LITERATURE MACHINES

THE LANGUAGE OF TECHNOLOGY AND DIFFERENCE

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Literature Machines investigates what it means to think about texts as literature machines, aiming in the process to re-think both what a machine does and what constitutes literature. But its central concept, the literature machine, does not imply that literature can be swiftly searched or broken down into algorithms. Rather, it suggests that literature should be understood as a machine that produces difference, revising our understanding of the machine and, more broadly, the language of technology. The essay theorizes the literature machine and its various dimensions — the way it produces meaning, its relation to affect, its potential politics, and what it reveals about the border between literature and philosophy — through readings of Maurice Blanchot, Marguerite Duras, Georges Perec, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Throughout, it engages with the thought of Jacques Derrida and other thinkers often associated with poststructuralism. Ultimately, *Literature Machines* makes the case for difference as the sine qua non of the literary, which it in turn theorizes as an epistemic quality that emerges in an event of reading. Through its own readings, the essay shows what we can understand about affect, subjectivity, and the essence of literature and technology when we approach texts as literature machines. In so doing, it also elucidates what we stand to lose when we forsake the difference-producing machine for the homogenizing machine, exceptions for patterns, and complexity for simplicity. To that end, it is also a critique of the epistemic norms of surveillance capitalism and emergent forms of reading in literary scholarship, most notably computational literary study.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joseph Zappa is a scholar who specializes in twentieth-century French literature and literary theory. He holds an MA (2019) in comparative literature from Cornell University and a BA (2017) in French studies and comparative literature from Brown University.

For my friends

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Introduction

Difference, Literature, Machine

I was taking a seminar at Cornell University with Laurent Dubreuil called "Poetry and Mind" in spring 2019 when I first began to think seriously about the questions that led to the writing of *Literature Machines*. In *Poetry and Mind,* Dubreuil investigates the relation between poetry and algorithms as well as the capacity of machines to anticipate or recreate the structures of what we commonly call literary texts.[1] In so doing, he also reckons with emerging forms of criticism, such as Stephen Ramsay's so-called "algorithmic criticism," that deploy computer programs to manipulate or identify the forms of literary texts. Taking the seminar and reading scholarship that aimed to bring (literal) computers into relation with literary texts in order to better understand them, I began to ask what would become the dissertation's most fundamental questions: What makes literature literary, or what is literature? What does it have to do with technology? Can machines be deployed to understand, or even read, literature? What in the literary might elude the grasp of machines and various forms of algorithmic or machinic criticism? Finally, if literature may be said to elude or surpass algorithms or the logical structures of machines, what *do* machines tell us about literature? Might literature itself be a machine, and what would be gained by thinking of it as such?

My doctoral studies had previously focused on affect, and my main concern in that domain had been leveraging the insights of poststructuralist literary and aesthetic theory, especially Jacques Derrida's, to develop a semiotics of affective reading.[2] My qualm with affect theory, explored in chapter two of this dissertation, is that it often posits affect as precisely other than what I take literature — and thus truly *literary* theory or criticism — to most fundamentally

[1] See the readings numbered 30, 31, and 33, to name a few examples, in *Poetry and Mind*.
[2] See Zappa.

be about: signifiers, semiosis, and the experiences they both disclose to us and provoke in readers. If affect is non-signifying or inextricably bound up in 'present' sensations or experiences, what could it have to do with literature, which, in my understanding, only comes into being through an event of reading that takes signification and the deferral of meaning (i.e., something other than 'present' sensations) as preconditions?

What I want to suggest by drawing this comparison between my questions about affect and machines is that my encounter with criticism attuned to or deploying machines begins with a similar disquiet to the one I felt about affect theory, another emergent field of literary study that seemed to be at odds with literature itself. Just as affect, as imagined by many affect theorists, appeared to seek in or around literature phenomena that were fundamentally incompatible with literariness, machines, and some of what I call computational literary study, appeared disposed to identify and help scholars articulate what I consider to be among the least literary elements of literary texts: numerical figures (e.g., numbers of adjectives or lengths of texts), patterns, and historical trends. Of course, numbers, patterns, and trends are a part, even a key part, of any literary text; there is no excess of structure without structure, no exception without a rule, and thus no literariness, which involves semiotic ambiguity, without relatively unambiguous features to which the literary stands in contrast. But I was dismayed to find that, similar to how affect theory often sacrificed a sophisticated conception of the literary or actively opposed itself to studies of language in order to chase and vaguely theorize evanescent experiences, computational literary study skipped over, openly disdained, or briefly acknowledged theories of literariness itself or extensive meditations on the signifier in order to focus instead on formal patterns, the digital mediation of literary materials, or the computational assessment of massive textual corpora to speculate about historical trends.

Again, none of these concerns of computational criticism — forms, historical influences, or mediation — are necessarily at odds with the literary and may even play an essential role in a text's literariness. But without a concept of the literary to accompany them, computational studies of form, history, and media do not teach us about the relation between literature and machines or use machines to teach us about literature. Rather, like affect theory without a regard for signification, these forms of computational criticism risk sacrificing literature altogether. I pursue this critique of computational literary study, while pointing to avenues for future and, I think, more literary research in that field, in chapter one. But for this introduction's purposes, suffice it to say that my encounter with computational literary study left me with the impression that the relation between literature and machines remained to be articulated in literary scholarship.

Literature machines attempts to theorize the relation between literariness and mechanicity and to explore its ramifications for thinking about what literature is, what it has to do with the language of technology, and what literature has to teach us in this particular cultural moment, one in which all aspects of social experience are being packaged and sold as data — all numbers to be crunched in so-called "real-time," no signifiers left to be parsed and studied.

Semiotic difference and the machine

However unfashionable it may be to acknowledge, all literature, and thus all writing worthy of the name literary study, criticism, theory, or scholarship, begins with a signifier. Thus, if we are to understand what literature is, what it might have to do with the machine, or really to say anything about it with an understanding of what it is we are talking about, we must understand how the signifier functions.

I, would-be literary critic, copy a word from the text I hope to understand and place it in my own text. Now, an event is happening; I am having an encounter with this word. It means something to me — not necessarily something clear at first and certainly not something that is *immediately* clear. Rather, as I discuss in chapter two, all sorts of forces mediate my interpretation of the word. Some of the forces are political and cultural; they have to do with me, the reader who happens to have alighted on this word and without whom the word, in its particular instantiation as I read and interpret it, would not happen to exist. But the forces that condition my encounter with the word also go beyond my incidental encounter with it. In the moment when the reader approaches the word, an overwhelming cultural history and future speak through it; the word only exists as a palimpsest of ever-evolving differences from all its past, future, and almost concurrent instantiations. In other words, when I happen upon the word, I am also happening upon the other words (the other iterations of this 'same' word) that the uncareful reader might mistake for its undifferentiated equals.

This is to say that there is no signifier, and thus no literature, without a difference in meaning or signification, a semiotic difference. I, the reader or theorist, might too hastily mistake the difference of the signifier for *my* difference, the difference that I impose upon it. But, while it is true that the signifier will not exist for me precisely as it exists for any other reader, the semiotic difference that attends all signification and thus all signifiers is more radical than a singular possessive pronoun would suggest. With or without me, from one moment to the next, just as all things ever so slowly change, shifting in their relation to a future they cannot fully anticipate and that we cannot fully anticipate for them, the signifier differs from what we can only reductively call itself. The "history," "machine," "text," and "word" of this moment are not those of the next — on the most granular and analytically meticulous level. What's more, it is

this foundational difference, this sine qua non of signification, textuality, and language, that provides the possibility for interpretation, the work of literary study, and indeed literature itself. Without this difference, language would cease to exist, as it is in simply ex-isting that what 'is' becomes something else, disavowing the constancy the ideological opponents of difference might falsely equate with 'being.' This linguistic difference, the instability of the signifier, is particularly central to literature, as literature is precisely the becoming-multiple or -undecidable of a text that might otherwise be taken to produce a unitary and definitive meaning.

In "Différance," Derrida writes:

> "'There is no name for it'": … This unnamable is the play which makes possible nominal effects, the relatively unitary and atomic structures that are called names, the chains of substitutions of names in which, for example, the nominal effect *différance* is itself *enmeshed*, carried off, reinscribed, just as a false entry or a false exit is still part of the game, a function of the system" (26-27).

A "false entry" into the game of literary interpretation — and thus the game of signification, semiotic difference, and the generative difference that Derrida calls différance — might be one that exalts the creativity or interpretation of the reader at the expensive of an ongoing genealogy of linguistic usage, and thus of linguistic difference, that conditions signification and the event of reading. The entry would be false in that it fails to recognize a beginning before the beginning of interpretation; the word does not just mean whatever we impose upon it but rather brings into its own encounter with us a vast history that conditions that encounter without determining its results. A "false exit" might be that of the radical formalist or deterministic historicist who claims to be but a vessel for the revelation of formal structures or historical forces that make the text *what it is*, as if no change or ongoing differentiation were possible, though in fact, the becoming of the text in an event of interpretation is inevitable, no matter how much the falsely humble reader might wish to reduce the text to a quasi-objective set of formal or historical

structures or conditions. What's particularly pertinent to this dissertation about both the false exit and the false entry into the game of interpretation — both of which hinge on an elision of difference — is that machines, whether literal insofar as they may be used to detect patterns in texts, or metaphorical, insofar as they may be the name of an algorithmic reading that foregrounds structure and rules at the expense of the singular relation between reader and text, lend themselves to the false entry or exit, to that same elision of difference.

But in the above meditation of Derrida's on difference, or différance, and names, I see another potential entry point for the machine, not as a machine that produces difference's marginalization or elimination, nor as the unnamable name of différance (as if a proper name had finally been found for the term). Rather, I would propose the machine as the medium or vessel that reveals, par excellence, the workings or the "play" of différance, or of, in the case of texts and signification, semiotic difference. In other words, the machine, appearing to, by definition, reproduce the very same result thanks to a necessarily unambiguous logic or algorithm, might be the name for the very opposite of what is expected of that signifier: the medium through which différance counter-intuitively and thus all the more meaningfully exerts its effects. This is the thesis of chapter one, in which I theorize the literature machine for which the dissertation is named: that it is precisely because 'the machine' tends to be the name of homogenization and algorithmic repetition without difference that it might be well suited to signal the workings of semiotic difference that I consider the cornerstone of literary texts. As one can do with all the major technological figures of the dissertation, then, one might say that the literature machine is an anti-machine; it is mechanical in its rote repetition in the sense that the text, for example a novel, appears to be the same across its iterations, but it is also anything but mechanical in that its production hinges on semiotic difference, on the creation of copies that differ from each other.

At this juncture, I see a number of potential inquiries one might have about the literature machine, and I will devote most of the rest of the introduction to considering them in hopes of clarifying the stakes of the project and the reasoning behind its idiosyncrasies. Among those inquiries are, firstly, why conceive of literature on the basis of undecidable or irreducibly multiple signification? Why is this notion of literature either necessary or compelling? Secondly, is the machine the only metaphor one might use to describe the workings of literature, even in the difference-oriented way the dissertation defines it? Why consider the relation between literature and technology? Thirdly, what is the status of the dissertation's theoretical basis and claims? Why the emphasis on Derrida and poststructuralism at a time when much of the discipline of literary scholarship in the United States turns to more historicist methods and more corporeal and material concerns? After answering these questions, which I ask of the dissertation because I view them as indicative of its central claims and merits, I will provide an outline of the work to come.

Literature and difference

No text earns the designation of literature in perpetuity; a text's literariness is never guaranteed. Rather, a text becomes literary in an event of reading that treats its signification, and thus its meanings, as fundamentally multiple. It would be correct to call these competing significations undecidable in the sense that none of them is ever fully instantiated or definitively true; it is never the case that a text means X and therefore does not mean Y. Rather, a text may, at once, mean X or Y. It is therefore part of responsible reading practices — practices that respect the full, potential literariness of a text — to acknowledge that the text may also mean Z, A, and B. The gears of the machine keep whirring; there is no original, definitive copy and no

end to the series of potential significations. This is what it means to read a text in a literary fashion and to take the literariness of a text seriously.[3]

The above does not mean that the text can mean anything whatsoever or that all its meanings, or interpretations, are equally valid. On the contrary, if we accept that a text can mean a potentially unlimited number of things and that no one interpretation is guaranteed, the onus on the reader to use the details of the text to justify her interpretation is all the greater because no assumptions about the text's meaning are granted a priori. Consider the poem "Blackberry-Picking" by Seamus Heaney:

Late August, given heavy rain and sun
For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.
At first, just one, a glossy purple clot
Among others, red, green, hard as a knot.
You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet
Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it
Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for
Picking. Then red ones inked up and that hunger
Sent us out with milk cans, pea tins, jam-pots
Where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots.
Round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills
We trekked and picked until the cans were full,
Until the tinkling bottom had been covered
With green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned
Like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered
With thorn pricks, our palms sticky as Bluebeard's.

We hoarded the fresh berries in the byre.
But when the bath was filled we found a fur,
A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache.
The juice was stinking too. Once off the bush
The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour.
I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair
That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.

[3] As I discuss at greater length in chapter one, I am influenced by a number of interlocutors here: Derrida's différance and attention to undecidability, Dubreuil's view of literature as a text interpreted with maximal attention to semantic potential, and Paul de Man's definition of literature as fundamentally having to do with signification all influence my theory of literature. That does not mean we are all in perfect agreement about what literature is, but I agree with all three that ambiguous, undecidable, or maximal semiosis is a key quality of the literary text. In my view, it is *the* precondition of a text's becoming literature.

Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not.

Many interpretations of the poem are viable. The formalist might set out to count syllables, take note of instances of enjambment and unusual punctuation, or note the single stanza break, which seems to mirror the meaning of a poem that begins with excitement and sours on itself, turning into dread and disappointment. The historicist might propose that we read the poem against the context of Ireland's Troubles, citing a collective cultural experience of joy and peace that downgrades into doubt or disgust. Ever curious about what a text purporting to be literature, such as a poem, tells us about literariness itself, I might propose the speaker's detection of blackberries — one ripe for the taking, then many, then none at all — as a metaphor for the process of literary reading itself, in which one possible meaning strikes the reader, then another, followed by the recognition that no meaning's brilliance or validity endures forever or remains unchanged with the passage of time.

There are two points I would like to make about the possible interpretations of the poem. The first is that while all interpretations are plausible, none of them is necessarily convincing. I have sketched the beginnings of a few interpretations here, but just how convincing each interpretation is would hinge on its now-unforeseeable turns, on the evidence, ostensibly within or beyond the text, that the reader adduces to support the interpretation's claims. Thus, while all three interpretations above are plausible, it is not the case that *any* claim about the text is rigorous or true. For example, suppose a reader were to claim that the above poem were about God without offering any evidence to support the assertion — perhaps the reader says that he simply 'feels' or has the impression that the poem is about God without pointing to any element of the text to support the claim. There is nothing in my understanding of literature that requires us to take the validity of the reader's feelings for granted; the fact that the text signifies

differently in each text-reader encounter does not mean that claims do not need to be justified, that significations as perceived by the reader do not need to be explained via recourse to the contents of the text. It may well be the case that a reader encounters the poem and believes to have encountered a poem about God, but the task of an affective literary analysis is precisely to substantiate that belief through interpretation, or the parsing of signifiers. Secondly, while all the above readings are plausible, what is not rigorous or admissible is to claim that one of the readings is *the only* viable reading of "Blackberry-Picking" or that a reading is necessarily worthless if it fails to consider a specific formal element or piece of historical context. It is possible to produce a compelling interpretation of the poem without considering the history of Ireland at all, just as it is possible to make convincing claims about it without regard for certain formal features. The only indispensable requirement of literary analysis is that the reader departs with an analysis of ambiguous or open-ended signification, that she explores her concerns about form, history, or the status of literature itself with concern for what the poem means and recognition that it means more than she can grasp in the event of a single reading.

My contention is that reading literature in this manner is essential not simply because it is more edifying than approaches that seek definitive truth in literature, though I will soon expand on what is to be learned from literature as I theorize it, but because it is the truth of how the literary text functions. It is simply the case that when I read "Blackberry-Picking," I read and experience a different text than reader Y. It is also the case that I will read and experience "Blackberry-Picking" differently at time X than at time Y. And it is the case that these three readers, reader X at time X, reader Y, and reader X at time Y, may produce different and perfectly compelling interpretations of "Blackberry-Picking" by noticing entirely different aspects of the text and considering them alongside other factors, historical, philosophical,

linguistic, or otherwise, of which one reader may be aware and the other entirely ignorant. It is in this sense that we cannot understand the conditions of literary reading without understanding the workings of semiotic difference, and it is also for this reason that I find value in conceptualizing the literary text as a (perhaps paradoxically machinic or anti-machinic) machine. We do the text, its many other iterations, and its many other readers at other times a disservice by failing to recognize the unforeseeable multiplicity of texts that it comprises. To conceive of the literary text *as* a machine is to foreground this — that I am only ever working off the set of copies the machine has produced for me and that these copies, too, are copying themselves and turning over, perhaps even unbeknownst to me, as I work my way through the ever-in-flux continuum that is the time-space of a literary reading.

Of course, texts that are not ostensibly literary may be read in a literary fashion and become literature machines. I may read a newspaper article, or a fragment of a newspaper article, in a manner that treats its signification as open-ended and multiple. In this case, while perhaps not being fictional in genre (the text attempts to refer to a defined referent, and its style strives for unambiguousness), the text may become literary in a given event of reading. Literariness is a linguistic and epistemic effect; it can show up wherever a text is to be found and elude the reader even when a text most urgently calls out for a literary reading. But just as interpretations may vary in their literariness and persuasiveness, texts, too, vary in their literary *potential*. While any text may be literary, some court literary readings more than others. And this, I would say, is what fictional texts — theatrical plays, poems, novels — do: court literariness in their unforeseen encounters with readers by signaling that they do not refer to a rigidly empirically verifiable reality. Through their branding and the generic trappings of fiction, novels and plays invite the reader to delay definitive signification and step into the epistemic zone of differential semiosis

that makes texts literary. But in any given text-reader encounter, fiction may not be literary, and nonfiction may be so.

Finally, it is fair to ask, even if one were to accept the premise that texts do signify differently, and convincingly so, across a potentially infinite series of iterations, what there is to be gained in engaging with the differential semiotic production of the literature machine. In a sense, this is the question that all of the dissertation's readings, especially its extended readings, of texts attempt to answer. By interpreting texts about trauma, memory, political manipulation, truth, and more from the vantage point of what I call literary reading, I attempt to demonstrate the insights that an insistence on semiotic difference has to offer. On the whole, though, I would insist on the claim that literariness as I theorize it is not just about linguistic, but epistemic, difference. It is a way of thinking not only about language but through language, or a way of thinking *tout court*, that attempts to take the maximal range of interpretive possibilities seriously. Thus, literariness as I understand it, as a process of reading and thinking, impels us to take experience seriously, not as something to be summarized, reduced to facts, patterns, broad historical trends, or linear narratives, but as an inexhaustible and, in the final analysis, incomprehensible source of insight. In this sense, I think it is fair to say that the literature machine is a bold thought experiment that aims to accomplish the precise opposite of what machines are today being marshaled to do in much of literary study and, more importantly, in our culture: to undertake slow and infinite conversations with texts and the subjects caught up in their webs at a time when ever more efficient and autonomous machines usher us always closer to processing all texts and others in 'real-time.'[4]

Technology and Literary Thought

[4] For more on literariness and thought experiments, see *Poetry and Mind*, 104-06.

If we, literary scholars, must still today begin a dissertation on technology with a reference to Martin Heidegger, the obligation has less to do with his views on what he calls "modern technology" than with the manner of thinking that the essay practices. Heidegger proposes to take us along a "way of thinking" [*Weg des Denkens*], adding "All ways of thinking, more or less perceptibly, lead through language in a manner that is extraordinary" [*eine ungewöhnliche Weise durch die Sprache*] (3/7). He will ultimately conclude:

> "When we look into the ambiguous essence of technology, we behold the constellation, the stellar course of the mystery. The question concerning technology is the question concerning the constellation in which revealing and concealing, in which the coming to presence of truth, comes to pass" (33).

There is a narrower point Heidegger makes here about the way humans use technology to reveal the mechanical capacities of Earth's resources and how that process in turn reveals the resources and ordering capacities of humans themselves. But what I find most compelling about his reflection on technology is that he ultimately uses it to make broader claims about the essence of essences (what essences are), how a thing comes to be what it is, and how the thinking subject apprehends that essence. Furthermore, Heidegger warns us not to get distracted by reflections on individual technologies (as if, as he puts it, staring at a single tree could reveal what is most essential to trees), nor to let "all revealing … be consumed in ordering," and not to let the "sheer preoccupation with technology" undermine our ability to "experience the coming to presence of technology" (33, 35). Heidegger accomplishes all this in his essay on technology through the way he thinks and, indispensably, the way he writes. It is precisely the circuitousness, the doubling back, the reflection on the essay's own terms, that is the essay's merit and that stands in contrast to what it is we are supposed to do with technology: work more efficiently, streamline thought processes, i.e., "be consumed in ordering."

