Two Regimes of Madness

Gilles Deleuze

Texts and Interviews 1975–1995

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Proust Round Table

Roland Barthes: Since I am to speak first, I will only point out that, for me, any colloquium on Proust has something paradoxical about it: Proust can only be the subject of an infinite colloquium—infinite because more than any other author, he is the one about whom there is an infinite amount to say. He is not an eternal author but, I think, a perpetual one, the way a calendar can be perpetual. And I do not believe this comes from the richness of Proust, which may be an overly qualitative notion, but rather from a certain destructuration of his discourse. It is not only *digressed* discourse, as we have said, but it is discourse perforated and deconstructed. It is like a galaxy open to infinite exploration because the particles move about and change places. This means that Proust is one of the very few authors I reread. I read his work like an illusory landscape lit by a succession of lights governed by a sort of variable rheostat that makes the décor pass gradually, and tirelessly, through different volumes, different levels of perception, and different levels of comprehension. The material is inexhaustible, not because it is always new, which does not mean much, but because it is always displaced when it returns. In this sense, the work is a true "mobile," and may in fact be the incarnation of Mallarmé's long-sought Book. In my opinion, *In Search of Lost Time* (and all the other texts that

accompany it) can only elicit ideas of research and not research itself. Therefore, Proust's text is excellent material for critical desire. It is a true object of desire for criticism, since everything is spent in the fantasy of research, in the idea of searching for something in Proust, thereby making the idea of an end for that research seem illusory. Proust is unique to the extent that all he leaves us to do is *rewrite him*, which is the exact contrary of exhausting him.

Gilles Deleuze: For my part, I would simply like to pose a problem in Proust that has occurred to me relatively recently. I have the impression that there is in this book a very important, very troubling presence of madness. This does not mean that Proust was mad, of course, but that in the *Search* itself there is a very vivid, very widespread presence of madness. Starting with two key characters. The presence of madness, as always in Proust, is very skillfully distributed. It is obvious from the start that Charlus is mad. As soon as you meet Charlus, you say: "Hey, he's mad." And the narrator tells us it is so. For Albertine, the reverse happens; it takes place at the end. It is not an immediate conviction; it is a doubt, a possibility. Maybe she was mad, maybe she had always been mad. This is what Andrée suggests at the end. So who is mad? Charlus, certainly. Albertine, maybe. But isn't there someone even more deranged? Someone hidden everywhere and who controls the certainty that Charlus is mad and the possibility Albertine might be too? Isn't there a ringleader? Everyone knows who this ringleader is: the narrator. How is the narrator mad? He is a very bizarre narrator. Totally bizarre. How is he presented? He has no organs, he can't see, he does not understand anything, he does not observe anything, he knows nothing; when something is shown to him, he looks but does not see it; when someone makes him feel something, they say: but look

how beautiful this is, he looks and then when someone says: here, take a look—something echoes in his head, he thinks of something else, something that interests him, something that is not on the level of perception, not on the level of intellection. He has no organs, no sensations, no perceptions: he has nothing. He is like a naked body, a vast undifferentiated body. Someone who doesn't see, feel or understand anything. What sort of activity could he have? I think that someone who is in that state can only respond to signs, to signals. In other words, the narrator is a spider. A spider is good for nothing. It doesn't understand anything; you can put a fly in front of it and it won't budge. But as soon as the slightest edge of its web starts vibrating, it moves its heavy body. It has no perceptions, no sensations. It responds to signals, nothing else. Just like the narrator. He also spins a web—his work—and responds to its vibrations while spinning it. A spider-madness, narrator-madness that understands nothing, doesn't want to understand anything, isn't interested in anything except the little sign back in the background. Both the certain madness of Charlus and the possible madness of Albertine emanate from him. He projects his opaque, blind presence throughout the four corners of the web that he is constantly making, undoing, redoing. It is an even greater metamorphosis than in Kafka, since the narrator has already undergone a transformation before the story begins.

What do you see when you don't see anything? What is striking for me in the *Search* is that it is always the same thing, but also extraordinarily diverse. If we tried to transcribe the narrator's vision the way biologists transcribe the vision of a fly, it would be a nebula with little bright points here and there. For example: the Charlus nebula. What does the narrator see, this narrator who is not Proust, of course? He sees two eyes, two blinking, asymmetrical eyes and he

vaguely hears a voice. Two singularities in the round-bellied nebula known as Charlus. In the case of Albertine, it is not an individual nebula, but a collective one—a distinction that is of no importance at all. It is the nebula of "young girls" with singularities, one of which is Albertine. It always happens the same way in Proust. The first, global vision is a kind of cloud with small points. There is a second moment that is no more reassuring. Depending on the singularities contained by the nebula, a kind of series is formed: for example Charlus's speeches, three long speeches built according to the same type, and whose rhythms are so similar that in each of the three cases, Charlus begins with an operation that would be called denial today: "No, you do not interest me," he tells the narrator. The second moment is opposition: there is so much difference between you and me that it cannot be overcome, and you are less than nothing compared to me. The third moment is madness: Charlus's speech, which until then is completely controlled, starts to go off-track. A surprising phenomenon that takes place in each of the three speeches. In the same way, you would have to show how there is an Albertine series and in fact multiple Albertine series that emerge from the nebula of young girls. These series are marked by eruptions of sadomasochism; they are abominable series, punctuated by profanation and sequestration; they are vast, cruel series born of myopic vision. And it does not stop there. There is a moment when, at the end of these series and like an ultimate third phase, everything dissolves, everything scatters, everything bursts apart—and ends—in a cluster of small boxes. There is no more Albertine. There are a hundred little Albertine boxes, spread out, no longer able to communicate with each other, aligned in a very curious dimension that is a transversal dimension. And I think it is there, in this final moment, that the theme of madness truly appears. It appears with

