signs, the statements of the law, the statements of the common language —, is inseparable from the image of monstrosity — the hermaphrodite, the machine. As we know, this monstrosity is the condition of the figuration of the subject who can proceed to the exercise of seeing, leaving the boundary of literature. Modern literary storytelling, so barely symbolic, so refractory to the hermeneutic game, thus appears as an exemplary way to provide a reading of the conditions that would represent the unconditioned: time, becoming, which assume the artifice of art, in other words some monster, probably inorganic and yet vital. The question of literature is not so much one of learning the truth of signs, but one of representing the learning of the Unconditioned of our condition, time, becoming. This is what Deleuze does not say: this Unconditioned and its learning are themselves a question, one of history. However, by another paradox of the game of recalling Bergson, the relation to the story cannot be read in the readings proposed in *Proust and Signs* and *Kafka*, in this ability that has story bending several times, in several places, and thereby providing hieroglyphic signs and drawing segments and movements.

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This means returning to the notion of the boundary of literature and to the question of story: what may be, in storytelling and in the literary story, the passage from a constituted memory to a constituting memory? — without identifying this passage with the exercise of thought, or with the exercise of a mental machine, as suggested in *Image-Time*? This means another interrogation of this literary modernity that the philosophy of Bergson, partly contemporary with it, may not interpret, but instead analyze.

In order to begin to answer this question, it is sufficient to say that literary storytelling is, in total, less the pursuit of a truth than the pursuit of an image, a mental image. This is the argument of "The Exhausted", Deleuze's commentary on Samuel Beckett's pieces for television. This valuation of the image can be read as anti-Platonism, as a kind of anti-discursivity and as a manner to tell the instantaneous. It can also be read as a way to say the generalized virtual — which excludes even the possible —, to refuse the pragmatism of storytelling and language, and as a suggestion of a kind of anti-vitalism — this suggests the notation of the exhaustion. For the subject who describes the image, for the writer who describes such an object, there is neither metaphor nor metonymy, nor consequently, a game of boxes and vases — this game described in *Proust and Signs*; there is no more hieroglyphic sign; there is no more movement; there is no more becoming that would be too big for the subject — unlike what is remarked in *Critic and Clinic*. There is no more imagination either. The subject can become an image. This is the last power of literary storytelling. We should return to the notion of the interiorization of storytelling. This image is both the index of the interiorization and the exteriorization of this storytelling that is only an image, as only thought is its own sign. A new meditation on the meditation is not started. Through literary storytelling, the conditions that can specify what is the image-time, which belong to cinema, are defined. In order to return to the Bergsonism, Deleuze needs first to exhaust literary storytelling. To choose such exhaustion means undoubtedly to place this storytelling under the sign of its own interrogativity: literary storytelling is probably, in the terms of Deleuze, only the name that suits this subjective act made against the objecthood of the problem of time. This implies that memory, history and story should be abandoned. But, by a turnout that does not stop being paradoxical, this mental image is perhaps also something that is more archaeological. We should say that, with modern literary storytelling, the memory that excludes the discourse and that may be in the instantaneity and in the lability of the image, of an image that is still partly a discourse. Literary storytelling is clearly characterized following the return to a kind of Bergsonism, and to some Platonism as well.

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**IV. Modernity, Storytelling, Image:  
the Passage to Cinema**

We should therefore continue to the completion of literary storytelling. Such a movement of exhaustion, on which Deleuze focuses, contradicts what he says about becoming-literature from a Bergsonian perspective. This contradiction repeats, in this crossing between Bergsonism and Deleuze's own thesis, a tradition of reading literary modernity: this literature is unable to compose its own symbolic game and an effective temporary figuration. This contradiction results in the pursuit of a kind of redemption by the image. The crossing between Bergsonism and Deleuze's thesis attests, further, that literary storytelling has here a double characterization: following the becoming of storytelling, following its liberty; following the finiteness of life, of the language, of social activity, what is recognizable in the analysis made of Proust, Kafka, and Beckett. This notion of the finiteness is the interpretation of the contradiction that characterizes modern literature. To communicate finiteness is basically to repeat what this notion of storytelling involves: mortality, analytical decomposition. This way of expressing finiteness remains ambivalent, however: a reading of an exhaustion of literary storytelling — where the critical vulgate of the end of literature is repeated; a reading of the function of literary storytelling with respect to this end — to go precisely against this end by changing the paradigms of this storytelling and by finding, in man, the movement of life's liberation, of language, of work (Deleuze 1986, 140). We return to Bergsonism, accompanied by some Nietzscheanism.

The question of literary storytelling remains unanswered: if this storytelling is the being of language and thereby a becoming, how can it also be that this temporal synthesis assumes the subject, duration, history? The answer can be read in literature, in cinematographic storytelling. All of this means undoubtedly to reject literature's power to emerge from its limitations and return to observing the contradiction of modern literature — whose Bergsonism appears as an analyzer and as a way still to believe, nonetheless, in the future of literary storytelling.

*Translated from French by Eva Velinova*

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### THE CONCEPT OF STORYTELLING AND THE PARADOXES OF LITERATURE: BETWEEN BERGSON AND DELEUZE

*In this study, Jean Bessière points out the elements of Bergsonian philosophy that continuously and essentially influence the shaping of the philosophical paradigm of Gilles Deleuze. This philosophical paradigm is significant, concludes the author, because it allows the performance of contemporary conclusions about certain literary categories, such as the phenomenon of storytelling when it is placed in parallel with cinematic storytelling, and consequently with the reflection on storytelling through images, present in the work of Gilles Deleuze. Moreover, the author focuses on the paradoxical and symbolical status that literature has at the moment when, on the one hand, it distances itself from concepts of memory and temporal synthesis and, on the other hand, it defines itself as a junction between the real and the imaginary, the actual and the virtual. Thereby, literature will be reduced to the vitalistic concepts of becoming and multiplicity that mark the modern poetics of the informal, without falling into pure artificiality of the sign.*