I would not endorse Heidegger's penchant for the so-called revelation of truth (or *aletheia*), nor would I necessarily look to an ancient philosophical reference point or philological origin as a means of rediscovering the truth in language. But *Literature Machines* inherits Heidegger's own relation to technology in that it is less interested in debating the merits or components of different kinds of machines than it is in exploring what machines, broadly conceived, tell us about time, being, and truth, and to the extent that the present essay succeeds in its ambitions, it is by ruminating on machines in and through language at a time when machines are increasingly deployed to short-circuit that very kind of thinking. At the end of his essay, Heidegger posits that the "realm of art" and act of poeisis may be uniquely positioned to reveal the essence of technology (35). But he also states that art will only bear that revelatory power if "reflection" on it "does not shut its eyes to the constellation of truth after which we are *questioning*" (35). There is little doubt that his case for art is also a case for the artful way of thinking that he practices, one that I would call poetic, or literary, in its own right insofar as it follows the winding path of language, paying attention to those "*ungewöhnliche*" aspects of its singular "*Weise durch die Sprache*." The dissertation, too, takes what I think is fair to call an idiosyncratic and certainly, in the context of the digital humanities, unusual approach to *thinking with technology* in that it follows the surprises and complications of major technological signifiers themselves to understand what is literary about them and, in turn, what they reveal about the conditions of literary reading and productive capacities of literature.

Literature Machines brings together four chapters, each centered on a technological signifier: the machine, the program, the automaton, and code. In each case, the goal is not to plumb the history of the word, the technology, or the many patented technologies that today may bear the name of "machine," "program," and so on. My aim is both more humble and more

ambitious than what such a survey might entail. It is to determine what the relation is between the signifier in question and literariness. Thus, in the case of the machine, I posit that the text itself may be thought of as a machine, considering the conditions under which a text signifies and the ways in which the text, become literary in an event of reading, produces and exemplarily or maximally demonstrates the difference always at work in signification. In chapter two, I consider the forces that program the event of literary reading, articulating the ways the program is also an anti-program, the role of affect in literary reading, and the similarities between the program of literary reading and the program of affective experience, in and outside texts. In chapter three, I reflect on the automaton as a means of exploring the status of subjectivity in the particular kind of text I call literature. While interpreting characters of Georges Perec as automata and, in so doing, articulating the automating effects of marketing technologies past and present, I also attend to those aspects of the textual subject that are irreducibly resistant to automation because, as products of the literature machine, they are destined to be read again and differently. Finally, in chapter four, I turn to codes in Friedrich Nietzsche to explore the relations between literariness in what is typically called literature and what is typically called philosophy. I also consider the status of my dissertation's own genre as an essay that both strives for thetic clarity and literariness, the latter of which is at least somewhat in tension with the former.

In every case, I produce what I would call a literary reading, or even a literary conception, of the technology itself. Thus, in the thinking that this dissertation practices, a machine is not simply a machine, nor a program a program. Rather, as I attempt to do when reading texts, I parse the complications of the technological signifier in hopes of articulating what is literary about it. In other words, my reading allows the technology to become literary, though just how literary is for the reader to judge. My hope, then, is that the dissertation, by

bringing technology into contact with literariness as a way of thinking and reading, expands our understanding of what the words machine, program, automaton, and code mean and, in so doing, also adds to our understanding of what a machine, or an automaton, is and does. For example, in chapter three, my rumination on the automaton aims to argue that all humans are in a certain sense automata, complicating the categories of both the human and the automaton in the process. I confess that the path through language I happen to take in making the argument is idiosyncratic; that is, I focus on freedom and the conditioning of the subject's thoughts and behavior as the center of my reflection on what is human, what is automaton, and how the two may converge or form a spectrum for theorizing subjectivity. But the idiosyncrasy or contingency of the meditation is by design; just as a literary reading of "Blackberry-Picking" cannot determine once and for all the text's definitive or full scope of meanings, a literary reading of the signifier "automaton" that travels through a constellation of texts by Perec and others cannot hope to settle for all time just what the word means or should mean. My view is that such an effort would be reductive, poor in literariness, and thus not a shining example of what literary reading has to offer the concepts and cultural phenomena with which it may come in contact. But I hope that, without aiming to exhaust the signifier "automaton" or fully theorize the phenomenon to which it refers, my reading of it succeeds in being literary, expanding our understanding of the automaton, the human, the works of Georges Perec, and the power of literariness itself, as a means of reading and thinking, in the process.

Thus, the dissertation's literary readings bring meditations on literariness together with meditations on technology not only to show what literary conceptions of technology might look like and to expand our understanding of technologies but also to demonstrate, in so doing, the epistemic potential of the literary. It is not a very imaginative or creative endeavor to view

literature as a fixed object, or collection of novels and poems, and to either study its formal features or adduce it as an example of broader cultural processes and trends. Perhaps this is all some imagine as proper for a study of what one may call literature. I prefer to imagine, in large part due to influences on which I will elaborate in the next section, that literature may mean and tell us more. I prefer to think of literariness as a quality that extends beyond a certain medium of the fine arts and has something singular to tell us about language itself, the conditions of thinking, humanity, and freedom. By theorizing the literature machine, the program of literary reading, the human-as-automaton, and literary code, I hope to demonstrate the potential to which I refer and make a case for it as a model for literary scholarship.

Finally, though, I must confess that, as I alluded to at the outset of the introduction, the decision to theorize literature as and in relation to the machine is also a contingent and historical one, which takes place at a moment when the humanities are waning, computer science departments are experiencing rapid growth, and all aspects of human experience are increasingly rendered as data in the hopes that nothing less than our so-called identities — who we are, distilled to literal, immutable data points — can be packaged and sold as the basis of twenty-first-century business. I doubt anyone will mistake what follows for a Marxist or principally anti-capitalist essay, and indeed, capitalism is not its chief concern. But the literary thinking the dissertation practices stands in sharp contrast to the epistemic imperatives of our surveillance capitalist era, which would have us believe that efficiency is the chief value of thought and that data-driven positivism represents the pinnacle of work, scholarship, and thinking in general. Chapters two and three reckon with this trend at length and argue against surveillance capitalism's epistemic imperatives and effects on the subject, but the whole dissertation, and literary reading in general, in and beyond the dissertation, do the work of thinking about culture,

language, and people in a manner that is decidedly inefficient and that surpasses the lens of data-driven analysis. By doing that work while thinking with and about machines, I hope to show that there is nothing inevitable about the reduction of scholarship to information and that there is ample insight to be derived from the way of thinking I call literary.

Poststructuralism

The term 'poststructuralism' is fraught for a few reasons. For one, it proposes, implicitly or explicitly, to bring together the widely divergent thought of a number of mostly French philosophers and their commentators, and as such, it must play host to differences that call into question whether the term is useful whatsoever. Secondly, it would seem to refer to a specific moment in the history of thought, the transition from structuralism to the so-called poststructuralism of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, and Michel Foucault, that can only debatably be said to have taken place in the mid-twentieth-century and that is now outdated. Thirdly, poststructuralism has become a parody in the words of the scholars intent on distinguishing themselves from the thought of the aforementioned thinkers and their successors. Thus, as I consider in my critique of computational literary study in chapter one, the term has at times to me seemed more useful as a poorly thought-out bulwark against the thought one might call poststructuralism than as a means of making a claim about the values of poststructural thought.

Nevertheless, the term has value and applies to the present essay in that it emphasizes a way of thinking about texts. In "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida writes:

"The entire history of the concept of structure, before the rupture of which we are speaking, must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center. … The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these

> metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix … is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence—*eidos, arche, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject), *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth" (353).

To the extent that this critique of attempting to identify a structure and therefore a center in whatever may be the object of one's philosophy applies to methods of reading, the prescription would be less anxiety about trying to find the 'key,' the 'core,' or the ultimate 'truth' of a text and more attention to, as the poststructuralist thinkers I mentioned above often put it, a text's margins. The reason to have less regard for a text's center, or the center of a phenomenon one is attempting to analyze, and more regard for its margins relates to Derrida's critique of presence and the primacy of irreducible difference, or *différance*, in relation to being. One might read a text in hopes of identifying the origin of its meaning (for example, the author's biography or the historical circumstances of its production), its essence (what it is 'really about'), or the moment of *aletheia* upon which one might finally stumble while traversing the path of language. But Derrida will famously show, time and time again, that each of these efforts to identify a definitive truth is not as definitive as its ambitious author might like to think. And this is because of difference — not only the author's interpretive difference, which complicates any claim about the objective structures or centers of a text, but also, as I explored above, the spatiotemporal difference, or diachronic difference, or *différance*, that makes presence itself and being-as-constancy illusory. Because the text is machinic, because it is always already reproducing and differing from itself as it endures through time, it has no center, no exhaustively definitional structure, and it is up to the rigorous critic to, without leaving structure entirely behind, account for its ever-accruing difference from itself, for the context of the singular text-reader encounter, and for the exceptions to structure that manifest in the event of reading. The power balance

between the center and the margins, the weight they must be accorded in a reading or act of philosophizing, begins to shift when we recognize the radical semiotic difference that attends all acts of reading and thinking.

I would therefore use the word 'poststructural,' not to refer to the historically situated moment of "rupture" to which Derrida refers (the emergent 'break' from structuralism occurring when he first gave the aforementioned lecture in the 1960s), nor to deploy as a catchall for the thought of the French thinkers to whom I earlier referred, but to describe the way of thinking, theorizing, and reading texts that affirms the loss of the center to which Derrida refers and accounts for the many differences that emerge in text-reader encounters. If we are to be rigorous, we would do well to acknowledge that an author's corpus is in its own right heterogeneous, and some of an author's texts, or the thinking practiced therein, might be worthy of the name 'poststructuralist,' while others may not be. Indeed, some aspects of a given essay may be attentive to the excess of structure while others lapse into the search for all-encompassing truth. But as a descriptor for a certain kind of thinking that takes place sometimes as opposed to the name of a collective school of thought with rigid boundaries, poststructuralism is enduringly descriptive and as valid today as it ever was, shifts in academic trends notwithstanding. I would also propose that it is more helpful to think of an essay as poststructuralist than, say, deconstructive or deconstructionist, as, if the latter terms are but synonyms for Derridean, the task of rigorously equating a given essay with the entirety of an author's thought would entail nothing but the act of seeking a center against which Derrida himself warns.

At the risk of stating the obvious, I view *Literature Machines* as a poststructuralist work of literary theory and criticism. It is heavily influenced by the thought of Derrida, whose work demonstrates unparalleled attention to difference and who, while having much to say about

matters ‘beyond literature’ in the traditional sense of the term, all but constantly engages in a kind of thinking and writing that I would call literary. The dissertation is also deeply marked by other thinkers whose work I would largely, if perhaps not uniformly, call poststructuralist, most notably that of Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, Paul de Man, and Laurent Dubreuil. All these thinkers seek the notable exceptions in the noise and articulate their value even as they note the structures without which no excess of structure, or exception, or difference, would be perceptible. I would even go so far as to say that there is no work of *literary* theory or criticism, in the fully descriptive sense of the adjective, that is not poststructuralist in its orientation because, as I understand it, literariness refers precisely to this difference in language that the privileging of structure marginalizes. Without the self-affirmative force of poststructuralism (in the sense of force and form that Derrida articulates in “Force and Signification” and that I explore in chapter two), textual criticism risks eliding its own literariness, or the semiotic and epistemic difference that literary reading brings to the fore.

It is not lost on me that many view the hour of poststructuralism as past and that it is more fashionable to adduce literary texts as evidence of cultural and historical phenomena, especially to make the case for literary scholarship qua progressive or leftist political practice. Of course, I do not think it beyond the scope of literary criticism and theory to make political claims or critique political and economic structures; indeed, this dissertation participates in the latter. But political thinking is not also literary thinking unless it takes as its point of departure the reckoning with difference and signification that is the source of literature’s distinctiveness and literary scholarship’s raison d’être. Stipulating this is not just a matter of definitional gatekeeping, though indeed, in scholarship, especially scholarship focused on the analysis of texts, it is helpful to be specific about the type of texts and thinking we are reading and

producing. More importantly, though, I would urge scholars hoping to make political claims via the analysis of literary texts to focus on difference and meaning because it is through that focus that we not only produce the most rigorous account of the ever-differing texts before us but also succeed in exploring what *literary* texts, and only literary texts, have to teach us about the world, including the political phenomena we may wish to critique or the political futures we endeavor to envision.

Literariness as I imagine it cannot lay the foundation of a specific political program — other ways of thinking, less suited to the study of literature, are better suited to that task — but literary thinking does have its strengths vis-à-vis the political.[5] For example, with its attention to difference and especially the granular differences of language, literary thinking is uniquely suited to show us what is risky, unethical, and authoritarian in the political programs and discourses that foist restrictive structures upon us. In chapter three, I explore what the present meditation on literature and technology has to teach us about politics, theorizing freedom, and the contemporary political and economic structures that condition it, in relation to the human automaton. Like the dissertation as a whole, chapter three offers little in the way of concrete political prescriptions, and readers looking for that out of *literary* theory will, in the case of this example of it and others, be dismayed. But to the extent that literary readings and thought are able to name the constricting forces of political orders — in this case, the emergent computational and surveillance capitalist order seeking to nullify the singularity of experience and automate the subject at unprecedented scale — and articulate the ways of relating to and

[5] In this reluctance to program politics, literary thinking as I imagine and practice it is very much consistent with the norms of Derrida's philosophy, which departs with an appreciation for the undecidable that taught me how to think in a manner attentive to the difference in language. For a gloss on the tension between Derrida's thought and programs of this kind, see Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*, especially 15–16.

understanding one another that make life livable, the dissertation strives to do the political potential of literary thinking justice.

Texts

Literature Machines does its thinking in conversation with the texts of Blanchot, Marguerite Duras, Perec, and Nietzsche. Each of them pushes the boundaries of thought on the particular question I pursue in the chapter their texts drive.

In chapter one, I theorize the literature machine through analyses of Blanchot's thinking on literature and his own narrative and quasi-narrative texts. Blanchot is to narrative texts what Derrida is to thetic texts: the most relentless thinker of difference in/and/as repetition, the most dogged practitioner of the literature machine. No thinker or writer can ensure a literary reading for his texts; no writer can ensure that the machine he sets up will function as a literature machine. But through his commitment to ambiguity and the complications of the signifier, in both his narrative and more thetic texts, Blanchot's corpus exhibits singular literary potential and all but demands that the reader contend with the semiotic difference that takes us down the path of the literary. It is for that reason that I turn to him to consider the fundamental dynamics of the literature machine and to emphasize what the kind of literary reading I practice can show us about texts and the experiences they both stage (without necessarily re-presenting) and provoke. In addition, Blanchot has his own meditations to offer on technology and on the timeliness of technology in particular. That dimension of his thought facilitates a theorization of the temporality of the literature machine, which is a transhistorical and transcultural concept. It also provides a solid basis, via contradistinction, for a critique of emergent forms of computational literary study, which tend either to marginalize the literariness of literature, fail to theorize it altogether, or distance themselves from close reading and literary theory, especially its

poststructuralist iterations, without rigorously assessing the latter. On the whole, chapter one is the essay that tries to make the most explicit case for the literature machine and literary reading as I theorize it, though every chapter attempts the same through the to-be-determined merits of its interpretations.

In chapter two, I expand the concept of the literature machine to the forces that condition it by theorizing the program, which I also posit as a narrative form to trace and allow for literary readings of affect. I attempt the above via readings of Marguerite Duras, whose texts are especially rich material for a theorization of affect, especially from a literary perspective as I understand the term. A concept central to my theory of the literature machine, the program refers to the forces that condition how a text comes to be what it is: the cultural, political, economic, and intellectual conditions that influence the reader's interpretation of the text, and therefore what the text may signify in a given event of reading, without fully determining the latter. I point out that the program may also be considered an anti-program in that it is this very constellation of seemingly constrictive conditions that allows for the creativity and partial freedom of the act of reading; without the social context and prior knowledge that kick-start an encounter between reader and text, there would be no reading whatsoever. As a narrative form, the program works in a similarly paradoxical fashion, denoting the seeming inevitability of certain actions that nevertheless shock the characters who undergo them. I propose affect as the name of precisely this kind of feeling, which strikes as an event that defies articulation without rendering articulation impossible. In this meditation on affect, I bring a literary perspective to affect and affect theory, criticizing forms of the latter that elide either the reader or the signifier while suggesting and demonstrating a way of reading for affect that privileges the signifier without discounting experience and the body. Finally, I contrast the forms of the program I theorize with

the programmatic cultural logic of surveillance capitalism, arguing that the program is today the name of an increasingly ubiquitous political, social, and epistemic regime that eliminates the difference, or singularity, of experience for the sake of monetizing it. Pursuing that study in juxtaposition with readings of Duras and particularly careful attention to the nuances of her characters' experiences and affects, I hope to show what we lose in the way of social understanding when we approach all experience, and all aspects of life, as information capable of being articulated in the form of data, as well as what we have to gain from literary reading.

Chapter three is the dissertation's most overtly political, and I turn there to the texts of Georges Perec, who is an exemplary thinker of freedom and its subversion as matters of both social conditioning and linguistic play. By theorizing the automaton as an integral part of the human, I aim to revise the still-dominant Western concept of the latter as an atomic individual capable of achieving a form of freedom that is reducible to independence. I read two of Perec's early novels and his radio play, *The Machine*, showing both how contextual forces automate the subject and how the subject might be said to retain something called quasi-freedom. At the same time, I attend to the relation between the literature machine and its apparently automated subjects, considering that which, in a text interpreted as literature, is ultimately radically mutable and multiple and thus irreducible to the automation that Perec's work at times seems to exemplarily stage. In addition, I consider the theory of freedom, or quasi-freedom, and its relation to literariness in the historical contexts of postwar and surveillance capitalism. This allows me to critique aspects of what is coercive in those systems and to investigate what is fraught in their second-order cultural effects, such as the strengthening of identities online as a means of connecting and resisting capitalist forces. Here, too, the literature machine and literary thinking have something to teach us, not necessarily in the way of political prescription but

rather in suggesting ways of thinking about the subject, which, like a text, necessarily differs from itself and surpasses the algorithmic strictures of surveillance capitalist economics and culture.

Chapter four marks a reflexive turn in which I address once more the dissertation's most fundamental concerns, such as the essence of literariness, in hopes of sketching (without too neatly demarcating) the borders among literary criticism, literature, and philosophy. I consider the status of my own text as a thetic one that nevertheless dwells on the delays and ambiguities of signification, arguing that literary theory involves both ambiguity of its own and rhetorical clarity. I also argue that philosophy, despite its practitioners' long-standing inclination to purge their craft of the literary, always contains the potential to be read as literature. To make the case and explore the ways in which philosophy might be read as literature and literature and narrative as capable of philosophizing or theorizing, I turn to the texts of Nietzsche, whose corpus contains perhaps the most literary potential in the Continental philosophical canon. Chapter four meditates on the potential literariness of texts and the reification of genre, especially the dividing lines between philosophy and literature, through a theorization of code, or codes, and what I call the will to decode. In relation to Nietzsche's will to power, I theorize two wills to decode, one that attempts to elide the literary in search of transcendental truth and another that aims to find the irreducibly multiple truths of a literary code. Ultimately, while all the chapters make the case for literariness as not just a textual feature or form but as a way of thinking that can impart its own singular form of knowledge, chapter four makes the case for the kind of literary theory, and thinking, that this dissertation practices while putting it in conversation with competing contemporary ways of thinking about texts.

The title of the dissertation refers to the concept, theorized briefly here and at greater length in chapter one, that undergirds the entire dissertation's claims and readings. The subtitle, "The Language of Technology and Difference," emphasizes that, as the theory of the literature machine requires, all the dissertation's thinking begins by reckoning with the language of technology and the radical semiotic difference that attends a literary reading of the essay's four major technological signifiers. In referring to difference, the subtitle also captures what I would call the dissertation's chief conviction: not just that any literary reading departs with a consideration of semiotic difference but that there is an ethical, disciplinary, and epistemic imperative to that endeavor. Insofar as the dissertation says anything of value about its main concerns — literature, the language of technology, affect, freedom, the politics and culture of surveillance capitalism, and the literariness of philosophy and theory — it does so by starting and sticking with a difference.