a kind of vegetal innocence, in a plant-like compartmentalization. The most typical text in this regard, the one that best displays the triple organization of the vision of the spider-narrator is his first kiss with Albertine. One can easily distinguish the three essential moments (although you could find many others). First, the nebula of the face with a bright, moving dot. Then the narrator comes closer: "In the short path from my lips to her cheek, I saw ten Albertines." Lastly, the great final moment comes when his mouth reaches the cheek and he is nothing more than a blind body grappling with Albertine's breaking up, her dispersion: "[...] suddenly, my eyes stopped seeing, then my nose, crushed, no longer perceived any odors, and without knowing for all that more about the taste of the desired rose, I learned, from these detestable signs, that I was finally kissing Albertine's cheek."

This is what interests me now in the *Search*: the presence, the immanence of madness in a work that is not a dress, not a cathedral, but a spider web woven before our eyes.

Gérard Genette: What I will say is inspired both by the work of this colloquium and by a retrospective glance on my own work on Proust, past and present. It seems to me that Proust's work, given its scope and complexity, and also given its evolving character, with the uninterrupted succession of diverse *states* of a single text, from *Pleasures and Days* to *Time Regained*, presents criticism with a difficulty that is also, in my eyes, an opportunity: to impose the passage from classical hermeneutics, which was paradigmatic (or metaphorical), to a new hermeneutics that would be syntagmatic, or metonymical, if you prefer. I mean that it is no longer sufficient, where Proust is concerned, to note the recurrence of motifs and to establish on the basis of these repetitions, once they have been collected and verified,

certain thematic objects whose ideal network we could then establish using the method which Charles Mauron has made famous, and which is the basis of all thematic criticism. The effects of distance and proximity, of the *place* in the text, between the various elements of the content must also be taken into account.

Of course these elements of disposition have always attracted the attention of analysts of narrative or stylistic technique. Jean Rousset, for example, told us of the *sporadic* aspect of the presentation of character in the *Search* and Leo Bersani spoke of what he called the "centrifugal force" or "horizontal transcendence" of style in the *Search* that distinguishes it from the style of *Jean Santeuil.* But what is pertinent to formal analysis is equally pertinent, I believe, indeed paramount, to the thematic analysis and interpretation of Proust. Let me cite only two or three examples which I have dealt with elsewhere. It should not be overlooked that from the first pages of *Combray*, the themes of alcohol and sexuality appear together, which supports (at least) their later relations of metaphorical equivalency. Conversely, I find the effects of displacement or delay significant when applied to the love between Marcel and his mysterious little cousin. It takes place in *Combray* but is only mentioned retrospectively much later, when Aunt Léonie's sofa is sold to Rachel's bordello. Or again, a thematic object like the Roussainville keep: it appears (twice) in Combray as witness and confidant of the protagonist's solitary erotic exultation, and then returns in *Time Regained* with a new erotic signification that resonates with the first meaning and modifies it after the fact, when we learn that the keep was the scene of Gilberte's orgies with the children of the village. There is an effect of variation here, a difference in identity that is as important as identity itself. It is not enough for interpretation to superimpose the two occurrences; that which resists superimposition

must also be interpreted—especially since we all know that the *Search* was more often than not created by the dispersion and dissociation of syncretic initial cells: it is an expanding universe where the elements that were close at the beginning are constantly moving apart. We know, for example, that Marcel and Swann, Charlus and Norpois were initially joined; we know that the so-called "Preface to *Against Saint-Beuve*" juxtaposed the experiences of the madeleine and the Guermantes cobblestone. In a draft published by Philippe Kolb, we see that the disillusioning revelation concerning the sources of the Vivonne was primitively acquired in childhood and that all of the thematic architecture of the *Search* relies on the prodigious distance between the feet of these arches, on the enormous wait for the final revelation.

All of this demands that we pay close attention to the chronotopological disposition of thematic signifiers and therefore to the semiotic power of the *context*. Roland Barthes insisted several times on the anti-symbolic role of the context, which is always treated like an instrument to reduce meaning. It seems to me that the opposite practice could be imagined using observations of this type. The context, in other words, the *space of the text* and the *effects of place* it determines, also generate sense. I think it was Hugo who said: "In *concierge*, there is *cierge* [candle]." Just as subtly, I would say: in context there is text and one cannot eliminate the first without taking the second into account, which is problematic in literature. It would therefore be better to return context to its symbolic reach by turning to a hermeneutics, or semiotics, that is less founded on paradigmatic invariance than on syntagmatic and therefore textual variations. Consequently, as we have known at least since Saussure, it is not repetition but difference, modulation, alteration, what Doubrovsky called the *false note* yesterday—in a word, variation,

even in its most elementary form. It would be pleasant to think that the role of the critic, like the musician, is to *interpret variations.*

Serge Doubrovsky: I think the three interventions we have just heard and that at first glance have nothing in common are caught in the same spider's web, precisely the one described by Deleuze. And wasn't that in fact typical of Proust, both this fragmentation, this total isolation and then, in the end, this communication, this reunion?

