

11. Deleuze and the Overcoming of Memory

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Gilles Deleuze's reading of Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time* (*À la recherche du temps perdu*) in *Proust and Signs* contains the striking claim that what constitutes its unity is not memory, not even involuntary memory. The "search" is not steered by the effort of recall or the exploration of memory, but by the desire for truth (which, following Nietzsche, we can say is always "hard").¹ Memory intervenes in this search only as a means but not the most profound means, just as past time intervenes as a structure of time but not the most profound one. Moreover, according to Deleuze, the search is oriented not toward the past but toward the future. The stress on the need to overcome memory, and an advocacy of the superiority of the future, are prevalent throughout the span of Deleuze's oeuvre. In *What Is Philosophy?* for example, Deleuze, writing with Félix Guattari, insists that memory plays only a small part in art, adding, "even and especially in Proust."² Deleuze and Guattari cite Désormière's phrase "I hate memory." In an essay on the composer Pierre Boulez and Proust, Deleuze cites Désormière's comment and states that the finality of art resides, in a phrase he borrows from Bergson, in an "enlarged perception"—enlarged "to the limits of the universe"—that requires creating art in such a way that "perception breaks with the identity to which memory rivets it."³ In *A Thousand Plateaus* he speaks of the "redundancy" of the madeleine and the dangers of falling into the black hole of involuntary memory.⁴ Of course, we must recognize an ambiguity within Deleuze's position on memory, and he must be read carefully on the issue. The ambiguity consists in the fact that Deleuze thinks that whenever art appeals to memory it is, in fact, appealing to something else (in *What Is Philosophy?* this is called "fabulation," a notion he borrows from Bergson), and whenever we think we are producing memories, we are, in fact, engaged in "becomings." Nevertheless, it is quite clear that Deleuze wishes to demote

memory and with respect to both his thinking of art and of time. On art, for example, Deleuze writes in his essay on Boulez and Proust: “According to Proust, even involuntary memory occupies a very restricted zone, which art exceeds on all sides, and which has only a conductive role.”⁵ For Deleuze it is always the present (and the future), not the past, that is at stake: “We write not with childhood memories but through blocs of childhood that are the becoming-child of the present.”⁶

In the important second chapter of *Difference and Repetition* (“Repetition for Itself”) on the three syntheses of time, Proust’s achievement is said to consist in having shown how it is possible to gain access to the pure past and to save it for ourselves (Bergson, Deleuze claims, merely demonstrated its existence to us). In Deleuze this second synthesis of time—the first being located in habit—is made to give way to a superior third synthesis of time, the pure empty form of time or time out of joint. The fundamental notion at work here, however, is that of the death instinct and its “forced movement” (*mouvement forcé*).⁷ This is also what is at stake in Deleuze’s reading of Proust in the second edition of *Proust and Signs*, in which recognition of the forced movement of time necessitates overcoming the erotic effect of memory.⁸ In this chapter my aim is to cast some light on a number of important notions that play a seminal role in Deleuze’s thinking on memory, but that are often treated in imprecise terms in the literature. They include the pure past, the virtual, and repetition. If we can secure an adequate understanding of the work these notions are doing in Deleuze’s thought we should be able to better grasp the nature of his commitment to the overcoming of memory. In part, this entails developing an adequate understanding of its curious operations and effects. In my view, Deleuze does this most effectively in his text on Proust and in the second chapter of *Difference and Repetition*. For this reason this material constitutes the basis of my reading of Deleuze on memory in this chapter (it is from Proust that Deleuze gets his crucial definition of the virtual). In the conclusion I briefly turn my attention to the collaborative work with Felix Guattari.