Chapter 1

Maurice Blanchot and the Literature Machine

Literature is dead or dying, a thing of the past. If one were to entertain the perspective that literature is today passing into obscurity, it would be tempting to situate that demise in relation to the ever-increasing ubiquity of technology, which provides more popular means of diversion and affects even the way the texts we do read are distributed and presented. But the assessment of literature as passé is not unique to the manifestly digital twenty-first century, nor even to the twentieth. In fact, Maurice Blanchot makes the same claim about literature's relegation to the past in a 1959 essay on the disappearance or death of literature. Blanchot somewhat imprecisely cites Hegel, as I cite Blanchot now, in search of evidence that literature is and for more than a century has been out of step with the times. The relations among literature, its times, and technology are the focus of both Blanchot's essay and the present one.

Blanchot's objective in paraphrasing a common misquotation of Hegel is to lay the foundation, as I attempt to do by citing him in turn, for the argument that grand proclamations of literature's demise due to contemporaneous phenomena, especially the rising role of technology in culture and even in the way literature is produced and read, fail to reckon with the essence of the object they presume to eulogize or redefine. In fact, rather than being redetermined by a given decade's technological developments, the essence of literature is unchanging throughout time. This is because, as Blanchot would have it, the essence of literature is nothing. Literature denotes no one identifiable thing but rather a mutable and "impersonal" text that must be rediscovered each time it is read (*Le livre à venir* 457).

> "L'essence de la littérature, c'est d'échapper à toute détermination essentielle, à toute affirmation qui la stabilise ou même la réalise : elle n'est jamais déjà là, elle est toujours à retrouver ou à réinventer. Il n'est même jamais sûr que le mot littérature ou le mot art réponde à rien de réel, rien de possible ou rien d'important" (459).

Neither the author's biography nor "historical circumstances" (451), Blanchot affirms, controversially in 1959 and perhaps controversially once more today, can determine the essence of the literary work. Put more boldly still, the literary work does not in the typical or stable sense exist; it only comes into being in an event of reading in which it is read as such. A text becomes literary when its reader refuses to impose onto it that perennially tempting and facile essence, historical or biographical, psychological or aesthetic, which it cannot, as literature, be said to possess.

Literature, then, cannot actually die, nor can it be relegated to the past, because it does not belong to any one time or historical period; it has no present and cannot therefore recede into a linear past simply because most readers have forgotten it or left it behind. Literature's temporality emerges in events of interpretation that exceed simple historical determination. Thus, Blanchot tells us in an essay entitled "Where is literature going?" that literature is going where it always goes, always has gone, and will go — if by literature we refer to what is actually literary. Literature "*va vers elle-même, vers son essence qui est la disparition*" (444). If Blanchot rarely wrote directly of the relation between literature and technology as such, it is perhaps because literature is not quite in competition with technology, nor, it bears emphasizing amid the growth of the digital humanities and in today's increasingly digital culture, is literature's essence disrupted by its creation or distribution via digital means. The relations literature and art express *precede* technical accomplishments and effects:

> "L'art ne nie pas le monde moderne, ni celui de la technique, ni l'effort de libération et de transformation qui prend appui sur cette technique, mais il exprime et peut-être accomplit des rapports qui précèdent tout accomplissement objectif et technique" (449-450).

Blanchot does not deny the possibility of a relation between literature and technology; he argues that art and literature express and even accomplish novel relations [des rapports] that

precede the results of technical processes. This literary, relational effect is a destabilizing one between text and reader that may be associated with the way technology reorients people's relations to the world around them. In their disruptive potential, contemporary technology's effects on subject-object relations are analogous to those of literature, which also resituates the reader in a new world, moving, however granularly, the boundaries of the previous one. Indeed, Blanchot claims that literature, particularly the works of Friedrich Hölderlin and Stéphane Mallarmé, "bien avant les inventions de la technique, l'usage des ondes et l'appel des images … ont … projeté et affirmé des bouleversements bien plus considérables que ceux dont, sur un autre plan, nous percevons maintenant, dans la commodité quotidienne, les formes impressionnantes" ("La recherche du point zéro," 463). Blanchot notes that the technology of his time produces the unmistakable impression that one has traveled to a world different from that of the then-bygone early twentieth century, "une autre planète" (463). But literature produces a disruption, or expresses a revalued relation between reader and text, reader and world, indeed subject and object, more radical than the effect of traveling to a place or time with different cultural and technical norms. Literature does not simply transport us to a world with markedly different characteristics; it undermines the possibility of holding together any kind of coherent world at all:

> "Plus profonde que la diversité des tempéraments, des humeurs et même des existences est la tension d'une recherche qui remet tout en question. Plus décisive que la déchirure des mondes est l'exigence qui rejette l'horizon même d'un monde" (468).

This epistemic and linguistic pursuit into which the literary text plunges its reader is the search on which I embark in this chapter and those to follow. In each chapter, I aim to theorize and explore the ramifications of this fundamentally literary power to revalue our understanding of language and the phenomena it describes. In particular, I will investigate this singularly

literary effect in relation to technology, focusing in this chapter on machines. My argument is that literature itself may productively be understood as a machine, but as one whose effects on the reader and the possibilities of knowledge and language are independent of any given decade's technological advancements.

To conceive of literature as a machine is to emphasize its capacity for producing linguistic and epistemic difference despite the apparently inert, impersonal repetition of the very same words on a print or electronic page. It is also to argue for the staying power of the literary mechanism as a singular epistemic and metalinguistic possibility whose essence and fundamental cultural power lie outside a given time period's technical developments. That means literature's essence is not fundamentally altered by new technical means of distributing and consuming texts, nor is it necessarily altered by the use of computers to interpret and even produce it. What literature can teach us about technology, and what technology can teach us about literature, is the power of technological signifiers and figures: what they mean, how they help us understand various processes related to literature itself, what they clarify about literature's status in our contemporary, technology-obsessed culture.

The basic premise of this chapter and those to follow, then, is that at a time when technology appears to be displacing literature as a cultural form and disrupting the conventional study of it in the form of the digital humanities, the relation between literature and technology may be counter-intuitively and productively reevaluated not as one of displacement or recent, historically situated disruption, but as essential and transhistorical. Indeed, we may think of literature as a machine. But to think of it as a machine in the way I theorize here will show that it has always been and will continue to be that machine, reorienting our understanding of the possible relation between literature, twenty-first-century technology, and the use and analysis of

technology in contemporary literary studies. I make this argument in four parts. In the first, I theorize what I call the literature machine, drawing on Blanchot's texts as well as the thought of his peers and interpreters, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida. In the second, I examine the place the literature machine may be said to occupy in Blanchot's work, considering its relation to such forms and figures as fragmentary writing and the void. In the third, I offer a reading of a fictional text of Blanchot's, *La folie du jour*, in order to demonstrate the ways of thinking that a *literary* reading of texts opens up; in other words, I demonstrate the potential products of the literature machine. In the final section, I turn to the digital humanities, and in particular computational literary study, considering the relation between literature and contemporary technology as both a tool for interpreting literary texts and a medium for producing and presenting them.

Throughout the essay, I defend the notion that literature is radically technical and mechanical. I argue that grasping this originary mechanicity and technicity at work in literature is essential to understanding its relation to technology and helps us grasp how literary texts work in general. Even today, in our unprecedented digital times, literature is going where it was headed at the time of Blanchot's writing more than sixty years ago: "vers son essence qui est la disparition" (*Le livre à venir* 444). Understanding literature itself and whatever it can teach us about technology requires heading toward that vanishing point.

The mechanism of literature

Literature machines produce difference. They recur eternally, different and singular in each of their instantiations, no one iteration precisely identical to another. The literature machine may be said to malfunction as it functions, producing copies of itself that are not copies of

something that can simply be regarded as a self.[6] To understand the mechanism of the literature machine, one might picture a copy machine, which takes what appears to be an original text and churns out replicas but, in replicating, folds the text into something different. Each copy-text's essence can only be understood, and even then, only ephemerally, as the intersection of the given copy, its reader, and the space and time in which the reading plays out. Copy A is not the same as Copy A, not even in the hands of Reader A when the time of reading shifts from time A to time B. The copy is itself a machine ever reproducing copies.

Still, the relation between literature and machines cannot be reduced to the notion that a machine, like literature, repeats itself and produces difference in the process. Like the machine, literature is, as Blanchot exemplarily argues, impersonal. In its repetition, literature divests itself of its author and the connection of any one person to it. In literature, Blanchot writes:

> "Le « il » narratif, qu'il soit absent ou présent, qu'il s'affirme ou se dérobe, qu'il altère ou non les conventions d'écriture – la linéarité, la continuité, la lisibilité – marque ainsi l'intrusion de l'autre – entendu au neutre – dans son étrangeté irréductible, dans sa perversité retorse. L'autre parle. *Mais quand l'autre parle, personne ne parle, car l'autre*, qu'il faut se garder d'honorer d'une majuscule qui le fixerait dans un substantif de majesté, comme s'il avait quelque présence substantielle, voire unique, *n'est précisément jamais seulement l'autre, il n'est plutôt ni l'un ni l'autre, et le neutre qui le marque le*

[6] Laurent Dubreuil has pointed out the danger of using the word "function" to refer to literature, for example in Michel Foucault's use of the term to describe the role of the author in the interpretation of a literary text in "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" (*De l'attrait à la possession* 328-330). It is true that "function" suggests something inherent, simple, and homogeneous in the workings of an object, and making such a supposition is fraught in the case of literature, which only comes into being in an event of reading dependent on a variable reader. For example, how can one talk about an author function when the reader of a text may know nothing of the author? The functioning of the function hinges on the context of a given event of reading, undermining the wisdom of choosing such a term, with the consistency and baseline necessity it suggests, for the effects of the author. (Barthes makes a similar mistake when he suggests that some authors in a given historical period disavow the author more than others; the point is that the author never has an indispensable function to perform in the event of literary reading; the author is always an optional part of the text's readerly production.) But this is precisely why I suggest that not every text, or even every novel or poem, functions *as* a literature machine. *In the event* that a text is read as literature, it will produce the semiotic function, the doubling of language and the contestation of the signifier, that I describe as literary; this function is the point of departure for literary reading, and without it, the literature machine cannot be conceived of as such (hence why I refer to it as a function, an operation that is necessary for the literature machine to 'work'). But I readily admit that the average reader may perceive this literary functioning as a malfunctioning — the signifier slipping away or doubling itself where the reader might prefer it to make (simple) sense, or function in the non-literary sense. Thus, "The literature machine may be said to malfunction as it functions," and it more often than not will not function at all, the allure of positivism and certainty triumphing where the literary might have appeared.

> *retire des deux, comme de l'unité*, l'établissant toujours au-dehors du terme, de l'acte ou du sujet où il prétend s'offrir" (*L'entretien infini* 1072).

Blanchot's neutral captures this impersonal quality of the literature machine. The literature machine rages on without regard for its creator, and while it exists in its various iterations only in relation to a reader, it also precedes and outlasts any given reader. But the impersonal character of literary language is even more radical than that: Even the people and objects literature names are other to themselves, constantly changing with each reading and, even within each reading, with each passing moment. Literary language is inveterately *othering*. It is a "void" that always invites another reading, another not fully realized instantiation of the same text to come (1072). Subject to the dynamics of the neutral, any "I," any person, who passes into literature is destined to become something else, an ever-mutating entity other than the entity to which one may mistakenly reduce it at a given moment. As Derrida writes in a reading of Blanchot, the literary text "is not. It does not exist" (*Demeure* 29). Rather, I would say, invoking a more Deleuzian vocabulary, that the literary text becomes — always already other than what it may be taken to stably 'be.' This makes the literature machine a source of anxiety and inconvenience for those who read in search of certain, stable knowledge.

Nevertheless, to say that the literary text becomes, or differs from itself, and that it is impersonal does not mean that it becomes of its own accord. The literature machine is not an organic machine of the kind Deleuze and Guattari describe: a cell-like, 'molecular' entity reproducing itself.[7] If one were to speak of a sort of reproduction in relation to the literary text, one could only do so by recognizing an event of reading, which entails the arrival of another (however human that reader may be). Therefore, the literature machine is not quite an autonomous being, nor even an organic one. As sobering as it may be to state, a text need not be

[7] See *L'anti-OEdipe*, 343-344 for Deleuze and Guattari on the organic machine.

living to differ from itself, to transform in events of reading, and to produce semiotic and epistemic difference worthy of concern. The literature machine is inorganic, different and capable of reproduction thanks to its encounters with readers and not to a life of its own.

One way of understanding this difference beyond organicity, this textual and impersonal difference I associate with the literature machine, is via recourse to the concept of technics or techne. In *Demeure,* Derrida articulates the same relation between the effects of technology and the effects of literature toward which Blanchot gestures in *Le livre à venir*. But Derrida may be accused of going even further than Blanchot, arguing not only that literature but also that language in general expresses the world-rending, differential effects Blanchot attributes to technology and, in a deeper sense, to literature. Writing specifically of testimony, which must be iterable or recordable in order to fulfill its duty as testimony, Derrida writes:

> "Là se trouve la racine du problème testimonial de la *tekhnè*. La technique, la reproductibilité technique, est exclue du témoignage qui en appelle toujours à la présence de la vive voix en première personne. Mais dès lors que le témoignage doit pouvoir se répéter, la *tekhnè* est admise, elle est introduite là où elle est exclue. *On n'a pas besoin pour cela d'attendre les caméras, les vidéos, les machines à écrire et les ordinateurs. Dès que la phrase est répétable … elle est déjà instrumentalisable et affectée de technologie*" (*Demeure* 49).

In Blanchot's telling, literature's world-rending effects precede and exceed the differential effects of technology by not simply marking a different historical moment but vitiating the possibility of determining an isolated historical moment as such. Because literature comes forth, or becomes, in an eternally recurrent temporality of reading and because it is different in each event of becoming, it does not, like technology, belong to fixed spatiotemporal worlds; it sunders them, creating a quasi-world in each inchoate moment in which it is read. Put simply, the literary text exists outside linear history. Derrida extends this view of literature to all textuality and indeed to all things or being itself, arguing that there is no isolated moment or origin that comes

before the generative difference Blanchot associates with literature. For Derrida, technics or *tekhnè,* as opposed to that which would appear to be natural, unaffected, isolated, and impervious to difference, is originary. The machine of difference, literary or otherwise, has always already begun tearing the world apart — no need to wait for modern technology, capable of recording or reproducing text ad infinitum, to rob a seemingly original text, testimony, moment, or world of its apparent unity or presence untouched by diachronicity and difference. In Derrida's understanding, the seemingly bygone world from which technological developments would seem to mark a departure has never existed in the first place; the environment we recognize as a world, as the first or unchanged or natural world, is always already passing us by — the world is always already technical. As I understand it, the literature machine expresses this originary technicity par excellence, showing its effects on language and, through language, on knowledge. It is this threat to a stable way of knowing the world that inspires anxiety and other adverse reactions to the theories, often associated with poststructuralism and especially deconstruction, that define the literary as fundamentally differential or technical.[8]

Just how literariness reaches so far into the depths of all kinds of epistemic certainty, destabilizing conceptions of being, truth, feeling, and time, is the subject of not only Blanchot's writing but also much of Deleuze and Derrida's. Their work is also deeply literary in the sense that they consistently engage with the difference in language, or a text's propensity to differ from itself (though Deleuze was sometimes less unguarded in this regard, preferring to focus on the

[8] Many of the authors from which I draw inspiration for my positing of literature as machine refer to the affective challenge that comes with reading literature as such. Literature, Blanchot tells us, provokes a "Recherche obscure, difficile et tourmentée. Expérience essentiellement risquée où l'art, l'œuvre, *la vérité et l'essence du langage* sont remis en cause et entrent dans le risqué" (*Le livre à venir* 450). Paul de Man argues that the "negative knowledge about the reliability of linguistic utterance" that literature takes as its most fundamental condition (in other words, literature's radical production of linguistic and therefore epistemic difference) "makes it epistemologically highly suspect and volatile" (*Resistance* 10).

so-called assemblages in which texts were embedded as opposed to interpretation as such).[9] Not coincidentally, both were also frequent readers of Blanchot. In the thought of all three (and this is the indeed literary sense in which the term poststructuralism is most coherent), the question is often what happens when one no longer regards words or even entities in general as fixed, when one consents to, as Deleuze puts it, "roll the dice," entering into that risqué game of epistemic and linguistic revaluation that Blanchot describes literature and art as inviting and that all three French thinkers find in Nietzsche (*Nietzsche et la philosophie* 29-31). Of course, Deleuze's relationship with literature was more reserved than Blanchot's or Derrida's. Deleuze was at peace with his status as metaphysician and at times attempted to keep literature and art at bay, claiming philosophy's role was to create concepts while relegating art and literature to the task of revaluing percepts and affects (*Qu'est-ce que la philosophie ?)*. In *Mille Plateaux*, he writes with Guattari that they will ask no more "ce que veut dire un livre, signifié ou signifiant, on ne cherchera rien à comprendre dans un livre, on se demandera avec quoi il fonctionne, en connexion de quoi il fait ou non passer des intensités" (10). But this rejection of inquiries into signification is at the same time a proclamation, à la Blanchot himself, of the power of textuality and of concepts to reorient reality. As Deleuze puts it more than once, he views literature as able to "inventer un peuple qui manque" (*Critique et clinique* 14). Just as Blanchot refers to the world-rending "relations" literature "expresses," Deleuze's interest in literature lies in the social and political relations it has the power to reconfigure. "But de la littérature," writes Deleuze, "c'est le passage de la vie dans le langage qui constitue les Idées" (16). In and through literature, life itself, social relations, the configuration of a people and the power of their language, may be transformed. This is the power of difference in and as text, of words that do not just add up to

[9] For more on the latter tendency of Deleuze's, see *Pourparlers*, especially 16-19.

narratives but call into question their own truth, the truth of the worlds to which they may refer, indeed the truth of any utterance or notion. This is also the differential, epistemic power of what I seek to theorize as the literature machine — without presuming that all the authors whose thought is deemed 'poststructural' would endorse the term.

It is helpful to turn to Deleuze and Derrida to illuminate the full epistemological potential of the literature machine and to affirm that the concept and its workings are by no means limited to Blanchot's ideas. It is also an instructive turn because Deleuze and Derrida more persistently invoke the lexicons of technology and mechanicity to describe the textual effects of difference and repetition I seek to gather here under the concept of the literature machine. In an essay on the encounter between the "Deleuzo-Guattarian writing machine" and the "literary machines" of Marcel Proust and Franz Kafka, Manola Antolioli claims that Deleuze and Guattari turn to the language of machines in their work to replace the notion of structure. She writes, closely aligned with the concept of the literature machine I attempt to theorize here, that "turning to the machine" opens up a "new approach to art" for Deleuze and Guattari in which "the work of art is transformed into a machinic entity that cannot be understood as a total, autonomous structure saturated with meaning, all of whose aspects could be explained" (159). She continues to note, referring in a sense also to those world-rending effects so essential to Blanchot's understanding of literature, that for Deleuze and Guattari the literary work "is perpetually open upon the real, capable of producing social, political, and philosophical effects, but also, above all, of profoundly transforming the perceptive and affective experience of the reader" (159). This is why I at once turn to Deleuze to deepen my theorization of the writing machine and turn away from his work, cautioning that it is Blanchot's in which the literature machine is more pervasively manifest. For while, as Antonioli suggests, Deleuze and Guattari offer us perhaps the

most comprehensive articulation of the machine's epistemic and even "real" or social effects, extending that articulation to literature, they also relegate literature to the realm of the aesthetic. Even while affirming literature's ability to create a people, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize its connections to feeling and perception, preferring to leave the category of thought, or new concepts, to proper philosophical discourse.[10]

By contrast, in Blanchot, the literature machine is a more general possibility latent in all writing; it cannot be consigned to texts that are readily recognizable as literature, such as novels, nor can it be limited to the aesthetic. In Blanchot's view as in mine, literariness is ultimately less a question of the would-be essence of the text at hand, though some texts may certainly lend themselves to literary reading more than others, than it is a question of a mode of interpretation or a relation between text and reader. The literariness of texts, their capacity for differential epistemic and linguistic production, must be found in reading:

> "Le livre qui a son origine dans l'art, n'a pas sa garantie dans le monde, et lorsqu'il est lu, il n'a encore jamais été lu, ne parvenant à sa présence d'œuvre que dans l'espace ouvert par cette lecture unique, chaque fois la première et chaque fois la seule. De là l'étrange liberté dont la lecture — littéraire — nous donne l'exemple. Libre mouvement, si elle n'est pas soumise, si elle ne prend appui sur rien qui soit déjà présent" (*L'espace littéraire*, 256).