Roland Barthes: I would simply like to say to Genette that if, in analyzing variations, one seeks a theme, one is entirely within a hermeneutic, for then one is following a vertical climb to a central object. However, and here I think Genette is right, if one postulates a description or simply a writing of variation, a variation of variations, then it is no longer a hermeneutic, it is simply a semiology. At least that is how I would define the word "semiology" taking up an opposition Foucault posed between "hermeneutics" and "semiology."

Jean-Pierre Richard: I would like to add a few words to what Gérard Genette said earlier. I certainly agree with the conception he developed of the *theme* as the sum or series of its modulations. I also think it is a good idea to undertake a contextual thematics. But I would like to mark a slight difference in the definition which has been provided or suggested. It seems to me, for example, that the Roussainville keep, at least in Genette's analysis, cannot truly appear as a theme...

Gérard Genette: I called it a "thematic object."

Jean-Pierre Richard: ... I would see it more as a *motif*, in other words, an object Proust very consciously uses repeatedly in the text to create certain effects, important effects, and I agree with Genette, that these are effects of delayed or displaced meaning.

But what I see as properly *thematic* in the Roussainville keep is something else: the possibility it offers us to open it, almost to break it apart, to perform in any case a mobilization and something like a disseminating liberation of its various constitutive traits (qualities or functions), to dissociate it, in fact to connect it with other objects that are present and active in the expanse of Proustian fiction. Among these definitive traits—I mean that define the object, but without *finishing* it of course, without closing it, rather opening it on all sides to its outside—among these specific traits, there would be *redness* (suggested by the signifier *Roussainville*): the redness that connects the keep to the libido of all the little redheaded girls. Or its *verticality* (that you earlier and correctly referred to as phallic) that connects the keep to all standing objects; and also, we could say, *inferiority*: since everything erotic that takes place in this keep always takes place in its underground floor. Thanks to this characteristic, the keep will undergo a subterranean modification with all of the other deep and clandestine places in the *Search*, especially with the crypt of the Combray church, the little anal pavilion of the Champs-Elysées that Doubrovsky talked about the other day, and the Paris subway during the war where Charlus takes his odd walks. The modulation of the theme can even appear very authentically Freudian here since along with the infantile and auto-erotic state of the underground (Roussainville), we have an anal underground in the Champs-Elysées, then a homosexual underground in the Paris subway. This is what I see as the modulation of a theme. What I see as thematic in an object is

less its ability to be repeated, to be reproduced as a whole, identical or varied, in various places, close or far apart, in the text, than its ability to spontaneously divide, to be abstractly, categorically distributed towards all other objects of fiction in a way that establishes a network of implicit solidarity—or if you prefer, this metaphor is apparently an obsession with us this evening—an ability to weave them, in the anticipatory and memorial space of reading, into a kind of vast signifying spider web. Themes are then read as the main lines of this infinite redistribution: series, yes, but always broken series, continually reencountered or traversed.

And this notion of *traversing* leads me to want to question Gilles Deleuze who did so well to evoke, at the end of his book on Proust, the importance of *transversals* in Proust's work. Perhaps the Roussainville keep provides us with an excellent example: remember the young boy who leads a visit to the Combray crypt where the murdered little girl was found, as Doubrovsky mentioned yesterday. But he is also one of the actors in the erotic games played out in the keep in which Gilberte takes part. Here, confirmed by the relay of a key character, we have a clear connection between two modalities of the Proustian underground, two of our spatio-libidinal series. My question for Deleuze about this is how exactly he conceives of the meaning of this notion of *transversality* in Proust. Why is it privileged by him in relation to all of the other structuring relationships in Proustian space (e.g. focality, symmetry and laterality)? And how is it specifically connected to an experience of madness?

Gilles Deleuze: I think we can call a dimension transversal that is neither horizontal nor vertical, supposing of course that it is question of a plane. I am not asking whether a dimension of this sort appears in Proust's work. I am asking what it is used for. And if

Proust needs it, why he needs it. It seems to me that in the end he has no choice. There is one thing he likes a lot: the idea that things or people or groups do not communicate. Charlus is a box; the young girls are a box containing smaller boxes. And I do not think it is a metaphor, at least in the ordinary sense of the term. Closed boxes or non-communicating vessels: here we grasp, I believe, two of Proust's possessions in the sense that a man is said to have properties, possessions. Well, these properties, these possessions which Proust manipulates throughout the *Search*, it is through him, strangely, that they communicate. This communication does not occur within any dimension usually included in the dimensions of communicating things: it could be called an aberrant communication. A famous example of this type of communication: the bumblebee and the orchid. Everything is compartmentalized. And that does not mean Proust is mad, but that this is a mad vision, since mad vision is much more plant-based than animal-based. What makes human sexuality an affair of flowers for Proust is that each person is bisexual. Everyone is a hermaphrodite but incapable of self-fertilization because the two sexes are separated. The amorous or sexual series will therefore be a particularly rich one. In speaking of a man, there are the male and female parts of the man. And for this male part, two cases or rather four: it can enter into a relationship with the male part of a woman or the female part of a woman, but also with the female part of another man or the male part of another man. There is communication, but it is always between non-communicating vases. There are openings but they always take place between closed boxes. We know that the orchid presents the image of an insect drawn on its flower, with its antennae, and the insect comes to fertilize this image, thereby ensuring the fertilization of the female flower by the male flower: to indicate

this type of crossing, of convergence between the evolution of the orchid and the evolution of the insect, a contemporary biologist[1] has spoken of an aparallel evolution, which is exactly what I mean by aberrant communication.