Virtual Memory and the Pure Past

In spite of all the philosophical innovations he puts to work in his text on Proust, Deleuze is keen to hold onto a reading of him as a novelist of time. If we don’t grant an important role to time in the construction of the novel, we lose all sense of the apprenticeship undergone by the narrator or the hero.⁹ This is an apprenticeship that in simple but vital terms takes time. As Deleuze writes, “What is important is that the hero does not know certain things at the start, gradually learns them, and finally receives an ultimate revelation” (*PS*, 26). It is an apprenticeship punctuated by a set of disappointments: the hero believes certain things (such as the phantasms that surround love) and he suffers under illusions (that the meaning of a sign resides in its object, for example). For Deleuze, the novel is best conceived in terms of a complex series, and the fundamental idea is that

time forms different series and contains more dimensions than space. The search acquires its distinct rhythms not simply through “the contributions and sedimentations of memory, but by a series of discontinuous disappointments and also by the means employed to overcome them within each series” (*PS*, 26; see also *PS*, 86–87). And yet, Deleuze is as keen to show that the novel is not simply about time as he is to show that it is not a novel about memory; rather, both are placed in the service of the apprenticeship that is one in the revelations of art—revelations of true essences.¹⁰

The reflective treatment in the novel of the shock of the past emerging in a new and brilliant way takes place in the context of the narrator’s realization that the sensations afforded by sensuous signs, such as the uneven paving-stones, the stiffness of the napkin, and the taste of the madeleine, have no connection with what he had attempted to recall, with the aid of an undifferentiated memory, of the places attached to them, such as Venice, Balbec, and Combray. He comes to understand why life is judged to be trivial even though at certain moments or singular points it appears to us as beautiful. The reason is that we judge ordinarily “on the evidence not of life itself but of those quite different images which preserve nothing of life—and therefore we judge it disparagingly.”¹¹ The narrator is struck, through this involuntary return of the past, by the fact that life is not truly lived in the moments of its passing where we find ourselves too immersed in immediate enjoyments and social rituals and activities. The unanticipated experiences afforded by involuntary memory go beyond the realm of egotistical pleasures and actually cause us to doubt the reality and existence of our normal self. The contemplation of these “fragments of existence withdrawn from Time,” although fugitive, provides the narrator with the only genuine pleasures he has known, which are deemed by him to be far superior to social pleasures or the pleasures of friendship. The narrator speaks of immobilizing time, of liberating fragments of time from their implication in a ceaseless flow, so as to have this comprehension of “eternity” and the “essence of things” (*SLT* 3:909). He comes to realize the nature of his vocation: to become a writer and produce literature. The fortuitous fashion of our encounter with the images that the sensations of involuntary memory bring into being vouchsafes for him their authenticity. The “trueness of the past” that is brought back to life will not be found through either conscious perception or conscious recollection. The book of reality will be made up of “impressions” and will devote itself to the task of extracting the truth of each impression, “however trivial its material, however faint its traces” (*SLT* 3:914). Through this process the mind will be led to “a state of greater perfection and given a pure joy” (the resonance with Spinoza’s *Ethics* is unmistakable). The impression serves the writer in the same way the experiment serves the scientist. The difference between the writer and the scientist, however, is that whereas intelligence always precedes the experiment, for the writer intelligence always comes after the impression. For the narrator, this means that the “ideas formed by the pure intelligence have no more than a logical, a possible truth, they are arbitrarily chosen. The book whose hieroglyphs are patterns not traced by us is the only

book that really belongs to us” (SLT 3:914). For Deleuze the sign of an involuntary memory is an ambiguous sign of life; it has one foot in the pure past and one foot in the future, a future that can be created only through the death instinct and the destruction of Eros.

The extraordinary presentation in the novel of a “fragment” of the past takes place at almost the midway point in the final part of the novel, *Time Regained*. The narrator probes the nature of this moment of the past, asking whether it was not perhaps something much more, “common both to the past and the present” and more essential than either of them. The experience is one in which the “harsh law” of passing reality, in which we can only imagine what is absent and in which imagination is seen as a failure, is neutralized, temporarily annulled

by a marvellous expedient of nature which had caused a sensation—the noise made both by the spoon and by the hammer, for instance—to be mirrored [*miroiter*] at one and the same time in the past, so that my imagination was permitted to savour it, and in the present, where the actual shock to my senses of the noise, the touch of the linen napkin, or whatever it might be, had added to the dreams of the imagination the concept of “existence” which they usually lack, and through this subterfuge [*et grâce à ce subterfuge*] had made it possible for my being to secure, to isolate, to immobilise for the duration of a lightning flash [*la durée d'un éclair*]—what it normally never apprehends: a fragment of time in the pure state [*un peu de temps à l'état pur*]. (SLT 905, translation slightly modified)¹²

The narrator stresses that this experience is impossible except under specific conditions. We need to have suspended our ordinary, intellectualist relation to the world, in which time is essentially calculative and in which we preserve bits of the past only for some narrow utilitarian purpose.