Literariness is not guaranteed because a text happens to have been published as a novel, theatrical play, or collection of poems; it is a more general epistemic quality that can only be said to emerge in an event of reading in which a text is treated as singular, its meaning unbound by what may appear falsely to be determinative historical, formal, biographical, or psychological structures. This makes Blanchot's conception of literature machinic in the sense Antonioli attributes to Deleuze and Guattari — for Blanchot as for Deleuze and Guattari's machines of

[10] Here I am especially influenced by Laurent Dubreuil, who argues against this aspect of Deleuze's thought and right insists that thought and feeling are not separable from each other, just as thought cannot be cast out of literature, nor feeling from philosophy. See Dubreuil, *The Intellective Space*, 11-12.

many kinds, literature is singular in each of its iterations, radically differential, and contextual in its production of meaning. But to follow Blanchot's theorization of literariness also makes his literature machine more general and expansive in its possibilities than the literature machine as it may be developed based purely on the thought of Deleuze and Guattari. This is because, for Blanchot, literature is not just something to be associated with what we commonly refer to as literary texts; it is an epistemic relation that may apply to seemingly non-literary texts in events of literary reading.

Like Blanchot, Derrida writes of literariness as a general epistemic relation between reader and text that challenges truth and even being as such, not just the referential function of words in fictional texts:

> "Car je dois le rappeler un peu massivement et simplement, mon intérêt le plus constant, je dirai avant même l'intérêt philosophique, si c'est possible, allait vers la littérature, vers l'écriture dite littéraire. Qu'est-ce que la littérature ? Et d'abord qu'est-ce qu'écrire ? Comment l'écrire en vient-il à déranger jusqu'à la question 'qu'est-ce que ?' et même 'qu'est-ce que ça veut dire ?' Autrement dit — et voilà l'autrement dire qui m'importait — quand et comment l'inscription devient-elle littérature et qui se passe-t-il alors ? … Qu'est-ce qui se passe entre philosophie et littérature, science et littérature, politique et littérature, théologie et littérature, psychanalyse et littérature, voilà dans l'abstraction de son titre la question la plus insistante" (*Du droit à la philosophie* 443).

Clearly, literature here is not, as Blanchot also warns against, a predetermined set of texts defined by a widely agreed-upon constellation of formal structures. Literature is a signifying function or dysfunction, an erratic cog in the textual machine that threatens to destabilize textual knowledge across superficial discursive or disciplinary boundaries. Indeed, writing itself — the very fact that something is written or exists more generally as language and may therefore be interpreted *differently*, pending time, place, and reader — threatens the stability of its meanings, always providing the possibility of a literary encounter.

Accordingly, the task of the philosopher or critic mindful of literariness is to parse the conditions of the literature machine's machinations, to understand wherein its semiotic multiplicities lie and delineate its possibilities while recognizing the impossibility of exhausting them. This is the responsibility and the sine qua non of literary reading. The "specificity" of the literary object is its "vacance," a vacuum or void, and literary critique must trace "la façon dont ce rien *lui-même* se détermine en se perdant" (*L'écriture et la différence* 17). Derrida himself attempts to theorize the conditions and possibilities of literariness by wedding his theorization of literature as event of contextual signification with theories of technicity, as I referenced earlier, and with theories of the machine and mechanicity. Doing just this in a text on materiality and language, Derrida turns to de Man, who writes:

> "The machine is like the grammar of the text when it is isolated from its rhetoric, the merely formal element without which no text can be generated. There can be no use of language which is not, within a certain perspective thus radically formal, i.e. mechanical, no matter how deeply this aspect may be concealed by aesthetic, formalistic delusions. The machine not only generates, but also suppresses, and not always in an innocent or balanced way" (*Allegories of Reading* 294).

There are two vital qualifications to make here. The first is that, as Derrida emphasizes in *Papier machine*, de Man does not *wholly* equate textuality with mechanicity but rather suggests that the text is *like* a machine when grammar is isolated from rhetoric (rhetoric denoting attention to the "negative knowledge about the reliability of linguistic utterance" to which de Man elsewhere refers as the hallmark of literariness). In other words, a text can be taken to mean precisely or essentially the same thing in each reading or instantiation — it can function like a machine in the banal sense, repeating the same thing without perceived difference — if it is read in that dogmatic, non-literary way. The second, though, is that it is this same mechanicity, repeatability, or iterability of textuality that provides the possibility the text may be read otherwise ("l'autrement dire" to which Derrida refers when asking when inscription becomes literature). To

conceive of the text as a machine is to acknowledge that it may be read with or without respect for difference; the novel may not be read as literary, and a simple sense may be plumbed for its literariness. I would posit that the literature machine is what the textual machine becomes when grammar is not isolated from rhetoric, when the workings of difference are reckoned with in their complexity, even if no reading can completely account for them.

Still, the primary distinction between the literature machine as it may be theorized on the basis of the works of Derrida and Blanchot is that, as Derrida himself acknowledges when describing literature as his "most constant interest," his approach as a (nevertheless profoundly literary) philosopher is less to write himself works that plunge into the chaos of literary signification than to identify and unpack the instances in which the texts of other writers, both ostensibly literary and philosophical, do the same. In other words, Derrida's texts, while attentive to semiotic multiplicities in the texts with which they enter into conversation, are themselves mostly quasi-thetic, stopping short of maximal formal disorder for the sake of rhetorical cohesion. Free of a professional philosopher's obligations, Blanchot more consistently takes a maximally dysfunctional and thus potentially literary approach. In Blanchot, the literature machine moves at seemingly maximum speed, opening up the "vacance" of literary signification whether his texts appear to belong to the would-be categories of fictional or critical-theoretical writing. As a work of literary theory and criticism, this essay more so follows the path of Derrida, tracing and affirming semiotic instability while attempting to maintain rhetorical clarity and some measure of unambiguity. But like any writer attentive to the dynamics of literary reading, I cannot say whether my literary criticism is definitively literary; that hinges on the reader's approach to my text machine, whose copies may or may not be literary in their own right.

The literature machine in Blanchot

Blanchot's efforts to undermine from the start the usual illusions of presence and unity that might accompany readings of his texts — his efforts to program the reader into receiving his text as a literature machine and not a homogeneous copy machine — manifest in *Le pas au-delà*. A literature machine par excellence, the text plays host to mechanisms of misdirection, bringing the reader into "un espace vide dont le vide … [n'empêche] nullement les tours et les détours d'un cheminement très long" (*Le pas au-delà* 9). In *Le pas au-delà,* meaning the step beyond but also, if read a little mischievously, the not-beyond or the beyond that is not, Blanchot announces the quintessentially literary suspension of simple signification or direct reference in the text's opening pages (as well as in the title), providing what amounts to a warning to the reader. The text's first line is a command: "Entrons dans ce rapport" (7). This first step marks writer and reader's entry into a literary space where writing, the text continues to tell us in short order, will mean something different than what the reader is likely to presume. "N'espère pas, si c'est là ton espoir — et il faut en douter —, unifier ton existence, y introduire, au passé quelque cohérence par l'écriture qui désunifie" (8). Far from a bio-graphical document that tells the simple truth of the writer's life, writing is explicitly presented as a disunifying mechanism. Its cogs turn before the writer even realizes writing has begun — "J'essaierai en vain de me le représenter, celui que je n'étais pas et qui, sans le vouloir, commençait d'écrire" (9) — and they continue to spin in the writer's absence, driving him not toward eternal preservation in the space "beyond" but rather toward an early and eternally recurrent death or disappearance:

> "Écrire comme question d'écrire, question qui porte l'écriture qui porte la question, ne te permet plus ce rapport à l'être — entendu d'abord comme tradition, ordre, certitude, vérité, toute forme d'enracinement — que tu as reçu un jour du passé du monde, domaine que tu étais appelé à gérer afin d'en fortifier ton "Moi", bien que celui-ci fût comme fissuré, dès le jour où le ciel s'ouvrit sur son vide" (9).

Writing does not conserve; it destroys, altering what 'is' as it incessantly produces different iterations and multiple possible interpretations of itself. In the reproduction of itself, writing produces difference. This differential reproduction triggers an endless series of destabilizing questions about just what the text is and who might be said to be speaking in it, fostering that distinctly literary "recherche qui remet tout en question" that Blanchot attributes specifically to art and literature (*Le livre à venir* 468). Writing is therefore in opposition to being *tout court* as long as being is considered the non-differential persistence of what is.

However, I would specify that this production of difference Blanchot associates with "writing" in general varies greatly according to the whims and context of the reading in which writing is re-written. In the bounds of the unusual "rapport" *Le pas au-delà* bids its reader to enter at its outset, writing may function as a difference-producing machine, a literature machine. But this is the case only on the condition that it is read as such. A reader may just as well seek to neutralize the differential effects of writing, suppressing the potential literariness, the literature machine, latent in all writing machines.

Still, while a writer cannot guarantee that his texts will be read as literary, he can compose them in such a way that they invite literary readings, and Blanchot's writing is exemplary in this regard. He aims in theory and practice to deny the possibility of an original signifier that would precede negation, replacing the very possibility of origins as typically conceived with a sort of quasi-origin that is multiple, differentiated, or dispersed at the outset. As Michel Foucault explains, Blanchot's theorization and practice of literature is intended to work outside the dynamics of the Hegelian dialectic.[11] Foucault writes:

[11] Roberto Nigro explicitly links the form of Blanchot's texts and his ambition to write outside dialectics, noting that for Blanchot as for his contemporary Georges Bataille, "To speak a language stripped of dialectics means to draw thought back toward the limit of the impossibility of language, toward the limit at which the essence of language is called into question" (656). Blanchot does not just claim that literature is a void of infinite questions where certainty

> "Nier dialectiquement, c'est faire entrer ce qu'on nie dans l'intériorité inquiète de l'esprit. Nier son propre discours comme le fait Blanchot, c'est le faire passer sans cesse hors de lui-même, le dessaisir à chaque instant non seulement de ce qu'il vient de dire mais du pouvoir de l'énoncer ; c'est le laisser là où il est, loin derrière soi, afin d'être libre pour un commencement — qui est une pure origine puisqu'il n'a que lui-même et le vide pour principe, mais qui est aussi bien recommencement puisque c'est le langage passé qui en se creusant lui-même a libéré ce vide" (22).

When literary language appears in an event of literary reading, it does not transmit or share a message, nor does it refer directly to a referent or summon an uncontested signified. Rather, it churns out "in each instant" a multiplicity of meanings exposed to both the future and the past. When the reader interprets a literary text, the text he or she reads comes into being only in relation to "past language," and that always-relational and -historical text in turn emerges only in an interpretation that remains to come. Therefore, each reading marks a "pure origin" in the sense that it is singular and unidentical to any other reading of what would appear to be the very same text — each reading is the very first of its kind — and yet this pure origin is also the site of a "resumption" or "second beginning" [recommencement] because the text only signifies within an evolving history of language. Blanchot aspires to "leave language where it is," eschewing in the very form of his texts the possibility that they might be taken to mean a single thing or convey a comprehensive message. Foucault continues, invoking the negative signifier that relentlessly chips away at the would-be presence of Blanchot's texts: "Pas de réflexion, mais l'oubli ; pas de contradiction, mais la contestation qui efface ; pas de réconciliation, mais le ressassement ; pas d'esprit à la conquête laborieuse de son unité, mais l'érosion indéfinie du dehors" (22-3). Blanchot's texts, like literary texts more generally as he permits us to imagine

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vanishes and language itself recurrently disappears; he writes his texts in ways that approach "the limit of the impossibility of language," which means among other things that Blanchot's writings defy readings in search of linear arguments, clear plot developments, and simple takeaways.

them, are a "pas" machine, generating one superficial step after another that announces its own erasure, its own multiplication.[12]

Blanchot himself might have most summarily theorized this mechanism via the notion of the fragmentary. He writes: "Le fragmentaire. Il n'y en a pas d'expérience, en ce sens qu'on ne la reçoit sous aucune forme de présent, qu'elle demeurerait sans sujet si elle avait lieu, excluant donc tout présent et toute présence, comme elle en serait exclue" (*Le pas au-delà* 71). The fragmentary does not refer to the simple parceling out of a text into fragments; it refers to this slipping away of the text, which, if literary (as I, inflecting Blanchot's broader perspective on writing, conceive of the literary), never steps before the reader as a unified, present, comprehensible whole — even if it seems to be written as such. The effects of the fragmentary appear to play out in the ostensibly more literary passages of *Le pas au-delà*, which are italicized and mostly recount a relation between an unnamed "eux" and speakers who sometimes address one another and refer to themselves as "nous." Blanchot writes:

> "*Ce que j'ai appris d'eux, c'est que, déjà autrefois, ils étaient proches de nous, séparés par peu de chose, seulement peut-être en ceci qu'ils ne sauraient s'attarder, du moins dans quelque forme de présent que ce soit.' — 'Ils passent.' — 'Ils sont toujours déjà passés, mais nous ne les manquons que de peu.' — 'Ils nous manquent d'autant plus*'" (60).

It is tempting to refer to this passage as a representation of the literary relation of which Blanchot writes more theoretically elsewhere, the literary relation that calls into question the essence of being. Nothing *is* here; no one is present to behold, to capture, to essentialize, and to know. To be precise, then, there is no *re-presentation* of the literary at stake in the passage; on the contrary,

[12] "Pas" is the word that Derrida, in one of many texts and many words on Blanchot, chooses as his title, playing on the titles of two of Blanchot's own works (*Faux pas* and *Le pas au-delà*). Making an observation of the use of "pas" in Blanchot's work that just as well captures the chaos at the decentered center of Blanchot's literary corpus, Derrida writes, "En tous ces sens," in all these meanings one can imagine for Blanchot's "pas," "il est labyrinthique et immédiatement, singulièrement multiple, de lui-même digressif" (*Parages* 35). This is the function of the literature machine: It takes what appears to be a single event of language and makes that event immediately multiple and differential.

the literary as it circulates in this fragment of text undermines the possibility of representation as such. There is no first place or prior time in which the "them" in question would have been present to represent later. At the same time, this lack of presence does not mean the quasi-beings referred to in the form of a third-person plural pronoun are simply absent; they were "already in another time … close" to the unnamed speakers identified as "us." A paradox is at play here: The beings always passing the speakers by are all the more missing to the speakers — the speakers miss them all the more — *because* the speakers only just miss them. Proximity begets epistemic, perceptual, and affective distance. It is implied that to be up close to someone, to have missed "them" only slightly, is to know them even less than one would know them were they to appear from afar. This is a literary way of writing and of knowing both the world and each other; I know you 'less' because I know you well, because you are close to me and therefore ineffable, inexhaustible in your difference not only from me but also from yourself. You, the "eux" whom I would not even address in the second person or in the singular, do not linger [ils ne sauraient s'attarder] before me. You, beholden to the mechanism of the literature machine, are ever-changing, and my respect for that difference in and beyond language leads me to recognize my distance from you.

In an essay that approaches Blanchot from the vantage point of machines as Deleuze and Guattari conceive of them, Constantino Villegas Burgos notes the connection between fragmentary writing and mechanicity in Blanchot. He writes of an extraordinarily powerful gesture in Blanchot's corpus, "un gesto maquínico que reúne lo incongruente, abre límites y deshace paradigmas" (202). The strength of this limit-defying, paradigm-disrupting text-machine is "la desenvoltura con que imbrica una multitud de estilos, tonos y tesituras, manteniendo su diferencia en una escritura fragmentaria" (202). Vacillating between aphorisms and several-page

meditations on Heidegger and Nietzsche, between seemingly philosophical discourse and literary narratives with neither proper names nor recognizable settings, fragmented texts of Blanchot's such as *Le pas au-delà* manufacture series of disruptions in lieu of linear narratives and logocentric theses. Of course, a text need not literally be composed of fragments, or short and not necessarily linear sections, as many of Blanchot's texts are, to be fragmentary in the sense he theorizes. But the form of *Le pas au-delà* accentuates the literary effect on knowledge — the multiplicity of meanings or irreducible difference — to which the fragmentary refers and that the literature machine produces. Beyond my own theorization of the literature machine, we might conceive of this as mechanical because it entails an originary repetition, a reproduction at the origin of semiosis, of multiple meanings, or differential iterations, where a non-literary reading might otherwise mistakenly glimpse a single and uncomplicated signifier.

And indeed, though it is by no means the superficial focus of *Le pas au*-delà or Blanchot's broader corpus, the machine appears in *Le pas au-delà* when Blanchot seeks to theorize the relation between time and events, memory and difference: "Admettons que les événements ne soient 'réels' qu'au passé, machine fonctionnant de telle sorte que nous puissions nous remémorer, par une mémoire bien agencée, quoique avec un léger doute, tout ce que le futur pourrait nous promettre ou nous faire redouter" (25). What does the future promise us in regard to the past? Here, the machine governing thought and memory appears to suppress difference — it is thanks to the machine that we can remember a 'real' event, an event untouched by the perceptual distortions of difference, by literariness as epistemic effect or mechanism. But if the machine is capable of suppressing difference, there is also the possibility that difference might not be suppressed, that it might emerge. The ghost of difference always lives within the machine (in the lexicon of this dissertation, every writing machine may become a literature

machine). Thus, the reality of the 'real' events to which Blanchot refers is couched in the skepticism of two apostrophes, and it is only with a layer of "doubt" that we could presume to look back on an event with the memory of "all" that which the future could promise us about it. The future may come back to surprise us, even in and about the past. Holly Langstaff, in an essay on Blanchot's writing qua uncontrollable mechanism, reads the eternal return and Blanchot's writing on it, citing this passage in particular, as signaling that "The future belongs as much to yesterday as to tomorrow when it is experienced as repetition of an irretrievable past" (411). Indeed, in Blanchot's understanding, we only remember the past on the condition that it is open to the future; in its repetition, all time remembered is subject to the difference-producing mechanism literary writing sets into motion. An interpretive mechanism both makes the event real — reconstructing it in the image of an organized faculty [*une mémoire bien agencée*] — and exposes it to the differential forces of the future context in which it is remembered. What I would add to Blanchot's account is that this difference-producing machine latent in all remembrance, and in all repetition, can be ignored or affirmed by the person who remembers. One can choose to affirm the notion that what she remembers is conditioned by the future context in which it is remembered, and that is a condition of literary reading and thinking. But one can also claim to remember nothing but the facts, rejecting difference and substituting a pure empirical or testimonial account for a more complicated reality. These, I will posit in the next section, are the stakes of literariness in *La folie du jour*.

Focusing further on the machine and the event, I must turn to "Typewriter Ribbon," in which Derrida wonders:

> "Will we be able to think, what is called thinking, at one and the same time, *both* what is happening [*ce qui arrive*] (we call that an event) *and* the calculable programming of an automatic repetition (we call that a machine)?

> For that, it would be necessary in the future (but there will be no future [*il n'y aura d'avenir*] except on this condition) to think *both* the event *and* the machine as two compatible or even indissociable concepts.
>
> … The machine … is destined [*serait vouée*] to repetition. It is destined [*serait destinée*], that is, to reproduce impassively, imperceptibly, without organ or organicity, received commands [*l'ordre reçu*]" (*Without Alibi* 72, *Papier Machine* 34-35).

I submit literature *as the machine* that corresponds to both these seemingly incommensurable definitions. For if all texts are in a basic sense machines — unchanging collections of language, empirically and verifiably the very same thing across differences in time and space, the products of "calculable programming" subject to "automatic repetition" — the difference-producing literature machine is precisely what the text or writing machine becomes when it is approached as an event in the sense Derrida theorizes. The literary text, read for neither theses nor messages but for ever-escaping essences, contested signifiers, and indirect references, is "that which arrives" as a contextual, unpredictable, and singular surprise. Literature is, as Blanchot writes of "them" in *Le pas au-delà* and argues of art and literature in *Le livre à venir*, an object that becomes more complicated and obscure the more one plunges into it, sacrificing one's hold on certainty, simple truth, and being in the process. But as Blanchot states in *L'espace littéraire*, this world-rending difference is never guaranteed simply because a text is commonly called literary; it is the techniques of literary reading that jump-start literature's mechanisms. In the space of literary reading, the literature machine will appear to have always already begun producing difference, rending worlds and opening access to knowledge otherwise consigned to the shadows of history, to voids that cannot be read.