The train scene where the narrator runs from one window to the other, going from the right landscape to the left and vice versa provides another example of the same phenomenon. Nothing communicates: it is a kind of great exploded world. The unity is not in what is seen. The only possible unity has to be sought in the narrator, in his spider behavior weaving his web from one window to the other. I think all the critics have said the same thing: the *Search*, as a work, is entirely made in this dimension, haunted by the narrator alone. The other characters, all of the other characters, are only boxes, mediocre or splendid boxes.

Serge Doubrovsky: Could I ask you this question then: what is *Time Regained* in this perspective?

Gilles Deleuze: *Time Regained* is not the moment when the narrator understands, nor the moment when he knows (I am using the wrong words but it's for the sake of time); it is the moment when he knows what he has been doing from the beginning. He didn't know. It is the moment he knows he is a spider, the moment he knows that madness has been present from the beginning, the moment he knows that his work is a web and at that moment he is fully affirmed. *Time Regained* is the transversal dimension par excellence. In this kind of explosion, of triumph at the end, one could say that this spider has understood everything. It has understood it was making a web, and that it was prodigious feat to understand it.

Serge Doubrovsky: What do you make of the major psychological laws that the narrator brings in throughout the story and scatters throughout the text? Do you see them as symptoms of his madness or analyses of human behavior?

Gilles Deleuze: Neither. I think they are very localized. As Genette said, there are very important problems of topology. Psychological laws are always laws of series. And series, in Proust's work, are never the last word. There is always something deeper than these series organized according to a vertical axis or with increasing depth. The series of planes that we see crossed by Albertine's face leads to something else, something much more important which is the last word. The same applies to the series marked by the laws of lies and the laws of jealousy. That is why as soon as Proust manipulates the laws, a dimension of humor intervenes that I see as essential and that raises a problem of interpretation, a real problem. Interpreting a text, I think, always comes back to evaluating its humor. A great author is someone who laughs a lot. In one of his first appearances, Charlus says something to the narrator like: "You don't care about your grandma, do you, you little devil." You might think Charlus is making a vulgar joke. But perhaps Charlus is in reality making a prediction, precisely that the narrator's love for his grandmother, or for his mother, the whole series is not at all the last word, since the last word is: you don't care, etc. And this is why I think that all the methods that have been invoked so far find themselves faced with this need to take into account not only a rhetoric, but a humoristics.

Question from the audience: Mr. Barthes, you suggested a relationship between the *Search* and Mallarmé's Book. Could you be more explicit concerning this relationship, or is it only an idea?

Roland Barthes: It is a projected connection; a metaphor, if you will. Mallarmé's Book is a space for permutation between a text that is read and the spectators who change places at each moment. I would simply suggest that Proust's book, the space of reading of this Proustian book, throughout the story, might be this Mallarmean Book, this book that only exists in a kind of non-hysterical, purely permutative theatricality founded on permutations of places. That is all I wanted to say.

Serge Doubrovsky: I would like to take advantage of this brief pause to respond to Genette. I will be in complete agreement with what he said before. All of the scenes of the *Search* are relived, but each time there is a qualitative difference that comes from the evolution of the book, of the text as such. And that is why, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, I did not present my own commentary as the final stage of my research but as an effort to establish the landmarks that will then allow the establishment of a network of differences. As for what Deleuze said earlier, I would not have used the same words. But the more I read Proust, the more I am sure, not that he was mad but—forgive the expression—a little "loony." To remain at this level, there are sentences that appear perfectly logical, but when you look closer, they do not hold up to scrutiny. If I used the language of psychoanalysis yesterday to describe this type of phenomenon, it was because psychoanalysis is the ideal language of the madman, it is madness codified. I therefore used a handy system, though maybe only to reassure myself.

Jean Ricardou: The various statements being exchanged here can be more or less easily connected. For example, what I would like to formulate combines best with what Gérard Genette discussed. I will

therefore ask Genette if he considers this separation or dispersion that currently inspires his critical desire as specific to Proust. As for me, I have the impression that his phenomenon (I would willingly call it the "Osiriac arrangement") is characteristic of every text. I am thinking in particular of a contemporary of Proust (but who is unfortunately much less mentioned): Roussel. He operates in perhaps a similar way, in the sense that some of his texts, like the *New Impressions of Africa*, are composed of a legible proliferation of parentheses inside parentheses separating the themes, dispersing them more and more. It is apparent in the composition of other texts by Roussel. Moreover, what worries me a little is that the phenomenon of dispersion could lead one to believe, perhaps, that there is first of all a presence of unity and that this unity is then dispersed. In other words, the Osiriac arrangement presupposes, before its dislocation, the presence of an original body, the body of Osiris. For me, it seems necessary to correct this arrangement with another notion: the notion of the "impossible puzzle." In it, there is a group of pieces separated from one another by the act of constantly putting them between new parentheses. At the same time, however, if you attempt to recompose a supposedly broken unity from the dispersed pieces, you would realize, through the impossible puzzle effect, that the pieces do not fit well together, do not have a compatible geometry. What interests me, in the end, is to aggravate the case of unity: not only (as you show) space and dispersion, but also impossible reunification. There is no original unity.