But let a noise or a scent, once heard or smelt, be heard or smelt again in the present and at the same time in the past, *real without being actual, ideal without being abstract*, and immediately the permanent and habitually concealed essence of things is liberated and our true self which seemed—had perhaps for long years seemed—to be dead but was not altogether dead, is awakened and reanimated as it receives the celestial nourishment that is brought to it. A minute freed from the order of time has re-created in us, to feel it, the man freed from the order of time. And one can understand that this man should have confidence in his joy, even if the simple taste of a madeleine does not seem logically to contain within it the reasons for this joy, one can understand that the word “death” should have no meaning for him; situated outside time, why should he fear the future?

But this species of optical illusion [*ce trompe-l'oeil*], which placed beside me a moment of the past that was incompatible with the present, could not last for long. (SLT 3:906, translation slightly modified, my emphasis)

We need to determine the nature of the experience described here, which is said to be neither simply of the past nor of the present. There is also the encounter with the virtual, that which is said to be “real without being actual, ideal without being abstract.” The discovery of lost time enables the artist to give a new truth to the times of life, including time past, and to find for every sign embedded in materiality a “spiritual equivalent” (SLT 3:912). The virtual, however, has to be comprehended as a complex and ambiguous sign of life since it is implicated in a forced movement, and this will prove to be the movement of death. The order of time the narrator refers to is clearly what we take to be normal empirical time, time that is linear and successive. For Deleuze, this order conceals a more complicated transcendental form of time (the splitting of time in two directions), which, in turn, must also give way to the pure, empty form of time. Let us keep in mind the fact that Deleuze remains wedded to two main Proustian insights, which he unravels through a set of theses inspired by Bergson (as in his two volumes on cinema or the essay on Boulez and Proust). The first is that time—the force of time—is not ordinarily visible or perceptible. The transcendental form of time is not ordinarily visible to us, which is why Deleuze comes up with an image of time to make it thinkable. This is the “crystal-image”: “What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or, what amounts to the same thing, it has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past.”¹³ Deleuze goes on to note that it is Bergson who shows us that this splitting of time never goes right to the end, which accounts for the strange and bewildering exchange that takes place in the “crystal” between the virtual and the actual (the virtual image of the past and the actual image of the present). The key Bergsonian insight for Deleuze is that time is not the interior in us but rather the opposite: it is the interiority in which we move, live, and change.¹⁴ Second, and drawing on the closing lines of the novel, human beings occupy in time a more considerable place than the restricted one that is allotted to them in space.¹⁵

Let me now outline how Deleuze reads the experience of Combray and the madeleine. We should not lose sight of the fact that Deleuze’s first reading of this episode—he will read it again in *Difference and Repetition*, and in his later works right up to *What Is Philosophy?*¹⁶—takes place in a chapter of *Proust and Signs* entitled “The Secondary Role of Memory.” Memory is judged to be playing a secondary role in relation to the narrator’s discovery of the superior nature of the signs of art. This for Deleuze is the meaning of the

apprenticeship; it takes time, but it is not an apprenticeship about time as such but about the slow becoming of his vocation and the discovery of the revelations of art.

Deleuze begins with a question: “At what level does the famous *involuntary* memory intervene?” It is clear for Deleuze that it intervenes in terms of a specific and special type of sign, namely a sensuous sign (such as the madeleine). A sensuous quality is apprehended as a sign, and we undergo an imperative that forces us to seek its meaning. It is involuntary memory, the memory solicited by the sign, that yields for us the meaning: thus, Combray for the madeleine, Venice for the cobblestones, and so on. Of course, not all sensuous signs are bound up with involuntary memory; some are connected with desire and imagination. Here, however, our focus is on involuntary memory and the truth about time it ultimately reveals.