What the literature machine produces: testimonies of the void

La folie du jour, in which "the day" at times signifies light, normative reason, and the unmediated truth, allows us to envision — there is hardly any escaping the ocular and luminary

figures here, a challenge to which I will return — among other things, that a certain technical relation is always already at work among people, texts, and things. Even in losing sight in the most material way possible, we, like the narrator, lose something we can never completely presume to have had: undifferentiated, complete, or natural access to empirically verifiable knowledge. As a literature machine, this text of Blanchot's is thus a difference-producing machine that exemplarily demonstrates among the most fundamental conditions of literature: There is no unmediated, natural, or original truth in textuality. Our relation to the text is always already technical. Yet *La folie du jour* also shows us, through the inability of its diegetic interpreters to understand the non-linear account presented to them, that to make some sense out of a non-empirically verifiable account of an event, one must be willing to read it in a non-empiricist, literary fashion. To shirk literary reading, which is attentive to multiple possible meanings, punctuation, and pauses, in favor of an empiricist lens in which only simple facts are legible is to relegate unrepresentable stories to the illegible ash heap of history.[13]

This simplifying interpretive lens may also be understood as mechanical in a way opposed to the mechanism of literature I attempt to theorize here. For example, Derrida, in a discussion of the fascist interpretation of Nietzsche, notes that all thought is exposed to "the machine or law of contamination. … What I say is *always* going to run the risk of being taken in an unfavorable light, it cannot fail to lead to misunderstandings, according to the very same law of contamination" (Nietzsche and the Machine 43). As reflected in Derrida's discussion of de Man's analogy between texts and machines, the mechanicity of texts, their inherent iterability, means they always may be interpreted in deadening, simplistic, non-literary, or simply incorrect ways. But that same mechanicity is what provides the possibility of literary encounters and

[13] For more on the link between literariness and unrepresentable events, see Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

incisive interpretations. Mechanicity then, as a feature of texts, is a condition that is neither positive nor negative in itself. Originary repetition is a possibility; the reader may make of it what she will.

I read *La folie du jour*, then, to build on my previous arguments in two ways. The first is to further articulate the forms that produce difference in literature. Through an extended reading of this most narrative of the Blanchot texts I have thus far cited, I hope to illustrate the ways the language of texts can produce literary effects, even if no text is literary without a reading that treats it as such. The second aim of this section is to reckon with the complexity of reading a text as an example of an epistemic principle when the text, like all literature machines, calls into question the possibility of principles, at least as generalizable notions taken to exist without difference. I will grapple, in other words, with the status of *La folie du jour* as an example of literature machines and with its forms as examples of the textual mechanisms that produce literary difference.

La folie du jour appears to tell the story of a man who loses vision after being attacked in the street. It is also more significantly a story of the conditions and possibilities of knowledge and of textuality, of what we know about texts as well as one another, and how we presume to know what we know. Technology as such makes an appearance in the text twice in the form of a telephone. In the first instance, the telephone marks an event of thwarted connection. The narrator says:

> "Je commençais à tomber dans la misère. Elle traçait lentement autour de moi des cercles dont le premier semblait me laisser tout, dont le dernier ne me laisserait que moi. Un jour, je me trouvai enfermé dans la ville : voyager n'était plus qu'une fable. Le téléphone cessa de répondre" (15).

Like madness, which is often represented as taking over a sovereign subject who would resist it, undermining the sovereignty and the very notion of the subject qua self-possessed individual in

the process, it is misery, not the narrator himself, who is the subject here. Misery, "elle," a mysterious, possibly gendered other like the law whom the narrator elsewhere personifies, referring to her "knee" (27), traces a series of circles around the narrator that gradually cut him off from all relations. In this space seemingly devoid of connection, this space where there is only the narrator [que moi], technology appears to reestablish ties across the distance physical travel cannot close [voyager n'était plus qu'une fable]. However, technology, standing in as a subject for an addressee on the other end of the line who does not speak — it is "the telephone" that does not respond, not an identifiable interlocutor — ceases to respond. Technology is therefore positioned as a precarious enabler of difference or relationality; it offers to connect the narrator to others, but it is also implicitly held accountable for the fallibility of connection or impossibility of total connection. As Avital Ronell writes, "The telephone connection houses the improper. Hitting the streets, it welcomes linguistic pollutants and reminds you to ask, 'Have I been understood?'" (3). Like a text that gives itself to be read and yet cannot be fully read, the person at the other end of the telephone is only possibly there on the condition that the telephone is present, but it is also the telephone, a technical progenitor of difference, that instantiates the potential absence of the interlocutor who may, and in this case does, stop responding.

But the telephone returns, and when it does, it is the narrator who has the privilege of picking it up or not: "Dans l'établissement, on me donna une petite situation. Je répondais au téléphone. Le docteur ayant un laboratoire d'analyse (il s'intéressait au sang), les gens entraient, buvaient une drogue ; étendus sur de petits lits, ils s'endormaient" (20). What I find significant here is not these lines in isolation but rather the way they develop the affective and social situation of the narrator, who is at this juncture living in an "establishment" where he is treated for a physical wound, his bludgeoned eyes, as well as a mental wound, his so-called misery or

inability to coexist with others in a way society deems proper. The paragraph preceding the second appearance of the telephone is as follows:

> "Même guéri, je doutais de l'être. Je ne pouvais ni lire ni écrire. J'étais environné d'un Nord brumeux. Mais voici l'étrangeté : quoique me rappelant le contact atroce, je dépérissais à vivre derrière des rideaux et des verres fumés. *Je voulais voir quelque chose en plein jour* ; j'étais rassasié de l'agrément et du confort de la pénombre ; j'avais pour le jour un désir d'eau et d'air. Et si voir c'était le feu, j'exigeais la plénitude du feu, et si voir c'était la contagion de la folie, je désirais follement cette folie" (19-20).

Juxtaposing the two appearances of the telephone, Langstaff writes that the machine "refuses dialogue and therefore an exchange with reason, represented paradoxically by the narrator's non-identical double within the psychiatric hospital" (406). Her interpretation is that the two telephonic scenes together compose an interrupted monologue, a call from the unhinged narrator outside the hospital to the hospitalized narrator, who is the one who stops responding to himself. Thus, it would be the narrator himself who, in the second telephonic instance, shirks reason, refusing to render himself (*se rendre*, to turn himself over) in language, which as Derrida tells us in a meditation on *la folie*, is in a sense always the language of reason: "Dès son premier souffle, la parole … n'ouvre son espace de parole qu'en enfermant la folie" (*L'écriture et la différence* 94). The reader may infer that it is the narrator who at times chooses not to respond once assigned the task of answering the mental hospital's telephone, and this may certainly be read as a rejection on the narrator's part of the demand to speak the language of reason. But I submit that the second telephone may also, like any literary machine, produce a different reading.

Read in relation to the desires expressed in the paragraph preceding it, the telephone may be read not only as a device that permits the rejection of reason (or the refusal to speak the language of reason) but also as an abridged *opening* to connection for a man whose privilege to connect with others has been doubly revoked. Cut off from what would appear to be unmediated relations to others in the forms of sight and sociality, the narrator is forced to settle for a

telephone, a task he takes up without question. But this triply mediated relation, which takes place via technology, in the context of institutional duty, and in the language of reason, always mediating itself, does not satisfy the narrator. He looks on covetously at the patients who come into the hospital to have their blood analyzed, opining that one scamming patient deserves better from the doctor. He also wanders the streets like a crab, venturing outside the confines of the hospital despite the danger of doing so. While walking around, he repeatedly sees a poster that reads, "*Toi aussi, tu le veux*," noting in response, "Certainement, je le voulais" (20-1). I would suggest that this nondescript direct object the narrator craves is precisely the thing for which he longs in the paragraph leading up to the telephonic scene: "voir quelque chose en plein jour," to see something in broad daylight, or in plain sight, as one says in English. Far from aspiring to cut all ties, for which the telephone cord may be read as a metonym, the narrator yearns to reestablish his access to the outside and laments the mediating structures isolating him from others. He claims to be wasting away [je dépérissais] behind the distorting mechanisms of curtains and smoked glass, and he longs for reading and writing, themselves channels to worlds outside himself. Notably, he desires this connection even though he recalls the pain of his last tactile encounter with an/other [le contact atroce], an encounter that deprives him of the very sight for which he seems to long. Indeed, the narrator desires the power of unmediated sight so forcefully that he is willing to expose himself to the "contagion of madness" for it. Juxtaposed with the unmediated sight the narrator desperately desires and cannot achieve, the telephone scene, inserted in between two passages of longing, illuminates the always-incomplete connection technicity offers, the lack it cannot fill.

Crucially, though, the dramatization of mediation via juxtaposition that the telephone scene allows does not mean technicity is not at work in connections unfacilitated by the

telephone, nor that complete sight or connection to the world outside oneself would be accessible to the narrator if only he were to regain sight. On the contrary, the telephone as well as the narrator's loss of physical sight and consequent need for tools make manifest the forces of mediation that always already condition sight, language, knowledge, and relations among subjects. The impossibility of direct observation and knowledge, even for those who possess full sight and extraordinary capacities of intellect and inspection by social standards, comes to the fore in the fraught encounters between the narrator and the doctors tasked with examining him. The doctors request that the narrator tell them "comment les choses se sont passées 'au juste'" (29). Dissatisfied with his response, they ask him to repeat himself and demand that he get around to "the facts," lending to the cyclical conversation "le caractère d'un interrogatoire autoritaire, surveillé et contrôlé par une règle stricte" (29). This "rule" rests on the assumption of the doctors, one an eye technician and the other a mental health specialist, that "un écrivain, un homme qui parle et qui raisonne avec distinction, est toujours capable de raconter des faits dont il se souvient" (30). The conflict in this story with no resolution is thus precisely that the doctors assume the narrator is capable of producing a story without meaningful difference, a story based on "the facts" that comes to a decisive end. They presume the possibility of empirical representation when there is no original, present, and undifferentiated event to represent. On the contrary, as Blanchot writes in *Le pas au-delà*, as concerns the production of a 'real' event, there is only the possibility of a remembering machine that is also a forgetting machine. What's more, the text this machine produces cannot assimilate to the authoritarian norms of the text's doctors, arbiters of rationality par excellence.

Of course, the doctors can search for evidence as they understand it in the narrator's story, and it is just this that they do, arrogating to themselves the right to search his room and claim its contents as testimony:

> "On ne s'en aperçoit pas, mais ce sont des rois. Ouvrant mes chambres, ils disaient : Tout ce qui est là nous appartient. Ils se jetaient sur mes rognures de pensée : Ceci est à nous. Ils interpellaient mon histoire : Parle, et elle se mettait à leur service. En hâte, je me dépouillais de moi-même. Je leur distribuais mon sang, mon intimité, je leur prêtais l'univers, je leur donnais le jour. Sous leurs yeux en rien étonnés, je devenais une goutte d'eau, une tache d'encre" (23).

The doctors, exemplary positivists, offer a foil for the sort of reading the narrator, and of course Blanchot across his many texts, demand. The text ironically states in a matter-of-fact fashion that the scraps of the narrator's thought [mes rognures de pensée], scattered writings in his bedroom, put themselves at the service of the doctors, who issue a command to them: "Parle." The irony is that the scraps of the narrator's thought and life may very well be read as empirical evidence of a history, or story, that can be reconstituted based on "the facts." The doctors will not necessarily detect anything deficient in their mode of analysis; to them, the scraps of paper will seem to speak, obeying the command. But in reading the narrator's bedroom objects for indisputable facts, for events that are real in themselves when events are only produced as real by forgetting machines, the doctors risk reducing his story, his history, to a distorted fraction of its full and multiple self. Thus, the narrator notes that under the magnifying scope of the scientists, his very self is emptied out [En hâte, je me dépouillais de moi-même]. The doctors are not surprised [leurs yeux en rien étonnés] by the evidence because they cannot be surprised, because in their deterministic, rationally mechanistic mode of reading they leave no room for the unexpected and thus the event of literary reading. But this absolutist method of reading [ce sont des rois] produces dissatisfying results: In lieu of a complex story, they reduce the narrator to a "drop of water, an ink stain" (23). Thus, at the end of their investigation, they are still left asking the

narrator: “Eh bien, où êtes-vous ? Où cachez-vous ? Se cacher est interdit, c’est une faute, etc.” (23).

The doctors implore the narrator to tell them where he is hiding, but the roadblock obstructing their path to truth is just as much the form of his account as their inability to listen to it in the way it demands. Theirs is a decidedly non-literary reading of a maximally differential or potentially literary text, a literature machine in waiting that can only get jammed up in the hands of empiricist operators. In an essay on *La folie du jour* and *L’instant de ma mort*, another short Blanchot text in which the impossibility of a pure empirical or historical account is at issue, Marie-Hélène Paret Passos writes that *La folie du jour* offers “ni début, ni fin. Ni temps, ni espace. Seul le secret qui revient dans un récit où rien ne se passe. Où rien ne passe. L’aveu est impossible, le témoignage latent” (207). The text offers a kind of secret the doctors are incapable of reading; there is a testimony to be read, but it cannot be read in the way they presume to read it. Similarly, Ginette Michaud writes that Blanchot, “qui a toujours privilégié l’effacement, l’impersonnalité et le retrait du Neutre, ne se confie pas naïvement, au décours de son œuvre et de sa vie, à la supposée transparence autobiographique, ni ne lui confie le dévoilement de la vérité, mais fait plutôt de celle-ci le lieu d’une sécrétion du secret” (59). Michaud writes this of *L’instant de ma* mort, but it holds for *La folie du jour* and any other text, no matter how seemingly autobiographical, that is subjected to the rigor of literary reading.

Indeed, the literature machine manufactures two degrees of secrets. The first is the “negative knowledge about the linguistic utterance” to which de Man refers. The language of any text read as literary is irreducibly ambiguous and multiple; this secret can be read, the most fundamental condition of literary reading, if one will delve into its digressions from semiotic

certainty. Yet as Derrida cautions, there is an even more resistant secret in texts, perhaps especially at work in but not limited to testimonies:

> "Par essence un témoignage est toujours autobiographique: il dit, à la première personne, *le secret partageable et impartageable* de ce qui m'est arrivé, à moi, à moi seul, le secret absolu de ce que j'ai été en position de vivre, voir, entendre, toucher, sentir et ressentir" (*Demeure* 51).

A reading of a text or testimony, spoken or written, can parse the meanings of linguistic utterances, as de Man advocates ("le secret partageable"), but it can never fully capture the sense or meaning of the experience to which the text refers ("le secret impartageable," or, I might say, "impossible à representer"). This irreducible secrecy is particularly evident in the case of testimonial accounts, and it is perhaps no accident that Blanchot turns to testimony in both *La folie du jour* and *L'instant de ma mort*, raising the stakes of his would-be narratives' quasi-incomprehensibility and staging the impossibility of the 'real' or representable event. But I would propose, as Derrida's reference to the "vacance comme situation de la littérature" (*L'écriture et la différence* 17) and Blanchot's void teach us, that this inexhaustibility, this "absolute" or "unshareable" secret beyond the more approachable secret of linguistic negativity, is not just a condition of testimonial texts but of literary texts in general. In a text read as literary, there is no essence to identify; this missing essence or center must remain secret, unspoken, to be sought after again in another event of reading. Not coincidentally, this inconclusive conclusion about the ultimate incomprehensibility of narrative is the one at which the narrator of *La folie du jour* himself arrives. After the doctors implore him to repeat his story, arriving at "the facts," the narrator notes: "Je dus reconnaître que je n'étais pas capable de former un récit avec ces événements. J'avais perdu le sens de l'histoire, cela arrive dans bien des maladies" (29). The narrator confesses that he is unable to produce a full account of the event he has undergone, the event whose truth the doctors implore him to disclose.

It is ironic that the narrator parrots the language of his less-than-generous interpreters, calling himself mad, as they would, when the text leads us to believe it is not necessarily he who is approaching the situation unreasonably. Indeed, the narrator calls his inability to produce a clear historical account of glass being thrown in his face a sign of illness when, as the name of the text suggests, the true madness of the encounter between the narrator and the doctors is the doctors' expectation that he will produce such an account. The madness of the day is thus the madness of reason itself, the madness of assuming a rigorously empirically verifiable account of events should be possible when no real, fully unified event has, as far as the witness can tell, taken place. Ultimately, the text calls the hegemony of rationality itself into question, and this is the note on which it ends: "Un récit ? Non, pas de récit, plus jamais" (30). At the end, the text pronounces itself open-ended. Against the doctors' expectation that he will repeat himself more clearly the following time, the narrator commits to the eternal recurrence of his unclear narrative that is not a narrative, not in the sense (a story comprising beginning, middle, and end) that his interlocutors understand. The end of the narrator's story is thus but an iteration of the beginning, something the text underscores when it repeats the lines of its first paragraph on its penultimate page. At the end, there is a beginning, and at the beginning, there is neither nature nor archive, neither origin nor simplicity, but the machinations of difference, a remembering-forgetting, creative-destructive, literary machine.

Now, before moving onto the future of the literature machine, it is worth considering the conditions of my interpretation of *La folie du jour*, a reading that imposes a convergence of sense on a story of madness or nonsense, even as it touts the power of nonsense or incomprehensibility in the thesis it seeks to advance. Is it contradictory to draw a lesson from literature about literature when the lesson is that literature offers no fully generalizable lessons, that it must be

read each time without predetermined conclusions? For this consideration, it is helpful to turn to the concept of law, a major component of *La folie du jour* and frequent concern in the philosophies of difference to which I have turned in this essay on the path to theorizing the literature machine. In a passage on the law, Deleuze writes of repetition:

> "Elle est contre la loi : contre la forme semblable et le contenu équivalent de la loi. Si la répétition peut être trouvée, même dans la nature, c'est au nom d'une puissance qui s'affirme contre la loi, qui travaille sous les lois, peut-être supérieure aux lois. Si la répétition existe, elle exprime à la fois une singularité contre le général, une universalité contre le particulier, un remarquable contre l'ordinaire, une instantanéité contre la variation, une éternité contre la permanence. À tous égards, la répétition, c'est la transgression. Elle met en question la loi, elle en dénonce le caractère nominal ou général, au profit d'une réalité plus profonde et plus artiste" (*Différence et répétition* 9).

Deleuze distinguishes between generality and repetition. Generality refers to particulars that can be substituted for one another. By contrast, repetition refers to singularities; a thing and its repetition are irreducibly different from one another and can thus not simply be exchanged in the manner of a substitution that would treat them as equal. While Deleuze initially appears to link this notion of repetition as difference to a *purely* aesthetic experience of sensations and feelings, noting that "On répète une œuvre d'art comme singularité sans concept," he quickly turns to the implications of differential repetition for thought (8). In particular, he sees Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard as having initiated "quelque chose de tout à fait nouveau" in the history of philosophy, a "philosophy of the future," as Nietzsche himself put it.[14] Another way of framing this epistemic breakthrough of Nietzsche's is as that same "transgression" of the law that repetition marks. Works like Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, itself a philosophy of the future, transgress the law because even when illustrating a principle pertinent beyond themselves, they change it

[14] See Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (Random House, 1966). Nietzsche even writes in the opening pages of that text of "new philosophers … coming up" who will no longer maintain metaphysicians' "fundamental faith … in opposite values," a reference that may be anachronistically understood as a foreshadowing of the coming of such thinkers of difference as Derrida, Blanchot, and Deleuze (10-11).

rather than merely shedding light upon it. Thus, Deleuze, following Nietzsche, criticizes Hegel, who "représente des concepts, au lieu de dramatiser les Idées : il fait un faux théâtre, un faux drame, un faux mouvement" (18). The purpose of writing in the transgressive, Nietzschean sense is not to see in texts the pure illustration of a concept; it is to see in them something singular and different, something that indeed affects the senses but in so doing also pushes thought in fresh directions. If we are to read *La folie du jour* or any literature machine as a literature machine, we must affirm the copies it produces of itself as unsubstitutable for any copies to come before or after and as unsubstitutable for other literary texts even as they exemplify repeatable forms of literariness. For the mechanics of difference and repetition to function in the literary text, we must detect something beyond the "nominal and general character" of the concept one may call literature machines. In the machinations of a singular reading of a singular artwork, one must see a repetition of the literature machine that is nonetheless singular, a text-machine to which the theorization of a concept falls short of doing justice.

It is, then, to justice that I return in one last round of reading *La folie du jour*, considering the text's two laws and the singular reality that may or may not appear in readings of them. The narrator tells us that behind the backs of the doctors tasked with interrogating him, he notices "la silhouette de la loi. Non pas la loi que l'on connaît, qui est rigoureuse et peu agréable : celle-ci était autre. Loin de tomber sous sa menace, c'est moi qui semblais l'effrayer" (24). This law reinforces or stands behind ("derrière leur dos") the doctors' demands: One of her goals, too, is to make the narrator "'rendre justice'" — in quotes in the original (24). The quotes betray skepticism on the narrator's part as to what the law understands by justice, or specifically what it means to render or do justice. Sure enough, her demand for justice seems to be the same as that of the doctors: that the narrator speak, providing an eyewitness account and thus first-hand

evidence that can be used to bring the person who threw glass in his face 'to justice.' It is for this reason that the narrator scares the law, maintaining power over her rather than the other way around. His power against this law of laws — this epistemological law, of empiricism and rational thought, underpinning the practice of law in societies such as the narrator's where an eyewitness account of assault will deprive the assaulter of his freedom, a fate called justice — is to remain blind and silent. In so doing, he deprives the law of the evidence it needs, the empirical evidence that is also the only kind of evidence out of which the doctors and the laws they follow are able to make justice. Without the narrator's testimony, the laws that "one knows" [que l'on connaît] cannot be applied, and the law that governs laws is impotent. The criminal justice system, the machine of justice, breaks down, producing nothing.