Gérard Genette: The relationship between Proust and Roussel is obviously too difficult to be dealt with quickly. There is, however, one element large enough for us to mention. As far as I know, Roussel had a certain way of mastering his arrangement and the

characteristic of the Proustian arrangement is that its author never quite mastered it. One could say he did not master it because he died too soon but naturally that is a joke. Even if he were still alive, I am sure he still would not have mastered it because it is infinite. The other question is: Is this phenomenon specific to Proust's work or a general phenomenon? I think this is a false problem in fact because, for me in any case, I can sense a phenomenon characteristic of Proust, and starting from this phenomenon, I am tempted to reread all other texts in this light. But from another point of view, one could say that these phenomena of distance, separation, etc. are the very definition of any text.

Roland Barthes: I see we are still turning around this form of theme and variation. In music, there is the academic and canonical form of the theme and variation, for example Brahms' variations on a theme by Haydn. The theme is given first and then ten, twelve or fifteen variations follow. But we must not forget that in the history of music, there is a great work that pretends to use the "theme and variations" structure but it fact undoes it: Beethoven's variations on a waltz by Diabelli, at least as they are admirably explained and described by Stockhausen in Boucourechliev's little book on Beethoven. You can see that we are dealing with thirty-three variations without a theme. And there is a theme that is given at the beginning, which is a very silly theme, but one that is given precisely, to some extent, for the sake of derision. I would say that Beethoven's variations here function a little like Proust's work. The theme is diffracted entirely in the variations and there is no longer a varied treatment of a theme. This means that in a way the metaphor (for every idea of variation is paradigmatic) is destroyed. Or, in any case, the origin of the

metaphor is destroyed. It is a metaphor, but without an origin. I think that is what should be said.

Another question from the audience: I would like to ask a question that will be a little like a pebble in the pond. In other words, I expect diverse responses that will give me a better idea of what you are all searching for in Proust. This is my question: Does the narrator have a method?

Gilles Deleuze: I think the narrator has a method; he does not know it at the beginning, he learns it by following different rhythms, on very different occasions, and this method, literally, is the spider strategy.

Serge Doubrovsky: The narrator's method? Well, there are several. The narrator is both someone who claims to live and someone who writes. This raises all kinds of problems. And it leads me back to the origins of metaphor: the original relationship, the relationship with the mother, with the body, with this "I" that is an other and that one eternally seeks to reconstitute—but can one really do so?—using various methods of writing.

Gérard Genette: When referring to the narrator of the *Search*, you have to state whether you are using the term in the strict sense or in the larger sense, which is ambiguous. Do you mean the one who is telling the story, or the protagonist? Concerning the protagonist's method, I can only repeat what Deleuze has written: he learns a method of deciphering, etc. That is the protagonist's method, and you could say it develops little by little. As for the method of the narrator as such, it is obviously outside the scope of the question asked.

Same interlocutor: If you say that the protagonist's method, in other words, the narrator in the broadest sense, develops little by little, then aren't you in disagreement with Gilles Deleuze? Because, if I understand you correctly, Mr. Deleuze, your idea is that this method is only discovered at the end. There would have been a kind of instinctive approach, an approach that is only understood, reviewed and analyzed in *Time Regained.*

Gérard Genette: I just said how I agreed with Deleuze.

Gilles Deleuze: Yes, I do not see where you see an opposition in what we have said.

Same interlocutor: I see an opposition between the idea of a method that is developed little by little and the idea that it is only revealed at the end.

Gilles Deleuze: I'm sorry, but I see them as the same thing. To say a method is locally constituted is to highlight that there is first, here and there, a fragment of content that is taken into a fragment of method. For the narrator to say at the end: "Ah, that's it!" does not mean that suddenly everything is reunited. The bits and pieces remain bits and pieces; the boxes are still boxes. But he grasps at the end that it is precisely these pieces that, with no reference to a superior unity, constitute the work as such. I therefore see no opposition between this local constitution of fragments of method and the final revelation.

Same interlocutor: I would like to return to a word you used in your first communication. You said at one point: But what does the

narrator do? He doesn't see anything, he doesn't understand anything. And you added: He doesn't want to understand anything.

Gilles Deleuze: It does not interest him. That is what I should have said.

Same interlocutor: Well, I wonder if the will not to understand is not part of the method. The idea of rejection: I reject things because they do not interest me. By instinct, I know that it does not interest me. Consequently, there *is* a method from the beginning, which would be to rely on a certain instinct. What is discovered at the end is that this method was the right one.

Gilles Deleuze: It is not that this method was the right one, but that this method functioned well. But it is not universal. You thus cannot say: it was the right method. You should say: it was the only method capable of functioning in such a way that this work was produced.

Same interlocutor: But doesn't the ambiguity come from the fact that, precisely, if the narrator has a method in the beginning, it is a method that does not postulate the goal towards which it is reaching? No goal is set; it only becomes apparent at the end.

Gilles Deleuze: But nothing is set. The method isn't either. Not only is the goal of the method not set, but the method itself is not set.

Same interlocutor: It may be, if not set, then at least evoked.

Gilles Deleuze: Is it evoked? I will take a simple example: the madeleine. It gives rise to an effort from the narrator that is explicitly

presented as a methodical effort. That is truly a scrap of method in practice. We learn, hundreds of pages later, that what was found at that moment was radically insufficient and that something else needs to be found, more searching is necessary. Thus, I do not at all believe—and it seems to me that you are now contradicting yourself—that the method is set first. It is not set; it functions here and there, with mistakes that are an integral part of the work and even when it has worked, it has to be taken up again in another mode. And that continues until the end, where a... a kind... how should I put it?... a kind of revelation intervenes. At the end, the narrator offers a glimpse of his method: to be open to what constrains him, to be open to what hurts him. That is a method. We can in any case call it that.