How do we explain that which so intrigues Proust’s narrator, namely, the experience in which the past encroaches on the present and in such a manner that one is made to doubt whether we are in one or the other? The madeleine experience is implicated in a reminiscence that cannot be resolved by the association of ideas or by the resources of voluntary memory, simply because it is an experience of a past that is not simply the past of a former present or of a past that is merely past in relation to our current present. It is truly disorientating. Deleuze poses a set of questions. First, what is the source of the extraordinary joy that we feel in the present sensation (of the past coming back to life)? This is a joy so powerful that it makes us indifferent to death. The episode in the novel of the grandmother’s death is important because here we have an experience of involuntary memory that does not bring joy—the joy of time lost or wasted being regained—but of terrible anguish and paralysis. So death cannot, ultimately, be a matter of indifference, but has to meet with a resolution. Second, how do we explain the lack of resemblance between the two sensations that are past and present? That is, how can we account for the fact that Combray rises up in this experience not as it was experienced in contiguity with a past sensation (the madeleine), but in a splendor and with a truth that has no equivalent in empirical reality? This is what Deleuze calls Combray created as an *event*.¹⁷ The reason why Combray rises up in a new form is because it is a past that is not relative either to the present that it once was or to a present in relation to which it is now held to be past. Deleuze calls this an experience of Combray “not in its reality, but in its truth” and in its “internalized difference” (it is a Combray made to appear not simply in terms of its external or contingent relations).

The experience cannot be explained on the level of voluntary memory, simply because this memory proceeds from an actual present to one that has been (a present that once was present but which no longer is). The past of voluntary memory is doubly relative: relative to the present it has been and also to the present with regard to which it is now held or judged to be past. Voluntary memory can only recompose the past with a set of different presents. Voluntary memory proceeds by snapshots and gives us an experience of the past that is as “shocking,” and as tedious, at looking at photographs. What escapes

voluntary memory, therefore, is “the past’s being *as past*” (PS, 57). The problem with this as a model of time is that it cannot explain its object, namely, time. Time and again, Deleuze insists in his work that if the present was not past at the same time as present, if the same moment did not coexist with itself as present and past, then it would never pass and a new present would never arrive to replace this one. In short, the past is formed at the same time as the present as in a virtual coexistence of the two. This is Bergson’s essential insight into the formation of time.¹⁸ On one level, therefore, the demands of conscious perception and voluntary memory establish a real succession; on another level, however, there is virtual coexistence. The past is experienced on more than one level, as both the passing of time and as that which is outside normal successive time, a little piece of time in its pure state. But this “pure state” is also a complicated sign of life; it enjoys a double existence, half outside of time (neither of the past nor of the present) and also in death.

Is it significant that the narrator speaks of his experience of time in its “pure state” as a species of “optical illusion”? It is vital we appreciate a key point with regard to Deleuze’s configuration of the virtual, including virtual memory. It is this: For Deleuze, the virtual is not an illusion. Let us take the example of the pure past to demonstrate this point. The pure past is a past that “perpetually differs from itself and whose universal mobility . . . causes the present to pass” (DR, 102). Take, for example, a virtual object (a part of a person or a place, a fetish or an object of love): this is never past either in relation to a new present or in relation to a present it once was. Rather, it “is past as the contemporary of the present which it is, in a frozen present” (DR, 102). Virtual objects can exist only as fragments—as, moreover, fragments of themselves—because they are found only as lost and exist only as recovered. As Deleuze stresses, “Loss or forgetting here are not determinations which must be overcome; rather, they refer to the objective nature of that which we recover, as lost, at the heart of forgetting” (DR, 102). For Deleuze, this provides the key to developing an adequate conception of repetition. Repetition does not operate from one present to another in a real series, say from a present to a former present that would assume the role of an ultimate or original term and that would always remain in place, acting as a point and power of attraction. This would give us a brute or bare, material model of repetition with something like fixation, regression, trauma, or the primal scene serving as the original element.