What, then, is produced by this literature machine that is also a machine of injustice, of justice not done and thus possibly also of an impossible kind of justice, the justice of what is called injustice? Does this broken justice-producing machine appertain to the category of conceptual representations or differential repetitions, to permanence or eternity, generality or singularity? I propose, returning to Blanchot's forgetting machine, which produces real events only in retrospect, sketching them in the image of the future, that the literature machine called *La folie du jour* produces two kinds of events. The first kind is the event of reading itself, that which has already been happening between these words and Blanchot's and will happen again on the condition that another reading happens upon it. The second kind is the events of the so-called narrative, fictional events that are not unreal for being so. Each of these events — the event of my reading, which can only exist on the condition that it is read in turn, and the narrated events I re-articulate in reading, which must be articulated once more by that same reading to come — may be read as representations of the literature machine. That is, they may be taken as nothing

more than the illustrations of a concept, its contours coming to light in accordance with the law the concept lays down. Indeed, as Derrida cautions of language, however crazy in its own right, that seeks to champion the mad, there is a thetic quality to all interpretation that is as inevitable as the figures of light and vision at least partially argumentative or explanatory writing is wont to employ.[15] Yet as Nietzsche, that most self-affirming and -effacing of literature machine engineers, whose *Beyond Good and Evil* was only the "Vorspiel *einer Philosophie der Zukunft*," teaches us, this writing, like all writing, provides the possibility of literariness. Read again, these words recur, becoming something different. The literature machine, functioning from the beginning, already whirring in the distance like the ringing before a telephone call yet to come, starts up again. Even when all the lights go out, the copy machine keeps running, transforming the output once thought possible of it.

The future of literature machines

Suppose there were a machine endowed with artificial intelligence that wrote what were widely recognized, by human interpreters, to be poems of the highest aesthetic quality. Perhaps the poems would be complex enough to engage at great length professional literary critics tasked with parsing their many meanings and allusions. Perhaps they would render images or even feelings widely agreed to be greatly moving, capable of lending language to experiences even credentialed aesthetes struggle to describe. Would this machine be a literature machine? How would it differ from the literature machines I have thus far described? What new or evolved theories of literature might this machine require? Would this machine represent the future of

[15] This is the thrust of Derrida's critique of Foucault in his reading of *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* in "Cogito et l'histoire de la folie," *L'écriture et la difference*.

literature machines, of literature itself? Would the essence of literature change if machines were capable of interpreting it or of helping people interpret it?

The fundamental weakness in much of the scholarship belonging to the so-called digital humanities and especially to computational literary study, which seeks to bring quantitative methods to the field, is that it presumes to offer something novel just because 'actual' literature machines are involved — and often does so without theorizing the literariness of the objects it computes, mediates, or produces via digital methods. Homing in on new materialism and speculative realism's representations of themselves as innovative departures from deconstruction and other 'twentieth-century' practices of criticism and theory, Jonathan Basile criticizes their branding of themselves as the "self-assured transgression of the avant-garde" (226). Indeed, academic literary studies is an industry that traffics in claims of novelty and cultural relevance, and the very phrase 'machine learning' in the title of a project in literary studies appears to summon dreams of grant money and publications. What's more, for some time now, literature departments, especially those of English literature, have set aside specific tenure-track appointments for scholars with skills in the so-called digital humanities, incentivizing the brand and its novelty campaign. But just because a poem is written by machines via algorithms instead of by 'humans' does not make it fundamentally different — more, less, or differently literary — than what one might too hastily call conventional or analog poems. Similarly, the use of computer-assisted quantitative methods to assess patterns in a text, while ostensibly original as a method, does not confer originality, in the sense of a vital and therefore valuable addition, to the field of literary study. Rather, these ostensibly machinic texts and forms of criticism face the same existential imperative that attends all work aspiring to the name of 'literary' study, criticism, or theory: They must develop or at least acknowledge a theory of the literary, find the

literariness in the objects they study, and explain what literariness produces or offers to knowledge. This is how, in the encounter between text and reader, a text machine becomes a literature machine. Failing a thorough reckoning with the literary, scholarship has nothing to do with literature in any but the most banal sense. That is the case of much computational and digital literary study.

Of course, I am hardly the first to propose a wide-ranging critique of the field. Polemics about the increased attention to machines and technology in literary criticism and theory, not as figures but as physical, text-producing mechanisms and methodological instruments, date back several years and target such work's insightfulness, quantitative rigor, and political motivations. Questioning the perspicacity of the digital humanities' "project-based" approaches, David Golumbia sets out to "challenge the right of DH to say that it eschews the methods, standards, and critical orientation of literary scholarship and simultaneously to declare that its products must be sanctioned by the profession *as* literary scholarship" (158). The literariness and critical rigor of computational literary criticism, Golumbia warns, are not evident. Nan Z. Da critiques what she calls computational literary study on quantitative grounds, concluding, "In a nutshell the problem with computational literary analysis as it stands is that what is robust is obvious (in the empirical sense) and what is not obvious is not robust… There is a fundamental mismatch between the statistical tools that are used and the objects to which they are applied" (601). In other words, statistics and the heavy-duty quantitative assessments for which computers are helpful are simply not well positioned to provide rigorous insights on literary texts that are unavailable to non-computational analysis. Citing a similar discrepancy between the objects of humanistic analysis and quantitative methods, information scholar Johanna Drucker calls on digital humanists not to apply methods from "disciplines whose fundamental epistemological

assumptions are at odds with humanistic method" to the humanities. Drucker primarily critiques digital humanists' failure to consider the constructed or contextual condition of what one may somewhat mistakenly call data (which derives from the Latin for 'given' when data is, as Drucker understands it, taken, captured, or constructed in given contexts, leading her to rebrand data as "capta").

Some digital humanities scholarship does warrant the most critical of these critiques, specifically that which actively opposes its work to the primarily interpretive endeavors of most literary critics and theorists. Matthew Jockers writes of the "methodological advantage" the sciences enjoy vis-à-vis the unfortunately unobjective humanities (6). Specifically singling out Derrida's failure to appreciate the objective empirical components that supposedly define literature, Andrew Piper deploys computation to show that patterns "indicative of fictionality" include "exclamation marks, questions marks, quotation marks, [and] first- and second-person pronouns" as well as the prevalence of third-person pronouns outside of dialogue (108-9). In so doing, Piper appears to provide a case in point for Nan Z. Da's claim that quantitative methods are poorly suited to provide penetrating (or more-than-obvious) insights about the objects of literary study. Another scapegoat in the positivist domain is Andrew Goldstone, who criticizes what might be called the more moderate or still-interpretive approaches within the computational humanities, panning research that offers "not facts but readings" (641). Goldstone advocates approaches that more wholly "eschew textual commentary" (638). And even the moderates of computational literary study, who want to hold hands with the dialecticians and deconstructionists while affirming that there is room in the industry for all, are liable to betray just how little there is of literature in the form of it that their scholarship produces. Literary historian Ted Underwood, one such moderate, muses that a Google "representative" once asked

him "whether it might not be easier simply to teach some literary history to graduate students in information science" (162). Underwood calls the comment "perceptive," implying that researchers without any training in literature might adequately implement the methods he champions (albeit with reduced attention to "historical differences," the apparent benefit of training in literary study) (162). Alas, the risk that an information scientist might not be equipped to evaluate concepts of the literary, gauge the effectiveness of different approaches to the literary object, or weigh the possible meanings of a signifier does not appear to factor into the equation.

As one might imagine, I contend that any method of 'literary' study that treats interpretation as optional or supplementary to data collection or pattern recognition would make for a poor future for the field. One of this dissertation's aims is to show by contradistinction that such approaches also provide limited grounds for critical meditations on the relation between literature and machines. A historian may recruit machines to assess the length of titles across vast corpora of novels in order to make claims about the market for literary writing in given countries in given time periods.[16] Likewise, a scholar interested in representations of gender may leverage computational methods to identify a correlation between the usage of certain verbs and the characterization of men and women in novels.[17] The fundamental shortcoming of this kind of research *as would-be literary study* or criticism is that it fails to grapple with or produce the singular knowledge that literature, and no other kind of discourse, makes possible. Data-driven conclusions on economic conditions and views of gender in a given time period are useful for history and even the history of the body of texts that happen to have been published as poems, novels, or plays (the body of work that is commonly and uncritically called literature). But data-

[16] Moretti, *Distant Reading*.
[17] See Matthew Jockers and Gabi Kirilloff, "Understanding Gender and Character Agency in the Nineteenth-Century Novel," 2016.

driven methods used to reach conclusions about markets and gender may be used just as effectively on newspaper articles as on so-called literary texts. Far from literature machines, which are literary thanks to the difference-producing mechanism of the text-reader encounter, texts studied in the manner of the computational studies I describe above are machines in a hollow sense: sameness-producing text machines stripped down to their simplest components, those binary enough to be rendered as data and processed as statistics. What these approaches miss is what Blanchot posits as literature's world-rending effects, which, beyond the development of any one kind of technology, illuminate the technicity always already at play in our relation to ourselves, texts, other objects, and one another. In other words, these approaches traffic in pattern recognition, formal or historical, and spectacular displays of manifestly digital mediation at the expense of examining the rarer and more incisive insights of literature machines: what they might tell us about the conditions of language and understanding and all the questions that surge forth from that fundamentally literary problem. In this thesis, I consider some of the problems that stem from the literary one of language's irreducible difference or interpretability: the construction of subjectivity, the articulation of feelings and trauma, the configuration of social relations, and the politics of marketing, to name a few. In each case, it is because I depart from the originary repetition and self-differentiation of the literature machine that I am able to consider its effects on subjectivity, affect, and social and political relations.

Still, I want to close this first chapter by considering some of the more complex interventions in the digital humanities. My qualm with some of the most promising examples of this work, which I will divide into the categories of computational formalism and computational media studies, is not that they lack potential as literary study in the more-than-empiricist sense I have attempted to develop through my theorization of the literature machine. Indeed, existing

scholarship in computational formalism and media studies uses machines for analysis and assesses the semiotic ramifications of digital materiality, respectively, in ways that could illuminate the difference at work in literary language. These methods are also not inconsistent with the epistemological reflections on the being of literature and the truth of language that I consider indispensable features of literary interpretation. My critique of these approaches to literature, which foreground machines in the production, presentation, and interpretation of literary texts, is that contrary to the claims of many of their practitioners, they do not mark radical departures from other forms of interpretive literary criticism and theory. Indeed, they are compatible with the assumptions of the interpretive practices they sometimes call into question. If these emerging fields of study represent some of the futures of the literature machine, it is not a wholly new future from which they emerge. It would be more apt to say these seemingly new approaches come to us from the past — iterations, rather than rejections, of the literature machine as it can be theorized based on the work of such thinkers as Blanchot, Deleuze, and Derrida.

Stephen Ramsay's algorithmic criticism is a prime example of computational formalism and its compatibility with the literature machine as I understand it. Ramsay deploys computational methods to identify and sometimes rearrange the forms of literary texts, leveraging computational methods in the service of interpretation. He does not set out to correct the rhetorical and methodological wrongs of literary study broadly speaking, arguing on the contrary, "Literary criticism operates within a hermeneutical framework in which the specifically scientific meaning of fact, metric, verification, and evidence simply do not apply" (7). In other words, the algorithmic critic demonstrates an understanding that simply producing facts about a text or its historical context does not make for illuminating literary scholarship; he recognizes

that computational enumerations or disruptions of form must be paired with interpretation. This insight aligns with plenty of other not necessarily digital or computational interpretive literary practices, which often identify the formal structures of texts as points of departure for more complex readings of them.

Ramsay implicitly illustrates both the literary potential of algorithmic criticism and its distorted framing vis-à-vis other forms of literary scholarship when he turns to digital humanist Stefan Sinclair's tool *HyperPo*. Texts put into *HyperPo* are "transformed into data points and visualizations" (74). Of *HyperPo*'s ability to present texts in different ways and foreground different elements of them, Ramsay writes:

> "For all its concerns with numerical information, *HyperPo* consciously works against the realization of 'results.' Instead, we engage in a kind of 'microscopic reading,' which, *like the close reading it both analogizes and contradicts*, draws us into certain kinds of noticings. … We might think of these [noticings] as the 'facts' of the text, but whatever knowledge is gained from their perusal stands at a marked distance from the quest for factuality that usually motivates linguistic and philological inquiry" (76).

What I find instructive about this example is not that it presents a way of thinking about texts in literary studies that is wholly new or that it desacralizes some doctrine of literary theory but rather that it at least partially disavows its relation to close reading while demonstrating a way of thinking about texts that is actually consistent with close reading and even the practices of reading associated with poststructuralism, including deconstruction. The error in Ramsay's framing of algorithmic criticism's approach has nothing to do with its potential insights, which are ostensibly unobjectionable by the standards of deconstruction and other interpretive critical practices. As I state above, identifying and then troubling or interpreting forms is standard critical practice in literary studies. Ramsay's error is to claim to embark on a practice of reading that meaningfully departs from existing practices of close reading when algorithmic criticism is, at least in its principles as Ramsay describes them above, perfectly compatible with them.

Indeed, Ramsay even praises a form of reading, possibly assisted by computers and developed first by Jerome McGann and Lisa Samuels, called "deformance," which involves rearranging texts into different sequences and forms in order to arrive at multiple readings of them.[18] Ramsay hails this practice, which a program like *HyperPo* might allow a critic to visualize or instantiate, for "unleashing the potentialities that altered perspectives may reveal" (33). In so doing, he points to the same always-already machinic and fundamentally difference-producing quality that led the close readers of previous generations from whom he aims to distance himself to turn to the machine as a figure for textuality and difference.[19] The mutability of the signifier or open-endedness of literary texts has always hinged on the notion that texts will take on different meanings when read by different readers at different times in different contexts, a truth about the texts we call literature that a digital technology such as *HyperPo* happens to instantiate visually.

The dubious departure algorithmic criticism is supposed to mark from deconstruction and other literary theories and philosophies of difference is even more apparent when Ramsay refers to them directly. At one point, Ramsay claims the signifying dynamism of a text he examines is not a "testimony to the poststructuralist insight that textuality is a shifting pattern of signification" but rather that the text at hand is "always coalescing into stability by virtue of the readerly process of deformation" (54). It is difficult to identify a constitutive difference in the critical treatment of a text described in these two ways, and the extensive theorization of signifying instability (or difference or *différance*) in thinkers such as Derrida, de Man, and Blanchot finds no equal justification or theorization for "coalescing into stability" in Ramsay's

[18] See Jerome McGann and Lisa Samuels. "Deformance and Interpretation," in *Radiant Textuality: Literature After the World Wide Web*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
[19] Indeed, Ramsay even refers to Derrida when discussing the various iterations of a text that emerge in rereading, seemingly noting of his own accord that readings assisted by programs like *HyperPo* do not mark a radical break from deconstructive reading practices but rather another, computational iteration of them (77).

prose. Yet it is less difficult to understand why a scholar might lay claim to uncharted methodological and epistemic territory in an industry where workers stake their reputations on newness. By drawing a contrast to what he dubiously deems "our poststructuralist age" (56), Ramsay finds a place for himself in the rightly contested, "self-assured transgression of the avant-garde" (Basile 226). While transgressions are marketable, Ramsay's use of machines to parse the machinations of literature machines is not as much a transgression as it is an iteration or update. Algorithmic criticism and other computer-assisted readings of form do not alter the status of the literary object as difference-producing machine; they simply use contemporary technology to illustrate the mutable formal components of machines whose differences predate and will outlast the popularity of any one technology, technical method, or school of criticism.[20]

The same coexistence of literary potential and iterative difference as opposed to radical newness can be found in computational media studies, which considers how the computational media essential to contemporary literary production shape the object of knowledge we profess to study as scholars of literature. N. Katherine Hayles summarizes the perspective driving studies of computational media, writing, "Lulled into somnolence by five hundred years of print, literary studies have been slow to wake up to the importance of media-specific analysis. Literary criticism and theory are shot through with unrecognized assumptions specific to print" ("Print is Flat" 67). Hayles is clearly right to observe that the very way text is presented on a print or digital page and whether that page is print or digital can significantly influence the outcomes of signification and literary reading. This is particularly obvious as "electronic textuality vibrantly asserts its presence" — who would deny that the deformed text of *HyperPo* Ramsay analyzes

[20] For another promising, interpretive example of computational formalism, see Hoyt Long and Richard Jean So. "Literary Pattern Recognition: Modernism between Close Reading and Machine Learning." *Critical Inquiry* 42, no. 2 (2016): 235-267.

contains different signifying possibilities thanks to digital mediation (Hayles, "Print is Flat," 67)? One may also convincingly argue that the digital infrastructure underpinning the production and distribution of texts adds a layer of complexity to readings of them, as does Avery Slater, or that the ability to observe the palimpsestic evolution of texts across electronically stored drafts multiplies the possibility for interpretations of them, whatever perspective the interpretations of those drafts may happen to emphasize, as Matthew Kirschenbaum allows us to imagine in *Track Changes*. However, the importance of the materiality of the signifier to interpretation has been evident since paragons of the so-called linguistic turn such as Derrida and Hélène Cixous played dramatically with white space as well as types and sizes of font and printed parts of their texts upside down.[21] Slater is correct in calling the need for attentiveness to digital media in readings of electronic texts an "update" to — not, in my view, a radical break from — understandings of literary reading and the materiality of the signifier such as de Man's (463). Indeed, if the various drafts of a text, its intentionally computer-distorted forms, and its presentation in digital channels are objects of analysis just as viable as the so-called original print text sanctioned and distributed by the author and publishing houses, the understanding of these digitally inflected copies as sources of interpretation just as valid as the 'original' print text may be attributed to precisely the theories of literature developed by poststructural theorists. If the machinations of digital media are sources of literary analysis just as fecund as the print text, it is because the original text has always already been a literature machine — multiple at its origin, copied from its first appearance, non-identical to itself even in its most traditional print form.

As is true of Ramsay and algorithmic criticism, then, my critique of computational media studies would be its framing of itself as a departure from the interpretive principles championed

[21] See Derrida, *Glas* (Paris: Galilée, 1974) and Hélène Cixous, *Partie* (Paris: des femmes, 1976).

by more long-standing theories of literature and literary reading. This is not to say one should subscribe to the interpretive perspectives of all practitioners of digital media analysis; those perspectives vary, and they will not all be attentive to semiotic difference in the way I take to be essential to an encounter with what is truly a literature machine. But there is nothing essential about attention to digital media that marks a rejection of differential or poststructural theories of literature. I take issue, then, with genealogical remarks on literary study like those of Hayles when she, like Ramsay, seeks distance from "several decades of poststructuralism" and reduces that assemblage of approaches to "close scrutiny of individual texts that uncovers and destabilizes the founding dichotomies generating the text's dynamics" (*How We Think* 31). Hayles' description of poststructuralism is a common caricature of deconstruction, only one poststructuralism and a body of work more complex than destabilizing binaries at that. More importantly for the present argument, though, Hayles claims that, relative to poststructuralism, "A different kind of theory emerges when the focus shifts to the digital tools used to analyze texts and convey results" (*How We Think* 31). Does a "different kind of theory" of literature or literary reading emerge when digital concerns are introduced to literary study? Should it? Must it? From what theories of literature and literary reading (besides the supposed importance of destabilizing dichotomies) do primarily digital theories of literature and literary reading diverge?

Hayles suggests close readers may prefer literary interpretation attentive to minute differences because "humans are notoriously egocentric" and believe themselves central to "how events originate and develop" (29). She also attributes advocacy of close reading by scholars such as Jane Gallop and Barbara Johnson to the belief that "close reading not only assures the professionalism of the profession but also makes literary studies an important asset to the culture" (58). But in the truncated citation of Johnson that Hayles adduces to support this claim,

Johnson herself writes that close attention to signification is essential to literary reading not for professional or political reasons but because it is the only kind of interpretation that can "measure up to the rigorous perversity and seductiveness of literary language" (347).

It is, then, as Johnson suggests. The task of literary study is interpretation attuned to slight semiotic differences due not to egocentrism or careerism (and indeed, it would be news to me if deconstruction, and not the digital humanities, were one's direct ticket to a career in the academic humanities today) but to a theory of what the literary is: a type of text, itself mechanical, that always differs from itself and, to be read as truly literary, must be read with rigorous attention to its multiplicities or differences. Digital approaches to literary criticism may indeed introduce a "different kind of theory" if they advance a different theory of what literature is. But if they merely assume literature refers to novels and poems, they introduce no theory whatsoever, substituting an uncritical empiricist presumption for the whole of literary theory. Thankfully, for those of us who would like to see literary theory and attention to the digital in its various forms persist in academic literary study, the more illuminating efforts in digital or computational criticism do not necessarily instantiate a break from poststructural theories of literature. On the contrary, they may well owe their legitimacy as often under-theorized critical practices to those same theories, which teach us that an algorithmically rearranged or electronic text is just as legitimate an analytical object as its print counterpart. To the extent that some efforts in the digital humanities represent the future of literature machines, those futures belong just as much to the future of literary criticism and theory as to its past.