Another question from the audience: Gilles Deleuze, I would like to return to your spider image, which is very striking, to ask you a question: What do you do then with the notion of belief, which is so prevalent in Proust? You said that the spider did not see anything; and Proust often says that such or such spectacle is bathed in a belief, in other words in a certain impression prior to the spectacle itself, for example the hawthorns, the impression felt on the morning at mass.

Gilles Deleuze: Once again, there is no opposition. What is opposed, if you will, is the world of perception or intellection, on the one hand, and the world of signals on the other. Each time there is belief, it means a signal has been received and that there is a reaction to this signal. In this sense, the spider believes, but it only believes in the vibrations of its web. The signal is what makes the web vibrate. Until the fly is in the web, the spider absolutely

does not believe in the existence of a fly. It does not believe it. It does not believe in flies. However, it believes in any movement of the web, no matter how small, and it believes in it as in a fly. Even if it is something else.

Same interlocutor: In other words, an object only exists if it is caught in the web...

Gilles Deleuze: ... if it emits a signal that moves the web, that moves it in the state that it is in at that moment. Because it is a web that is made, that is built, just like with spiders, and it does not wait until it is done for there to be prey, in other words things that make the web move.

Same interlocutor: But he is the one who secretes this prey, because he makes it become prey.

Gilles Deleuze: No. He secretes the web. There is an outside object, but it does not intervene as an object, it intervenes as an emitter of signals.

Same interlocutor: Caught in the web he is in the process of secreting.

Gilles Deleuze: That's right.

Same interlocutor: And it only exists at that moment.

Gilles Deleuze: That's right.

Another question from the audience: I would like to ask a question to Mr. Deleuze and Mr. Doubrovsky. Mr. Deleuze, you used the word madness several times. Could you define your use of this word? Also, Mr. Doubrovsky, you stated that the narrator is not mad but "loony." That requires an explanation.

Gilles Deleuze: I started with the use Proust himself made of the word "madness." There is an excellent page in *The Prisoner* on this theme: what worries people is not crime, not misdeeds, it is something worse, it is madness. And these words, as if by chance, describe Charlus and the mother of a family who discovered, or sensed—she also happens to be very stupid—that Charlus was mad, and that when he stroked the cheek of her boys and pulled their ears, there was something more than homosexuality, something incredible that was on the order of madness. And Proust tells us that this is worrisome.

As for determining what madness is and what it consists of, I believe that one could speak of schizophrenia. This universe of closed boxes that I tried to describe, with its aberrant communications, is a fundamentally schizoid universe.

Serge Doubrovsky: If I used the word "loony," it is because I believe it is not exactly a question of madness. I do not think the narrator is completely mad, even though we could add to the texts cited by Deleuze the passage where Vinteuil is said to have died a madman. The narrator struggles with madness; otherwise, you can be sure, he would not have written his book. I wanted to introduce, through the use of a slang term, some of the humor Deleuze had requested.

I will not repeat what I said yesterday about neurosis. What strikes me, staying at the level of writing alone, is that the same

stories, the same characters, the same situations reappear constantly with a slight variation each time. This phenomenon, which Genette referred to earlier, was very well analyzed by Leo Bersani in his book on Proust. Things are repeated obsessively, the coincidences are too great. Everything happens as if the story were becoming more and more fantastical. We no longer have any sort of narrative realism, but a delirium that presents itself as narration. This should be shown through a series of examples. Limiting ourselves to the main Proustian maxims alone, which could have been gathered into a collection, the effect, when read one after the other, is quite extraordinary: the narrator deploys his treasures of ingeniousness to justify behavior that is fundamentally aberrant.

Another question from the audience: Roland Barthes, I would like to ask a question that I will have some difficulty formulating since it calls on a text I have had some difficulty understanding: the preface to your *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*. There you speak of the "pleasure of the text" in terms that evoke Proust rather clearly. You also speak of a kind of critical activity considered as subversion or redirection, which is not without resemblance to the interpretation of variations of which Genette spoke. This seems rather ambiguous to the extent that the interpretation of variations is not far from a certain form of pastiche that threatens to lead to the worst critical indulgence.

Roland Barthes: I do not see the ambiguity of the pastiche.

Same interlocutor: I would like to talk about the interpretation of variations, which you seem to ascribe to as a critical activity, and that I would relate to the pleasure of the text you describe. I would like to know how that is situated.

Roland Barthes: The pleasure of the text has no direct relationship with the object of this colloquium, although Proust is a great source of pleasure for me personally. I even spoke earlier of critical desire. The pleasure of the text is a sort of claim I made, but it must now be taken to a more theoretical level. I will simply say, in a word, that it may now be time, given the evolution of textual theory, to question the economy or economies of pleasure in the text. How does a text please? What is the pleasure limit (*plus-à-jouir*) of a text, where is it situated, is it the same for everyone? Certainly not. Where then does that lead us methodologically? We could for example start with the observation that for millennia, there was an undisputed pleasure in narration, anecdotes, stories, tales. If we now produce texts that are no longer narrative, what substitutive economy controls pleasure? There has to be a displacement of pleasure, a displacement of the pleasure limit (*plus-à-jouir*), and that is when we should seek a kind of extension of the theory of text. I ask the question, and I have nothing further to offer at the moment. It is something one could consider working on collectively, in a research seminar, for example.