For Deleuze, by contrast, repetition takes place through perpetual disguise and displacement. This is why he takes issue with Freud’s figuration of the death drive as a return to inanimate matter. Deleuze has a different model of the real: it is inseparable from the virtual. He asks us to consider the following question: Conceive of two presents or two events, call them infantile and adult, and then ask, How can the former present act at a distance upon the present one and provide a model for it when all effectiveness is received retrospectively from the later present? Would not repetition come to subsist on this model solely as the illusory power of a solipsistic subject? (DR, 104). His proposal is that we

think the succession of presents as implicated in a virtual coexistence of perception and memory: “Repetition is constituted not from one present to another, but between the two coexistent series that these presents form in function of the virtual object (object = x)” (*DR*, 105). Disguise and displacement cannot be explained by repression because repression is not primary; rather, death, forgetting, and repetition are the primary terms: “We do not repeat because we repress, we repress because we repeat” (*DR*, 105). Much of this gets confused in theorizing on repetition—as well as in our own heads—owing to the fact that the transcendental form of time is not normally perceptible to us. But it is this confusion that generates the erroneous view that the virtual can simply be dismissed as an illusion; in truth, the contrary is the case, and it is the pure past that denounces the illusion (of a perpetual and self-same present). The pure past assumes the form of an illusion only and precisely when it is conceived of as a mythical former present (*DR*, 109). It is for this reason that Deleuze posits Thanatos as lying at the base of memory: it is opposed not to the “truth” of the essences and events of involuntary memory but rather to their erotic illusory form (Combray treated as a former present, for example). The question has to be asked, however: Might there still be too much Eros in the discoveries and revelations of involuntary memory?

In the later edition of *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze reworks the movement of time in a section entitled “The Three Machines.” It is here that we find the reasons for conceiving of time as the forced movement of a certain death instinct. The stakes of this can be made clear when coupled with the presentation of the syntheses of time and the reworking of the death instinct carried out in *Difference and Repetition*.

Memory and the Death Instinct

What are the lessons in life, love, and death that Proust’s narrator learns from his apprenticeship in signs? The easiest lessons he learns are bound up with the worldly signs. This is owing to their shallowness or vacuity, for example, friendship (the hollowness of its conversations) and the fashions and habits of society. Harder lessons come from experiences of love and death. Such sensuous signs contain an essential ambivalence, since they sometimes bring joy and at other times only great pain. In the case of love its most painful signs are connected to repetitions. Not only do we repeat our past loves, it is also the case that any present love repeats the moment of the dissolution and anticipates its own end.¹⁹ It is a psychoanalytic error, however, to suppose that the narrator simply repeats in his series of loves his initial or original love for his mother: “It is true that our loves repeat our feelings for the mother, but the latter already repeats other loves, which we have not ourselves experienced” (*PS*, 72). The error is to suppose that the object can be treated as an ultimate or an original term and that it can be assigned a fixed place. This is to lose sight of the fact that the object exists only as a virtual object.²⁰ This explains why our loves

do not refer back in any simple or straightforward sense to our mother: “It is simply that the mother occupies a certain place in relation to the virtual object in the series which constitute our present,” and the object is subject to perpetual displacement and disguise (*DR*, 105). There is simply the “object = x .” Love is not explicated by the ones we love or by the ephemeral states that govern the moments of being in love (Proust, *SLT*, 3:933–34). Each love in our series of successive loves contributes a difference but one that is already contained “in a primordial image that we unceasingly reproduce at different levels and repeat as the intelligible law of all our loves” (*PS*, 68). The transitions between our different loves find their law not in memory but in forgetting (Proust, *SLT*, 3:940). The identity of the beloved is governed by contingency, and our realized loves depend on extrinsic factors, occasions, and circumstances (*PS*, 76). Equally important are the lessons to be learned from giving up on a spurious objectivist interpretation of things in the world (people and places): “The reasons for loving never inhere in the person loved but refer to ghosts, to Third Parties, to Themes that are incarnated . . . according to complex laws” (*PS*, 31). The narrator must learn that avowal is not essential to love, since all our freedom will be lost “if we give the object the benefit of the signs and significations that transcend it” (*PS*, 31). To be faithful to love it is necessary to be harsh, cruel, and deceptive with those we love. Sensuous signs present so many traps for us, inviting us to seek their meaning in the object that bears or emits them, in which “the possibility of failure, the abandonment of interpretation, is like the worm in the fruit” (*PS*, 32). Joy can be had from all of this, from the lessons of life, love, and death, and it is a joy that resides in comprehension.