The relation between literature and machines, even literary texts produced or interpreted by machines, is not new. It is essential and transhistorical. Each text machine is liable to become a literature machine, one whose differences remain to be discovered.

Chapter 2

The Programmatic Affects of Duras

"Ainsi, Lol fut mariée sans l'avoir voulu, de la façon qui lui convenait, sans passer par la sauvagerie d'un choix, sans avoir à plagier le crime qu'aurait été, aux yeux de quelques-uns, le remplacement par un être unique du partant de T. Beach et surtout sans avoir trahi l'abandon exemplaire dans lequel il l'avait laissée" (*Lol V. Stein* 31).

The definitions of program precede the computer program.[22] A program, as in the program preceding an event, may refer to a notice that alerts the reader to what is to come. It may also refer to what we commonly call a computer program, "a series of coded instructions and definitions which when fed into a computer automatically *directs* its operation in performing a particular task" (OED, my emphasis). The distinction between these definitions, one seemingly analog and the other clearly digital, is not so clear, still less so in the case of the literature machine. Indeed, when I invoke the word 'program' to refer to the destiny of the literature machine, I refer both to an alert about an event to come and to instructions that direct, or control, its operation. But to what extent a text's program is indeed able to control its operation — that is, the ways it is read — hinges on the text at hand as well as the conditions of its encounter with a reader.[23] Just as a text not typically recognized as literary may be read in a literary fashion, thus

[22] See Wendy Hui Kyong Chun.

[23] In *Poetry and Mind*, whose proclamation "What one cannot compute, one must poetize, and think" (113) animates this project, Laurent Dubreuil makes a similar distinction between what he calls the power of the computer "program" to predict the unfoldings of a text and the text's "poetic programme," which "would not be *pre*dicted by our minds in any robust way" (59). The emphasis of my use of the term differs in that, while Dubreuil focuses on the reader and the computer's abilities to predict the contents (the program) and the potentially contradictory effects (the programme) of the text, I see the program as a metatextual constellation of forces that conditions the "programme." In other words, when Dubreuil notes the unexpected qualities and semiotic effects of the poem he analyzes and adduces these elements as evidence of a "programme" beyond the reach of the "program," the "programme" he discovers is, in the lexicon of this chapter, itself both programmatic and anti-programmatic. It is programmatic in that it is his own training and cultural situation (as he earlier acknowledges) that allows him to discover this "programme" likely invisible to the computer program's predictive and interpretive capacities, but the programme is also anti-programmatic in that, as Dubreuil avers for the author of the poem, the programme-atic reading (like the poem's writing) only emerges "through the performance of writing" via unconscious and conscious means (60). What I wish to emphasize is that no element of the interpretive experience is not programmatic in the sense to which I refer here. It is just that — and this is the paradox of decision-making and of thought that interests me — what is necessarily programmatic in the encounter between reader and text (even the most complex or perhaps "poetic"

becoming a literature machine, a text published as a novel may be read in a way that is not literary. Therefore, if the literature machine itself is to have a program, this program does not necessarily reside in the material of the text itself, though some texts may lend themselves more readily to literary reading than others. The program of literary reading — the constellation of forces that shapes the interpretive outcome of an encounter between reader and text — exceeds what most readily passes for the text's contents.

Of course, the words of a text are the most obvious component of its program, and the content of the text shapes its reading. But a text's program is always subject to disruption; it is not *simply* executed, its content is not simply communicated, and if the text is to become literary, it must be read as complex, as having multiple possible senses, where one sense might otherwise be taken to do. The language of a literary text is not reducible to information — if information is understood as verbal content capable of being transmitted or communicated from one person to another or from the text, seemingly independent, to its reader without ambiguity, interpretation, or the interference of context.[24] Rather, the reader determines the signification of the text in the culturally situated, if not historically determined, event of an encounter with it, and the meaning

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elements of that encounter) is also potentially surprising, even singular, and that conditional yet unpredictable singularity is the sine qua non of the literature machine's becoming-literary, or the text machine's contingent transformation into a literature machine.

[24] A number of texts have influenced my understanding of the disparity between language and information in the sense I describe above. One of them is *What Is Information?*, in which the German philosopher of science Peter Janich thoroughly debunks the "myth," to use his word, that information is natural. This myth fosters and corresponds to the misconceptions that all language can be reduced to information, or simply communicated messages, and that language is therefore best studied by the sciences. Another is Jacques Derrida's "Signature Event Context," one of many texts in which Derrida underscores the importance of context and interpretation in determining the meaning of language, which is fundamentally indeterminate and therefore irreducible to acontextual information. A third is *Poetry and Mind*, in which Dubreuil argues that poetry and literature incorporate, but are not reducible to and allow us to think beyond, the normative structures of language and thought. Others might note here the pertinence of cybernetics, the "field of communication and control," which comes from the Greek for "steers-man" (Wiener 18) but is perhaps overly given to reducing language and the control that can be exercised through it to the uncomplicated communication of information ("The most fundamental conviction of cybernetic theory is that it all comes down to messages (i.e., information) sent and responded to (i.e., feedback)" (Wiener xi)). For a history of the relation between literature and information in twentieth-century French thought with special attention to cybernetics, see Kohlbry.

of the text emerges in the interplay between programmatic forces of control and interpretive freedom.[25] These programmatic forces include not just the words on the page but also a text's art and images, its branding, the historical and cultural contexts in which it is produced and read, as well as the economic factors that shape readings of it. Neither mechanization nor freedom is total at the scene of literary reading, and neither can exist without the other.

A program is not in itself a malevolent or anti-literary force. A writer may force a particularly constrictive program upon her own text, believing the former to foster creativity, even literariness itself, in the latter, as in the case of Oulipo.[26] Computer programs themselves may also be used to generate literary texts with varying degrees of involvement from human writers and programmers.[27] In my view, these constrictive and algorithmic programs, digital or analog, do not usher in a new epoch of programmatic literature; they render more visible and perhaps all the more constrictive programmatic forces that have always conditioned the production of literature machines. These more-than-digital programmatic constraints have always shaped and will always shape both the writing of texts and their interpretation. Thus, literary programs are neither wholly new phenomena unique to the information age nor nefarious digital incursions on the nobly analog practice of literary writing and reading. They should neither be celebrated nor denounced as such.

Just as a literature machine is mechanical and more than mechanical (repetitive and different in each of its iterations, impersonal and dependent on its reader), the literary program

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[25] See Derrida, *For What Tomorrow*, on freedom, the event, and the machine (e.g., 48-9).

[26] A couple of exemplary cases, among many others, are Georges Perec's lipogram *La disparition*, whose three hundred pages lack the letter e, and Raymond Queneau's *Exercices de style*, an Oulipo precursor in which Queneau recounts the 'same' basic plot ninety-nine times in ninety-nine different ways.

[27] Cf. Bloomfield and Campaignolle for a discussion of the French *littérature numérique*, or digital literature, as well as its relation to Oulipo. They point out the overlap between approaches emphasizing constraint as a component of literary production and literature produced through computational processes. For a discussion of electronic literature, or literature produced through computational processes and media, in the Anglo-American context, see Hayles.

may be described as both programmatic and anti-programmatic. It is programmatic in that it is an apparatus of signifiers, images, cultural norms, and economic incentives that alerts the reader to what the text may become and provides the instructions for how it is to be read. But the program conditioning literary reading and the production of the literature machine is also anti-programmatic because, as the Oulipians are at pains to demonstrate, constraint and control are not wholly anathema to freedom; from all kinds of constraints (ideological, linguistic, economic, and so on), the reader may nevertheless devise something singular and unprecedented. The literature machine's program provides the materials for its own overtaking or defiance; it is within the program itself, within its words, within the ideology and various forces that surround the text, that the means to surpass the program can be found.[28]

In the coming pages, I turn to the work of Marguerite Duras to expand my theorization of the program, which refers not only to the conditions that shape literary reading but also to similarly paradoxical, and thus potentially literary, narrative forms that unfold within texts themselves. In section one, I turn to Duras' texts to elucidate these programmatic narrative forms, which, like the program that conditions literary reading, control and prefigure events to come while enabling the arrival of events divergent from the expectations of those who undergo them. Section two provides the theoretical foundation for my interpretation of some of the key concepts and questions that arise in Duras' texts. I define affect, propose a way of reading affect in texts, and articulate the relation between affect and events. Sections three and four interrogate the logic of the affective event and its relation to the program, delving also into the challenge programmatic affects in Duras' *Lol V. Stein* pose to the metaphysics of decision-making. I close

[28] Cf. Dubreuil, *The Intellective Space*, for a perspective on the relation between the rules that always condition thought as well as language and the possibilities of exceeding them without destroying them or entirely leaving them behind. Dubreuil calls these two regimes of thought the cognitive and intellective.

the chapter by considering the link between this study and the epistemic norms of our increasingly programmatic present. Like chapter one's theorization of the literature machine, then, chapter two attempts to think what literariness teaches us about the language of technology and what the language of technology might elucidate about literature at a time when technology is increasingly used to program literary reading itself.[29]

Duras' programs

Events befall characters in Duras' texts, in which the program appears as a bodily, less-than-conscious force that compels characters to act in ways inexplicable to others and even to themselves. Consider the following passage from *L'amant*:

"Je lui dis de venir, qu'il doit recommencer à me prendre. Il vient. … Je lui dis ce désir de lui. Il me dit d'attendre encore. Il me parle, il dit *qu'il a su tout de suite, dès la traversée du fleuve, que je serais ainsi* après mon premier amant, que j'aimerais l'amour, il dit qu'il sait déjà que lui je le tromperai et aussi que je tromperai tous les hommes avec qui je serai. Il dit que quant à lui il a été l'instrument de son propre malheur. Je suis heureuse de tout ce qu'il m'annonce et je le lui dis. … Il me dit que je suis son seul amour, et c'est ça qu'il doit dire et c'est ça qu'on dit quand *on laisse le dire se faire, quand on laisse le corps faire et chercher et trouver et prendre* ce qu'il veut, et là tout est bon, il n'y a pas de déchet, les déchets sont recouverts, tout va dans le torrent, dans la force du désir » (*L'amant* 54-5).

What the protagonist desires, something in the present tense ("je lui dis de venir") sprawling out into the future ("il vient," meaning not only that he comes but also that he remains to come, that a tale is just beginning), is a story told *as if* it has already happened ("il dit qu'il sait déjà que lui je le tromperai et aussi que je tromperai tous les hommes avec qui je serai »). The man says he knows what empirical logic tells us he cannot know: the future. As we say in English, 'He cannot *tell* the future.' Yet in this fiction, he is allowed to know what no one can know, to say what is unsayable, to fabricate. He is allowed to tell the story of what is to come, of what the narrator

[29] See chapter one's discussion of computational literary studies.

will do and desire, of what he will, thanks to her future actions, have been — "*l'instrument de son propre malheur*." In programmatic fashion, the lover not only alerts the reader as to what he will become but also acts as if he himself is programmed, as if a bodily force beyond his understanding dictates the movements that will lead to his own sorrow. The lover says "what he must say … what one says when one lets speech come about." An inexorable machine, he marches forward, pulled by the "force of desire," emitting words and *passively acting* in ways seemingly chosen for him. The one who desires is beholden to the machinations of a body, which "does and seeks and finds and takes what it wants."

L'amant, then, tells a story of programmatic and anti-programmatic desire in the conditional, leaving doubt where there supposedly is none, framing as a surprise what is supposed to be predictable. Thus, the lover, who predicts how the narrator "would be" after her first lover and that she "*will* wrong" him and all the lovers of hers to follow, at once tells the truth of her future and weaves a fiction. For when their tryst comes to an end, when he can no longer take her as she commands, it is indeed because her body "*allait partir, trahir*" (was going to leave, to betray him) (133). Her body appears to follow the program, the alert about the tragic separation that was to come as a result of her own actions. But it is neither she nor he who makes the decision, as his prediction initially suggests ("je [la fille] le tromperai"). It is *his* body that puts an end to their romance, and that end arrives as a surprise: "*C'était arrivé brutalement, à son insu. Son corps ne voulait plus*" (133). If the program speaks to literature, this is how literature speaks to the logic of the program, showing that what is written in advance may still surprise, that there is always the possibility of the unpredictable where predictability seems to reign. The program alerts the reader and, in this case, the characters to what is to come, but the event to come arrives unexpectedly nonetheless, and the source of the surprise, typical for Duras,

is a less-than-conscious bodily force, “la force du désir,” which comes and goes in spite of those it strikes. Whether the program is fulfilled, whether the girl wrongs the lover, remains ambiguous, and to the extent that the lover participates in their romance’s undoing, it is his body, as if unconsciously programmed in spite of him, that effectuates that undoing.

The lovers of *L’amant* are not the only of Duras’ characters beholden to this mechanism, this programmatic affect that at once charts the character’s path forward and, as a more-than-programmatic, potentially literary program, runs the risk of malfunctioning, of surprising those caught up in its projections. There is, for example, *Le camion*, a film directed by Duras in which she plays a woman recounting the story of her next film to a comedian. In effect, the film stages the recounting of a program for another film that may or may not happen. In this imaginary film, a hitchhiking woman boards a truck and tells the driver about herself. The woman describes the mise en scène of her imaginary film (the film within the film) as crafting a sense of the characters’ relationship as a “relation lointaine, presque indifférente, machinale,” noting that it is possible the relationship between the imaginary film’s only two characters will never “take place” (16-7). This is a paradoxical program: Duras relies on the complexity of signification (what might it mean for a relationship to take place?) to present a program that is at once sure to take place (the plot of the imagined movie is very simply that a relationship of some kind will begin between these characters) and unsure to do so (will they really come to know each other, or will their brief union mark a missed encounter, an encounter between two people who fail to understand or really converse with one another?).

Yet the program of the imagined film is not the only program at work here. Within the imagined film itself, the woman character’s behavior is programmatic and anti-programmatic. The director played by Duras describes the relationship between the two characters in her

upcoming film as “machinal”: automatic, machinelike, even unconscious. The fictional woman will later describe her behavior in just that way, if somewhat subtly: “Tout m’arrive,” she says — “Il m’arrive de dire des choses plus substantielles … Il m’arrive aussi de me taire longuement … Tout m’arrive … de parler, de me taire. D’être triste. Ou gaie” (52-3). The woman presents herself as the object of a force, like the “force du désir” that controls the behavior of the lovers in *L’amant,* that leads her to speak, go silent, and feel. She presents herself as a robot devoid of sovereignty, a programmed machine lacking the power to act of her own accord, and yet the results of this program are not predictable. The feelings the woman describes strike her; they “arrive” or “happen,” little events seemingly defying her own expectations. Indeed, these programmatic behaviors and feelings leave the woman so unsure of who she is that she describes herself as “always” living in a sort of “confusion mentale” (52). Even more pointedly, when her male interlocutor directly asks who she is, she says, “Je ne sais pas vous répondre. Votre logique m’échappe. Si on me demande qui je suis, je me trouble” (62). The protagonist is a woman whose behavior and feelings appeared to be programmed, who embarks on a “relation machinale” that reveals her to be an enigma to herself, a vehicle for some sort of unconscious force that occupies the driver’s seat, steering her own sentiments and behavior.

The minimalist dialogue between the director played by Duras and the comedian, then, is a deceptively ambitious program. The titular truck will take the characters down the esoteric paths of just what it means to make a decision and to know or name oneself. But whether we consent to follow the truck down that path, to read the film as something more than what it may at first appear to be, is evidence of yet a third program in play. This is the meta-program I theorized in the essay’s opening pages, the constellation of forces that dictates what is visible or legible to the viewer or reader. In the case of this encounter between reader and text, it is likely

my familiarity with Duras and the French thought surrounding her texts that exhorts me to see not just an enigmatic conversation but an epistemological provocation as well as an inquiry into the fraught construction of identity when the imagined character says, "Votre logique m'échappe" in response to the question of who she is (62).[30] This discursive architecture always framing the text and the reader's encounter with it is what makes literary reading simultaneously a deeply programmed and more-than-programmatic exercise. The outcomes of the text, the meanings it is capable of producing, are partially determined by an interplay among the text's contents, its historical and ideological context, and its reader. Yet those outcomes are also indeterminate, incapable of homogenization or a priori programming across a possible and necessarily unpredictable range of instances of reading — instances that take place across different readers at different times in different places. Like the woman who pronounces her identity foreign to the logic of her interlocutor's presumably factual question ("Qui êtes-vous?" 62), the paradoxical logic of the program teaches us that the text itself cannot maintain a merely algorithmic, factual, or quantifiable self. What the text 'is' at its very core depends on the context of a given reading; what will be made of the words on the page and images onscreen is programmed to change according to the reader who comes along and according to the time at which that reader arrives.

[30] It is awkward to note the forces of the program of literary reading in the process of that reading. It is awkward because doing so illuminates both the knowledge and ignorance of the reader, the limitations and advantages of the context in which the reader comes into contact with the text. This is why the program, a part of all reading, typically remains implicit. In this case, a couple of examples of Duras' commentary on her own writing prime us to focus on the aporias that manifest in her texts due to signification's complexity. In *La vie matérielle*, she states that to write is to "raconter une histoire et l'absence de cette histoire" (35), noting that the ball at S. Tahla in *Lol V. Stein*, to be discussed later in this essay, both destroys and creates the eponymous character. In *Les Parleuses*, a conversation with Xavière Gauthier, Duras describes her writing as experimentation with a "blanc dans la chaîne," which she also describes as an "omission," a "suppression." As for the context of French thought that shapes both Duras' writing and my readings, it is of course difficult for those familiar with Duras' contemporaries, such as Derrida and Jacques Lacan, to read her writing and her commentary on her writing without thinking of the play of the signifier and the absence at work within 'presence' itself that so animated the speculative French thought of postwar France.

Multiple programs also shape the action in *Moderato cantabile*, whose protagonist, Anne Desbaresdes, returns each day to the site of a murder to hear a man she's forbidden to love tell the fabricated story of the slain woman. At first, there is the inexplicable murder of a woman by her lover. Anne descends from an apartment where her son is receiving a piano lesson to a crowd outside the café where the murder takes place, and the crowd sees the murderous man's eyes, which are described as follows: "Toute expression en avait disparu, excepté celle, foudroyée, indélébile, inversée du monde, de son désir" (20-1). Shortly afterward, Anne will ask Chauvin, the man she encounters in the café, what happened, posing what might productively be understood as both a constative statement and a question, "Et évidemment on ne peut pas savoir pourquoi?" (29). Chauvin responds, "Lui le savait. Il est maintenant devenu fou, enfermé depuis hier soir. Elle, est morte" (29). One program, now past, is implied; the other has just been set in motion. Like *L'amant*'s lovers and *Le camion*'s imagined protagonist, the murderer appears to act as a result of a force beyond his own will, a force unknown even to himself. The only direct evidence we have for the motive behind his deed (further framed as a mystery by other characters, who refer many times to the unknowability of the murder's cause) is his enigmatic expression directly following the act. That expression is remarkably blank or illegible ("Toute expression en avait disparu"), save for its reflection of a still-burning desire, which is described as having struck him like a lightning bolt ("foudroyée"). The man appears to have been beholden to a drive, an affective and possibly unconscious force ("la force du désir" (*L'amant*), "machinale " (*Le camion*)) that steers him toward a mad act in spite of his own wishes, his own interests, and those of his lover. More cripplingly still for the man's hopes of self-control, the programmatic and murderous desire later fosters madness itself ("Il est maintenant devenu fou"), a state of being that deprives him of the power to explain the havoc he has wrought. At the

moment when Chauvin declares him mad, the man has completely been taken over by a desire whose program executes its will through his body. In turn, the man's madness and related inability to explain himself trigger yet another program that will dominate the novel's plot, as it is the man's inexplicable behavior that provides the initial set of instructions as well as the raison d'être for Anne and Chauvin's rapport. Across a handful of meetings in the café, they will meet to discuss the motive of this enigmatic murder, driven themselves to know that which, as Anne suggests, "on ne peut pas savoir" (29).

Of course, that an unexplainable murder provides the grounds for Anne and Chauvin's illicit relationship does not in itself make their rapport programmatic in the way I have endeavored to theorize here. I suggest that Anne's behavior in the wake of the murder may be read as programmatic because, like the behavior of the murderer and that of so many other Duras characters, she is described as repeatedly acting in spite of herself, as falling into routines that become both predictable in their repetition and surprising in their consequences. In addition, Anne's programmatic behavior appears to result from an unconscious or unknowable force that results in less-than-conscious choices.