As for the second question concerning the interpretation of variations, I would say that a critic is not at all like a pianist who simply interprets, executes the variations that are written. In reality, the critic at least temporarily reaches a destructuration of the Proustian text; he or she reacts against the rhetorical structuring (the "outline") that has until now been prevalent in Proust studies. At that point, the critic is not at all like a traditional pianist performing variations that are indeed in the text, but he or she becomes more like the operator of a part as in post-serial music. It is the same difference there would be between the interpreter of a romantic concerto and the musician, the operator in a formation (the word orchestra is no longer used) capable of playing completely

contemporary music, according to a written canvas that has nothing to do with old-fashioned notation. At that moment, the Proustian text becomes, little by little, through the sort of Heracliteanism that critics are caught up in, a type of sheet music full of holes with which one will be able to operate variations instead of performing them. This would lead us back to the problem that was raised in a much more concrete, and in a sense, much more serious debate that took place this afternoon, by those of us who referred to the problems of the Proustian text, in the material sense of the word "text." Perhaps at that point we would need these Proustian papers, not only for the literality of the sentences they would provide us but for the type, I would say, of graphic configuration, of graphic explosion they represent. That is in a way how I see a certain future, not of Proustian criticism (its future is of no interest: criticism will always remain an institution, one can always move outside or beyond it), but of reading and therefore of pleasure.

Jean-Pierre Richard: Following Roland Barthes' remarks, I would like to say that for me there seems to exist a rather fundamental agreement or at least a convergence between everyone around this table: everyone has described Proust's writing practices for us from the perspective of dispersal, fragmentation, and discontinuity. It seems obvious to me, however, in reading Proust's text, that there is a Proustian ideology of the work that goes against all of these descriptions, a very explicit, insistent, even heavy-handed ideology, which on the contrary values echoes, lines of resemblance, reminders, repercussions, the division into *ways*, the symmetries, the points of view, the "stars," and which ends in the well-known passages of *Time Regained* with the appearance of a character who ties together all of the threads that until then were separate. It

therefore seems that there is a disparity between the explicit Proustian ideology of the text and the descriptions you have made of it. I therefore ask you simply this: If this disparity exists, what place do you give this Proustian ideology in the practice of the text? How do you explain this contradiction between what he says and the way he says it?

Roland Barthes: Personally, I see the ideology you describe. It comes out more at the end...

Jean-Pierre Richard: Not all along?

Roland Barthes: ... more like a Proustian *imaginary*, in the Lacanian sense; this imaginary is *in* the text, it takes its place there as in a box but, I would add, a Japanese box in which there is only another box, and so on. And in that way, the text's misunderstanding of itself ends up being figured in the text itself. That is how I would see this theory of writing rather than this ideology, which is in the Proustian text.

Jean-Pierre Richard: This theory also, however, structures the text. It sometimes resembles a practice. Deleuze quoted earlier, for example, and quite appropriately, the example of the madeleine, saying that the main character only understood its meaning much later. But during the first experience, Proust already says: I had to postpone until much later my understanding of the meaning of what happened to me that day. There is thus indeed a theoretical presupposition and certainty of what is the value of the experience to be interpreted later. It seems difficult to say here that it is only at the end, by an after-the-fact effect, that the web is woven or undone.

Jean Ricardou: I do not completely agree with the idea of a Proustian ideology of the work. I would say: the ideology of Proust's work. This ideology, which is internal for the most part, has two functions, depending on whether it conforms or not with the text's functioning. In the first case, one of the effects of this self-representation I already mentioned in my presentation and I won't insist. But this is not to say—to add some nuance to my previous remarks—that any ideology within the text necessarily agrees with the text's functioning. They may very well be opposed. With this reverse self-representation, the relationship between fiction and narration would no longer be similitude, as in strict self-representation, but opposition. Not a metaphor, but an antithesis. In this case, it could be a strategy of deception. The ideology of the work would draw all the more attention to unification, to gathering together because the best way to grasp dispersion is the desire for gathering together. It could also be the indication of a dual operation. In my presentation, I put the accent on the analogical comparison, but it is only possible through separation and distinction. Deleuze and Genette have both insisted on this complimentary operation. Using this insistence, one might find a contradictory ideology in the *Search*. This time, it is not the other becoming the same (Swann's way joining Guermantes' way) but the same becoming other: deaths, separations, exclusions, transformations (everything tending to become its opposite). There would thus be self-representation of the contradictory functioning of the text through a conflict of ideologies of the text.

Gérard Genette: A word on what Jean-Pierre Richard was just saying. I believe that in Proust, as in many other writers, theory lags behind practice. To put it simply, one could say he is a writer of the

20th century with an aesthetic and literary ideology of the 19th century. But we are and we must be 20th century critics, and we have to read him as such, not as he read himself. Moreover, his literary theory is nevertheless more subtle than the grand finale and closing synthesis of *Time Regained.* In his theory of reading and in reading his own book, when he states for example that his readers will have to be readers of themselves, there is something that in part subverts the idea of a final closure of the work, and therefore the (classical-romantic) idea of the *work* itself. Then there is a third element. Proust's text is no longer what it was, say, in 1939 when only the *Search* was known along with two or three works considered minor. In my opinion, the major event in Proust criticism over the last few years is not that we can write or have written about Proust, but that he has, I dare say, continued to write himself. It is the discovery of the mass of pre-texts and para-texts that have opened the *Search* more than it was before when it was read in isolation. I mean that not only does it open from the end, as we have always known, in the sense that its circularity prevents it from ending by stopping, but that it is also open at the beginning, in the sense that not only does it not end, but in a sense it never begins, because Proust was always already working on this work. And in a way, he is still working on it. We do not yet have all of Proust's text. Everything we are saying now will in part be invalid when we have the whole text. Luckily, for him and for us, we will never have the whole text.