But what are we to make of the shattering realization of the brute fact of death in an experience of involuntary memory? Can death be put to work like life and love? The painful realization of the full force of the grandmother’s being dead gives rise to an encounter with the idea of death (*SLT* 2:783–85). This death seems to haunt life, to highlight the contingent nature of our affections and attachments, our loves, and to rob life of any enduring meaning or sense. How can thought work the idea of death, supposing it can? There is no doubt that this episode presents the narrator of Proust’s novel with a serious challenge:

I was determined not merely to suffer, but to respect the original form of my suffering as it had suddenly come upon me unawares, and I wanted to continue to feel it, following its own laws, whenever that contradiction of survival and annihilation, so strangely intertwined within me, returned. I did not know whether I should one day distil a grain of truth from this painful and for the moment incomprehensible impression, but I knew that if I ever did extract some truth from life, it could only be from such an impression and from none other, an impression at once so particular and so spontaneous, which had neither been traced by my intelligence nor attenuated by my pusillanimity, but which death itself, the sudden revelation of death, striking

like a thunderbolt, had carved within me, along a supernatural and inhuman graph, in a double and mysterious furrow. (As for the state of forgetfulness of my grandmother in which I had been living until that moment, I could not even think of clinging to it to find some truth; since in itself it was nothing but a negation, a weakening of the faculty of thought incapable of recreating a real moment of life and obliged to substitute for it conventional and neutral images.) (*SLT* 2:786–87)

For Deleuze, the key to producing an adequate reading of this experience is to refer back to the phrase “a little piece of time in its pure state.” In *Difference and Repetition* he proposes that the Proustian formula has a double referent: on one level it refers to the pure past, in the in-itself of time (passive noumenal synthesis, which remains erotic), but on another level it refers to the “pure and empty form of time,” or the synthesis of the death instinct (*DR*, 122). The encounter with and exploration of the pure past is erotic because it finds its basis in our need for attachment (to materiality, for example, such as a face or a place). As a power and a desire it holds the “secret of an insistence in all our existence” (*DR*, 85). But it is not the last word or the final synthesis of time. In the “note on the Proustian experiences” the claim that the fragment of time in its pure state refers to both the pure past and the empty form of time comes at the end of a long paragraph that connects the in-itself of Combray (an example of “the object = *x*”) with the memory of the grandmother. Deleuze writes: “Eros is constituted by the resonance, but overcomes itself in the direction of the death instinct which is constituted by the amplitude of a forced movement” (*DR*, 122). What is this “forced movement”?

In the first edition of *Proust and Signs* the grandmother episode is discussed but the challenge it poses is not confronted. It takes place in the book’s second chapter on “Signs and Truth” at the point when Deleuze recognizes that sensuous signs can be both signs of alteration and disappearance: there is not only plenitude but also absence and the void of time lost forever. The episode of the memory of the grandmother is *in principle* no different from the madeleine or the cobblestones (*PS*, 19–20). And yet the experience of the former is shattering and puts the Proustian vision of the redemption of time to the test.

In the chapter entitled “The Three Machines,” Deleuze seeks to show that in Proust’s novel there are several “orders of truth” and no simple or single truth. The first two orders have already been touched upon. These are the orders of reminiscences and essences, of time regained through the production of lost time (it is a paradox of lost time that it is produced as lost), and of general laws extracted from the encounter with the sensuous signs (signs of love, for example, which give way to the idea of love). The third order is the order of universal alteration of death, including the idea of death and the production of catastrophe. This is the order that constitutes the long final finish of the book, the aging of the guests of Mme de Guermantes’s salon, where we encounter sublime disguises and senilities, the distortion of time in matter (distortion of features, the fragmentation

of gestures, the loss of coordination of muscles, the formation of moss, lichen, and patches of mold on bodies, etc.). All that exists is corroded and distorted by time. Time gives life and time gives death.

This final order, which is encountered in the memory of the grandmother, presents an acute problem. This final order fits into the other two orders and would seem to negate any principle of meaning or value. Is not death lurking away in each and every moment? When the narrator leans down to unbutton his boot everything begins exactly as in ecstasy, the expectation of the strange return with the present moment set in resonance with an earlier one. But very quickly this joy turns into an intolerable anguish as the pairing of the two moments breaks down and yields to a disappearance of the earlier one “in a certainty of death and nothingness” (*PS*, 157). Reconciliation must be found and the contradiction solved between the third and the first two orders. In the third order we are presented with an “idea of death” as that which uniformly imbues all fragments and carries them toward a universal end. We seem to be confronted with that perennial truism and existential banality that death robs life of all meaning. But this insight has to be shown to derive from an optical illusion or effect, just like the optical effect of the pure past. The contradiction is not resolved in the memory of the grandmother. Whereas the first two orders ultimately prove productive in the apprenticeship, the latter would seem to be absolutely catastrophic and unproductive. Hence Deleuze’s question: “Can we conceive a machine capable of extracting something from this kind of painful impression and of producing certain truths?” As long as we cannot, the work of art encounters the gravest objections.

Deleuze seeks to show that this idea of death consists of a certain effect of time. The idea of death must lead to a truth of time being disclosed, one that enables us to conquer the erotic effect of memory. What is the specific effect of time that produces the idea of death? Deleuze argues as follows. With two given states of the same person—the earlier that we remember, the present that we experience—the impression of aging from one to the other has the effect of pushing the earlier moment into a remote, improbable past. The movement of time from past to present is “doubled by a forced movement of greater amplitude” that sweeps away the two moments, stresses the gap between them, and pushes the past far back in time. It is quite different from the echo of resonance produced in the madeleine experience, because in this experience we are presented with an infinite dilation of time and not an extreme contraction of it as with the former experience. This leads Deleuze to propose that the idea of death be treated “less as a severance than an effect of mixture or confusion” in which the “amplitude of the forced movement is as much taken up by the living as by the dead; all are dying, half dead, or racing to the grave” (*PS*, 159). This half-death, however, is also of significance in an unexpected way, a way that the narrator cannot see at the time of the experience of the involuntary memory of the grandmother and the shocking confrontation with the fact of her death: “At the heart of the excessive amplitude of the movement, we can describe men as monstrous

beings,” that is, as those who occupy in time a much more considerable “place” than the one reserved for them in space. When viewed under the optics of time, human beings become transformed into giants, plunged into the years and periods remote from one another in time. How is it possible to surmount the objection or contradiction of death? Deleuze argues that death ceases to be an objection to the extent that it can be integrated into an “order of production, thus giving it its place in the work of art” (*PS*, 160). More specifically, he writes: “The forced movement of great amplitude is a machine that produces the effect of withdrawal or the idea of death.” The encounter with death is another way in which the force and sensation of time are disclosed and experienced. The idea of death, therefore, necessarily relies upon an optics and a perspectivism. It occupies a place within life. It is part of the delay or the meanwhile (*entre-temps*) of the “event” that belongs, strictly speaking, neither to time nor to eternity. In this delay and “meanwhile,” we have already died and will die innumerable times. It is not, therefore, so much that the dead become distant from us as time goes by, but rather that we become distant from them: the dead die for us through our occupying a place within the forced movement of time. This might explain why at one point in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze says that this delay is the pure form of time (*DR*, 124).

The idea of death is produced as an effect of time. In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze writes: “The second synthesis of time [the pure past] points beyond itself in the direction of a third synthesis which denounces the illusion of the in-itself as still a correlate of representation. The in-itself of the past and the repetition in reminiscence constitute a kind of ‘effect,’ like an optical effect, or rather the erotic effect of memory itself” (*DR*, 88). It is not necessary here to explore the nature of this third synthesis, the pure empty form of time. My principal concern is with Deleuze’s acknowledgement of the curious effect of memory. Deleuze interprets “time empty and out of joint” (time stripped of any actual, empirical content) as “precisely the death instinct,” which, furthermore, does not “enter into a cycle with Eros, but testifies to a completely different synthesis” (*DR*, 111). The correlation between Eros and memory is replaced by one between “a great amnesiac” and a “death instinct desexualized and without love” (*DR*, 111). Deleuze takes issue with Freud’s positing of a death instinct existing prior to this desexualized energy. Freud did this for two reasons, according to Deleuze: first, because he allowed a dualistic and conflictual model to preside over his theory of drives, and second, because he relied on a material model for his theory of repetition: “Determined as the . . . return of the living to inanimate matter, death has only an extrinsic, scientific, and objective definition” (*DR*, 111). In contrast to this, Deleuze proposes a quite different conception of death, for example, as “the last form of the problematic, the source of problems and questions” and as the “non-being where every affirmation is nourished” (*DR*, 112). This means that death cannot “appear in the objective model of an indifferent inanimate matter to which the living would ‘return’; it is present in the living in the form of a subjective and differentiated experience endowed with its prototype. It is not a material state; on the contrary,