Another question from the audience: I find that among the things that have been said, there were two rather disturbing things. One from Deleuze and the other from Doubrovsky. They each spoke of madness. It is one thing to say with Deleuze that the theme of madness is present throughout Proust's work. It is another thing to point

a finger and say, "Look, Charlus is mad. Albertine is mad." One might as well say that anyone is mad: Sade, Lautréamont or Maldoror. Why is Charlus mad?

Gilles Deleuze: Listen, I am not the one who says it; Proust does. Proust says it from the start: Charlus is mad. Proust makes Andrée write: Maybe Albertine was mad. It is in the text. As for the question of whether Proust was mad or not, you will admit that I did not ask that question. I am like you; it does not interest me. I simply asked whether madness was present in this work and what was the function of this presence.

Same interlocutor: OK. But then Doubrovsky continues by saying that madness, which this time is the writer's madness, appears in the novel when the coincidences start to pile up towards the end. Is this compatible with a non-psychological view of Proust's work? Isn't what happens then just an acceleration in the recurrence of themes? Are these coincidences, or what you call coincidences, proof of madness?

Serge Doubrovsky: Personally, I think the narrator has a strategy—and I mean the writer writing the book—which consists of attributing homosexuality to others, attributing madness to Charlus or Albertine. He reserves "nervosism" for himself, and it is easy to recognize all the aspects of a psychosomatic illness in it.

What I mean is that the entire work seems to be a kind of game through which a writer is trying to build a universe, to tell a story we can read, that has been read as a story. Jean-Pierre Richard was right to highlight the presence of a structuring ideology in the work. Proust, man of the 19th century. But the more we read the *Search*,

the more we realize we are in a mental universe, a psychical one, if you prefer, or better yet an unconscious one—I don't know—but a textual universe in any case. This plays off two completely opposed views: a story is being told, but as it is being told, it is being destroyed.

Same interlocutor: Do you mean that as soon as a story is no longer "realist," it becomes madness?

Serge Doubrovsky: I think that a certain feeling of the derealization of the text leads one to ask questions about madness. But, again, I do not like this word. I would simply add that the loss of the reality principle seems to me to be one of the major discoveries of modern writing.

Another question from the audience: I would like to ask two questions: one to Barthes and the other to Deleuze.

When you, Roland Barthes, say that an economy must be reintroduced into the theory of the text as it has been practiced until now, you choose pleasure as the anchor of this new dimension. But whose pleasure? You say: the reader's pleasure, the critic's pleasure. But is it possible to take pleasure in someone like Proust who writes beyond the pleasure principle? And, more generally speaking, isn't it finally time to locate the economic investments on the side of the writer instead of the reader, something no critic has succeeded in doing?

Roland Barthes: Perhaps in looking around the theme of pleasure, I am posing the question in a somewhat naïve, alienated way at first. Maybe one day it will lead me to the affirmation you suggest. You

asked a question but in fact you gave a response that I might only find months from now; in other words, that this notion of the pleasure of the text might not hold. But I would like, at least once, to take this notion from the start, simply and naïvely, even if the path I must take will destroy me, dissipate me as a subject of pleasure and dissipate the pleasure in me. Maybe there will no longer be any pleasure; maybe there will only be desire, the pleasure of fantasy.

Same interlocutor: Yes, of course, it is called fantasy, but there is something else: a kind of pleasure caught in a dead desire. And that may precisely be what defines the critic's viewpoint.

Roland Barthes: You show no qualms about making my pleasure in Proust seem guilty, in any case. I would not have had it for long, I think.

Same interlocutor: Now for my question to Deleuze. You said that Proust opened himself to violence towards himself. But what does violence to Proust, what does he discover, in the end, that does violence to him?

Gilles Deleuze: Proust always defines the world of violence as part of the world of signals and signs. Every signal, no matter what it is, does violence.

Same interlocutor: But isn't there another possible reading of Proust? I am thinking of a text by Blanchot where he talks of inscriptions instead of signs. A spider spins its web without method or aim. Granted. But there are nonetheless a certain number of texts that are inscribed somewhere. I am thinking of the famous sentence

that says that the two sexes will each die separately. Here there is something that does not refer solely to the world of signs, but to a much more secret and much less reassuring series, a series that would connect, among other things, with sexuality.

Gilles Deleuze: Maybe the world of signs is a reassuring world for you. It was not for Proust. And I do not see the need to distinguish between that world and the world of sexuality when, for Proust, sexuality is entirely caught up in the world of signs.

Same interlocutor: Yes, but at a first level. It is also inscribed somewhere else.

Gilles Deleuze: But what type of inscription are we talking about? The sentence you mentioned on the two sexes is a prediction. It is the language of prophets, not the "logos." Prophets emit signs or signals. And moreover, they need a sign to guarantee their word. There is no rhetoric, no logic here. The world of signals is not a reassuring one at all, nor is it asexual. On the contrary, it is the world of the hermaphrodite, of a hermaphrodite that does not communicate with itself: it is the world of violence.