having renounced all matter, it corresponds to a pure form—the empty form of time” (DR, 112). The error of the Freudian model is that it reduces death to an objective determination of matter in which repetition finds its ultimate principle in an undifferentiated material model, “beyond the displacements and disguises of a secondary or opposed difference” (DR, 111–12). Deleuze insists that the structure of the unconscious is not conflictual or oppositional but rather “questioning and problematizing.” And repetition is not a bare and brute power but woven from disguise and displacement; it does not exist apart from its constitutive elements. Deleuze proposes, therefore, that we not posit a death instinct that is distinguishable from Eros either in terms of a difference in kind between two forces or by a difference in rhythm or amplitude between two movements. To suggest as much would imply that difference is simply given, and so is life. Thanatos is indistinguishable from the desexualization of Eros, and “there is no analytic difference between” the two.

. . .

Deleuze’s engagement with the motifs of Proust’s great novel is significant for our understanding of the ways in which memory gets figured in his thinking. His reading differs markedly from an entire French (and not only French) tradition that traps the Proustian search in a depressive cycle of nostalgia and regression, spinning in the vertigo of the virtual and seeking refuge from the demands of life and the future in the melancholia of lost time. This appreciation of Proust can be found at work, for example, in the readings advanced by Beckett, for whom Proust’s science is the science of affliction;²¹ by Georges Bataille, for whom the project is one of attaining a state of total and pure dissatisfaction;²² and by Julia Kristeva, for whom the project is one morbid, and erotically perverse, attachment to death and the past.²³ In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari claim that Proust’s aim was not to regain time or to force memories back into existence, but rather to become “a master of speeds to the rhythm of his asthma.”²⁴ In their first collaboration, *Anti-Oedipus*, they read Proust’s novel as a “schizoid work par excellence” and as a “great enterprise in schizoanalysis.”²⁵ The Oedipus complex is posited as a *virtual* complex; it is a “reactional formation . . . a reaction to desiring-production.”²⁶ In this work, Freud’s death drive is taken to be a transcendent principle caught up in a subjective system of ego-representation, in which the essence of life is conceived in the form of death itself: “This turning against life is also the last way in which a depressive and exhausted libido can go on surviving, and dream that it is surviving.”²⁷ For them, death is to be approached as part of a desiring-machine; it can only be evaluated in terms of its functioning and the system of its energetic conversions, never as an abstract principle. Death “occurs in life and for life, in every passage or becoming, in every intensity as passage or becoming.”²⁸

When Deleuze attacks memory, it is typically a specific figuration he has in mind. For example when a becoming is declared to be “anti-memory,” as in *A Thousand Plateaus*, it

is the punctual organization found in standard genealogies that is meant. Such arborescent schemas rest on hierarchical systems with centers of subjectification functioning in terms of an organized memory. Here channels of transmission are preestablished, the system preexists the individual, and any deviation from the norms of the system is treated as an aberration. Is it possible to construct an architecture of memory that would not appeal to a center point, to a fixed point of origin, or to a preestablished end? It could be claimed that this is precisely the role the concept of the “rhizome” is designed to play by Deleuze and Guattari, in which the autochthonous is revealed as the always becoming-heterogeneous of the earth (the becoming of nondenumerable multiplicities, peoples to come, and the anomalous, for example). This is why in his second volume on cinema Deleuze posits a “world-memory” conceived as a continuum of life characterized by metamorphoses that cannot be restricted to a single character, family, or group.²⁹ As Adorno noted: “The category of the root, the origin, is a category of dominion.”³⁰ And as Derrida noted, the concept of politics rarely announces itself without an attachment of the “State” to the family of man and a schema of filiation.³¹ If our desire is to think beyond the law of genus and of species or race, then we also need to come up with a different construction, a different language, of memory. As Deleuze’s work evolves, it becomes clear that the most important impulse informing his critical engagements with memory is a (micro-)political one.

PART 2

How Memory Works

I. THE INNER SELF