Just after it is stated that Anne is unaccustomed to drinking during the daylight hours during which she habitually meets Chauvin, she finds herself downing successive glasses of wine. In this context, the language of machinery, as in *Le camion*, describes a bodily desire: "La main chercha le verre, machinalement" (31). Anne will keep drinking during her meetings with Chauvin, progressively consuming more until the day when she drinks so much and stays at the café so late that she shatters her own façade, arriving at home after night has fallen, upending a dinner party amid the polite society to which she belongs, and vomiting up the wine at her child's bedside. Notably, at this final meeting in which Anne imbibes too much, her eyes are

described in such a way that harkens back to the man whose expression contains nothing but illegible desire. Of the tension on Chauvin's face, it is said, Anne "ne put en rassasier ses yeux" (97). Like a runaway train (or *camion*), a man whose affective energy crosses the limit into physical violence, or a computer program stuck in an interminable loop, Anne is so fixated on Chauvin, so beholden to the wine before her, that she will push past the reasonable limits previously guiding their rapport until the point of doing lasting damage to her own life and relationships with others. The sentence following the image of Anne's eyes solidifies the parallel between her facial expression and the expression on the murderer's face, an expression that is said to be "inversée du monde." Just after the description of Anne's eyes as insatiable, Duras writes: "L'enfant surgit une dernière fois du trottoir" (97). This couplet of intense, verboten desire in one sentence followed by the matter-of-fact presence of Anne's child in the second underscores Anne's infatuation with Chauvin and the risk it poses to her married life in the high society of her seaside town. The murderer's eyes reflect that he has lost the world, that he is distant from everything except the program of his own burning desire. In her final meeting with Chauvin before her secret is almost forcibly disclosed, Anne, too, stands on the precipice of losing her world to "la force du désir." She would not be the first of Duras' characters to do so.

As in Duras' other texts, though, this dangerous program is also anti-programmatic. This is true not only in its mysterious origins, which diverge from programmatic instructions or alerts about the future, but also in its capacity to diverge from the outcomes it seems to all but guarantee. Room for surprise remains where a precarious affect seems poised to annihilate the characters beholden to it. Prefiguring a rupture to come, the narrator opens the final chapter by likening the town's response to the unseasonably beautiful weather that has graced the period of Anne and Chauvin's meetings to the way one would speak "d'un temps mensonger qui eût caché

derrière sa pérennité quelque irrégularité qui bientôt se laisserait voir" (115). This irregularity begging to break out into the open can be interpreted in two ways. It is perhaps most obviously retrospective, a reference to the previous chapter in which Anne shows up late to the dinner party at her own residence, alerting those present to her aberrant behavior of recent days. But the irregularity may also portend a change to come, a shift in Anne's illicit rapport, which had previously settled into a routine of its own. Little details that precede the final dialogue between the would-be lovers suggest that the latter is an appropriate interpretation. For the first time, Anne joins the meeting without her son, a break from routine that allows her to indulge in yet another break, a heightened level of intimacy beyond the scope of family surveillance. The narrator also notes that Chauvin had not shaved in the morning preceding their meeting, and Anne had not applied to her face the "care" she usually takes, details neither is said to notice. These details about the weather and cosmetic routines are disclosed like a secret from narrator to reader. The insight about what is to come remains obscure to the programmed players on stage.

In the last chapter, then, parts of the program remain intact. Unlike the reader, who receives a foreboding hint about a possible turn in the weather and whose attention is drawn to the little details of each character's face, Anne and Chauvin remain fixated on the common desire that has driven them to meet since the novel's beginning. Anne notes only that the weather is beautiful ("Il fait beau"), marking a contrast with the narrator who likens it to a "temps mensonger," and Chauvin only looks out the window "blindly" ("aveuglément"), his mind clearly elsewhere. The two then return to the topic on which they have been fixated throughout the text. As if to answer the question about the murder's motive that Anne poses in their first meeting ("on ne peut pas savoir pourquoi ?"), Duras stages a final back-and-forth about the parallel lovers whose tragic story kicks off Anne and Chauvin's own. Anne says she would like

to understand the otherworldly desire ("merveilleuse … envie") that led the man to both love and kill his beloved, to which Chauvin responds, "Ce n'est pas la peine d'essayer de comprendre. On ne peut pas comprendre à ce point" (121). In a sense, then, the dialogue's final moments make it seem as though their entire rapport has been for nothing. They will never understand, or perhaps more precisely never articulate ("comprendre à ce point"), the dynamic between the novel's first two lovers. But as this exchange takes place just after Anne and Chauvin hesitantly place their hands upon one another's, making physical contact for the first time, it becomes manifest that they are not there, have never been there, for the sake of articulating or discovering what transpired in that baleful tryst. They are there to live out that story themselves — to repeat what they have seen, executing the steps of a certain program's second iteration even if it spells their own destruction (and the collapse of Anne's previously cherished family, signified by the ritual presence of the child, in particular).

In an ambiguous manner characteristic of Duras (recall the relationship of *Le camion,* which does and does not take place), the text leans on both semantic complexity and brevity (or a lack of plot detail) to at once instantiate and reject this thesis about the programmatic repetition of the first chapter's murder. Chauvin may be said to malfunction, skirting the fatal blow, where Anne is said to execute the code of the fatal program, as she is able to kiss him even after the town's daily siren sounds, alerting them to the inevitable arrival of some eight hundred workers, who will no doubt witness what the adulterers do and spread the rumor about town. The text describes this public kiss as a "rite mortuaire" (123). Further underscoring the ghostly parallel between Anne and Chauvin's dangerous, in some ways fatal, romance and the literally murderous one that marks the novel's point of departure, Chauvin's last words to Anne are: "Je voudrais que vous soyez morte," to which she says, "C'est fait" (126). What is done is a foretold,

or at least foreshadowed, denouement, the unraveling of a knot that threatens to strangle both the lovers caught up in it. But Anne and Chauvin do not die, not in the literal sense the program might be said to prefigure at the text's beginning. Even their romance does not come to a definitive conclusion, nor does Anne's marriage definitively end, as far as we can tell. The surprise of the literary program, linked as ever to the subtlety of language (it would not be literary otherwise), is the precise sense in which a death occurs. For this sense, I would point once more to the description of the murderer, who is said in the wake of his lover's killing to be "inversé du monde." What is dead, irretrievably different, lost forever to the murderous lover, his victim, and Anne and Chauvin themselves, is the world, the world as the lovers knew it before their romance, which the literature machine's program compels it to destroy.[31]

Affect, program, drive

In these brief readings of Duras' texts, I attempted to expand my case for the program as a technological figure that elucidates a mechanism of the Durassian literature machine: its capacity to foreshadow an event that, thanks to the indirectness or complexity of literary reference, defies the expectations the machine itself establishes. I call this mechanism, which in Duras' texts often appears as a subconscious, bodily force, the program. But two other words recur in these readings, which focus on Duras' characters' programmatic feelings: affect and drive. In this section, I will attend to the relations among the program and these other two terms. Doing so will provide me the opportunity to explicate the relation of the program as I theorize it through Duras' texts to affect and psychoanalytic theory, both of which inform the broader program that shapes my encounter with Duras. My questions, then, are the following: What is an

[31] Cf. My discussion in chapter one of Blanchot's *Le livre à venir* (especially part four: Où va la littérature ?), the literature machine, and the end of the world, which literature's arrival always marks.

affect? Can affect be programmatic? What does this have to do with literature or literariness? How does the program compare to the drives of Freudian psychoanalysis?

It is helpful to a point to understand the so-called affective turn in relation to the long-standing linguistic turn that predated it. This narrative has limitations, but the core idea about affect theory and affect-attentive literary criticism suggested by that juxtaposition is largely correct: namely, that affect theory emerges as a means of delving into something other than, irreducible to, or beneath the seemingly superficial play of a text's signifiers.[32] Thus, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth call affect, among other things, the "name we give to … visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing" (1). Brian Massumi, while affirming that affect cannot be wholly separated from language, insists it is "irreducibly bodily and autonomic" (*Parables for the Virtual* 28).[33] Anthropologist Kathleen Stewart refers to affects as "things that happen … in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating…" (2). Affect theory's most polemical critics have seized on this sense that affect exists outside of cognition, belongs uniquely to the writer, and is thus incomprehensible or undefinable, or may refer to any number of phenomena in a list without clear attributes, to dismiss the field's core concerns or ways of writing about them.[34]

But I say it is only helpful to a point to introduce affect in contradistinction to the linguistic turn because affect theorists are hardly the only professional readers of literature or

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[32] The linguistic turn can, in this case, most helpfully be understood as a focus in American literary criticism and theory, deeply shaped by its encounter with philosopher Jacques Derrida and to a lesser extent the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, on signification or the complexity of the signifier as the cornerstone of literary study. For more on this view of literary study, which animates my own project, see de Man and Redfield. For a gloss of the tension between the literary theory of the linguistic turn and more contemporary, materiality-attuned trends, see Attridge and Elliott.

[33] While maintaining that affect is "unqualified … not ownable or recognizable and is thus resistant to critique," Massumi does not posit a strict boundary between affect and language, arguing that the former suffuses the latter (*Politics of Affect* 150).

[34] See Leys.

theorists of feeling to foreground that which is inarticulable or resistant to thought and language in the objects of their study. Indeed, some of the most prominent ways of thinking and reading associated with the linguistic turn are themselves constructed around a fascination with this very unthinkable or inexpressible quality in texts that, in the realm of feelings, may be called affect. Theorizing an elusive, unthinkable, or inexpressible feeling, especially as it manifests in a literary text, may well be the point where the so-called affective and linguistic turns intersect, where theories of affect and schools of criticism and theory laser-focused on language, such as deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis, have the most to say to one another.

There is ample existing evidence for this intersection between the affective and linguistic turns, even if other critics have not framed the connections between affect theory and other kinds of theory and criticism in quite that way. Marta Figlerowicz points out that the use of affect as a critical term can be traced back to psychoanalysis, whose practitioners used it to describe a necessarily external, and thus interpretive and linguistic, assessment of the feelings of the analysand (2). Claire Nouvet, reading Jean-François Lyotard, a French philosopher oft-associated with the linguistic turn, writes, "Affectivity ignores referentiality. The very strength of the affect resides in the fact that it prevents logos from referring it to any object" (235).[35] Derrida's thought itself has been described as a pursuit of the limits of thought within language, and there is no reason one cannot apply deconstruction's attention to the multiplicities of signification, as well as its aversion to definitive judgment and respect for context, to the critical objects to be made of feelings.[36]

[35] For Lyotard himself on the link between the inarticulable and affect, see *The Differend* and his essay "Emma."
[36] For Derrida and the limits of thought, see Priest. For Derrida and the impossibility of judgment or doing justice (in the realm of textual interpretation as in a court of law), see Derrida, "Force of Law."

This, then, is my precise contention: that we see affect not as any vague number of phenomena beyond thought but as a specific kind of feeling that, while open to interpretation and understanding through and within language, challenges understanding itself in specific ways. In other words, best understanding affect requires that we apply the lessons of signifier-oriented theory and criticism to the analysis of feelings in texts. I propose that we define affect as a feeling that arrives as an event. As an event, an affect is not simply surprising or unexpected. It is "an absolutely other singularity," a feeling so surprising, so unknown, so foreign to expectations necessarily built on prior experience, that it defies, while not completely eluding, understanding in language (Derrida, "Artifactualities," 13). Affect arrives suddenly, but it is not on the most rigorous level immediate or unmediated because it bears an essential relation to the context in which it manifests. It is unrepresentable in the sense that it can never be perfectly expressed in writing or verbal speech as an exact replica of the event it first constituted, but it is not wholly inarticulable or ineffable. We can and must, if we as critics (of culture, literature, film, whatever) would like to understand affect and deploy it as an instructive critical category, articulate it as it manifests in texts. We may accomplish this, without presuming to reconstruct a pure replica or representation of a phenomenon once present, via recourse to specific formal details.

Discussing affect's manifestation in literature is a felicitous way to approach the controversial questions of affect's mediation or immediacy; representability or lack thereof; and the conditions of the encounter between affect and its interpreters. Massumi claims, articulating one of the core tenets of his understanding of affect, that affect "is direct. You don't need a concept of 'mediation' to talk about it" (*Politics of Affect* 7). On the contrary, to talk about affect is always already to mediate it; to witness affect, feel an affect, or be affected by it is to mediate it, to introduce a spatiotemporal as well as epistemic difference that transforms it into something

else. Now, it is precisely as a result of this irreducible mediation that affect is, as affect theorists are wont to aver, not purely representable, incapable of being fully or purely reconstituted within thought. Thought mediates affect, changing it; affect mediates thought, changing the latter.[37] In this sense, I assent to the notion that one can never state precisely what the affect is. But it is the task of critics and theorists of affect to account for that mediation, striving to articulate the forms in which the affect appears while acknowledging how our specific encounter with the affect — be it in a literary work, painting, film, or in so-called real life — mediates and transforms it. In the case of studies of affect in literature, this contextual mediation and the imperative to reckon with it should be all the more obvious. When I analyze affect in a novel or poem, I bring to that analysis, to that articulation of affect, not only my own ideology and expectations, the singular limits and powers of my own mind and body, but also the mediating forces of a particular encounter: the time and space in which it takes place, the medium of the text, and the machines I may or may not use to write about it. In other words, literature's affects, too, are produced within the broader machinations of the literature machine. My encounter with affect does not escape the paradoxical forces of the literary program. Those forces both constrain my reading and provide the partial freedom that may lead to its literariness, making my interpretation of affect in literature its own event.

Massumi is not the only influential thinker of affect to shirk mediation or to leave undertheorized the role of the reader and the text-reader dynamics that provide the possibility of affect's articulation. Gilles Deleuze allots a major role to affect in aesthetics, calling the artwork "un bloc de sensations, c'est-à-dire, un composé de percepts et d'affects" (*Qu'est-ce que la philosophie ?* 196). But Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who refer, in a brief reading of Proust, to

[37] For a take on the inextricable relation between affect and cognition informed by both Continental philosophy and cognitive science, see Dubreuil, *Intellective Space*, 11-12.

jealousy as "étant le sens des signes, l'affect comme sémiologie," also refer to affect in literature as if it were an objective phenomenon emanating from nowhere but the artwork, or text, itself (210). They claim the artwork is "un bloc de sensations présentes qui ne doivent qu'à elles-mêmes leur propre conservation, et donnent à l'événement le composé qui le célèbre" (201). Like their Canadian interpreter, Deleuze and Guattari neglect to theorize the interpretive forces at the scene of reading that make writing about affect possible in the first place, particularly as it manifests in literary texts. They correctly theorize the temporality of the artwork or text's affects, noting that they recur eternally as a sort of vanishing presence that the artwork itself *partially* makes possible. But the text is not the only cog in the literature machine. It is the encounter between text and reader, or artwork and observer, that allows for the recurrence of the text and its affects within the relation that encounter initiates. Only within the reader's mediating eyes and ears do the text's affects become even partially legible, permitting them to signify as language or foster novel affects in the reader. It is this text-reader relation, inseparable from mediation and the existence of any sort of aesthetic criticism, that provides the chance that jealousy may be read as the "sense" or "meaning" of Proust's "signs." Only in this relation may affect be understood "as semiology," either in the strict sense of signification or as a replacement for semiology in the form of the reader's affective response. As I explore in chapter one, there are aspects of the thought of Deleuze and Guattari, especially the consistent emphasis on difference in/and/as repetition, that help us understand the literature machine, but when it comes to theorizing the dynamics of literary reading, semiosis, and aesthetics, they make the crucial mistake of leaving out the reader or observer as well as the program that constrains possible encounters with the text.

Indeed, even exemplary readers of affect who foreground the imperative of interpreting and articulating it as it appears in critical objects are not necessarily keen on theorizing the role their own mediating minds and bodies, as well as the context of their readings, play in those interpretations. Here, I am thinking primarily of Eugenie Brinkema, whose *The Forms of the Affects* remains the point of reference for affirmatively interpretive and formalist approaches to affect theory. Brinkema argues that theory and criticism centered on affect have historically neglected form in favor of an emphasis on the aesthetic response of the reader, speculation about the feelings of a character or body undergoing an affect, or both. Like what I am proposing here, Brinkema's argument refuses a choice between affect and language or form, asserting on the contrary that it is precisely through formal readings — theorizing joy through linguistic repetition or disgust through a grid of color — that one may "reintroduce particularity to any consideration of affects" (xvi). But in her quest to theorize what she calls a radically formalist approach to affect, Brinkema goes so far as to eschew entirely the body and subjectivity of textual characters and the readers who interpret them.

By eliding the feelings of the reader, Brinkema's theory of affect and of affect-attentive criticism neglects a key component of what makes all reading possible. The literature machine does not function without a reader, and formalist reading of the kind Brinkema practices is strictly impossible without readerly feelings, however sentimental it may feel to acknowledge them. These feelings are not just the stuff of affect theory or centuries-old aestheticians, either. The formalist reading Brinkema practices, itself often associated with the linguistic turn, depends on a range of feelings: the "anxiety of not-knowing" (de Man 59) of readers who interpret texts while remaining open to their arrival as unexpected events; the humility to reckon with context and relativity in place of definitive judgment; and the affirmative joy, even relief, that comes

with recognizing one will never tell the full and definitive truth of a text but must rather locate and articulate whatever truths one can, knowing that another reader will come along at a future time to articulate other truths within the very same text.[38] The reader's feelings, which may themselves arrive as affects, are an inextricable part of reading, whether explicitly acknowledged in an interpretive text or not. They are a fundamental part of the program shaping interpretation, an indispensable cog in the machine that produces a literary text.[39]

As far as the connection between affect and the program is concerned, I have focused thus far on the conditional forces that constrain and enable literary readings of affect. But as my readings of Duras imply, affect is not only related to the program that governs the encounter between reader and text. Within the text itself, affect may be said to take a programmatic form. Consider the end of the relationship between the lovers of *L'amant*. The male lover predicts that the woman will betray him ("il dit qu'il sait déjà que lui je le tromperai et aussi que je tromperai tous les hommes avec qui je serai," 54). The unraveling of their rapport appears to follow the

[38] I inherit this injunction to read humbly and affirmatively without pronouncing definitive judgment from Deleuze and Derrida, both of whom find it in Friedrich Nietzsche. Consider Deleuze's "Pour en finir avec le jugement," an essay on Nietzsche, among others, in which Deleuze says the "secret" is to "faire exister, non pas juger. … Quel jugement d'expertise, en art, pourrait porter sur l'œuvre à venir ?" (169). The reader brings the literary text into being, allowing it to become literary; she does not define it once and for all. One may also consider Derrida's "Force et Signification," in which he warns not to read for structure and form without accounting for force, the latter of which is "l'autre du langage," — in other words, one must account for the differentiating power of context, and thus of différance or difference itself, which makes each reading of the text necessarily distinct from all others (45). In both cases, the humble rejection of definitive judgment emanates from a respect for a work's capacity to differ from itself in repetitions or iterations of itself, a Nietzschean lesson Derrida discusses in "Différance" (18-19), a brief reading of Nietzsche where he not coincidentally cites Deleuze's interpretation of the same.

[39] To acknowledge that readerly affect shapes interpretation and that is therefore part of the program of literary reading is not to say that the text, much less the text's author, necessarily *controls* the affects of the reader. Of course, this question of the text, or the orator, controlling the reader's affects is an ancient problem. In Cicero's dialogues, for example, Antonius tells Catulus, "Nothing in oratory … is more important than to win for the orator the favor of his hearer, and to have the latter so affected as to be swayed by something resembling a mental impulse or emotion, rather than by judgment or deliberation" (325). But I am far less certain that a text, ostensibly poetic or argumentative, can control the emotions of its reader, and I am less interested in the capacity of the text to do so. Rather, I insist on the affects of the reader to underscore, not that the author or text can control the reader's affects but that those affects, 'produced' by the text or not, exist and influence any ability to interpret the text. This is the affective supplement, often readily discounted by critics, that renders pure or radical formalism ultimately illusory and forces us to theorize the program of literary reading as an affective one, if not because the text or the author can control the reader's affects in the way the study of rhetoric might suggest.

program; their relationship nears an end as the narrator reckons with the perception that his young lover's body "*allait partir, trahir*" (was going to leave, to betray him) (133). But what actually delivers the final blow to their sexual rapport is an affect *par excellence,* delivered despite the lover's wishes in the form of an arrival:

"C'était arrivé brutalement, à son insu. Son corps ne voulait plus de celle-ci qui allait partir, trahir. Il disait : je ne peux plus te prendre, je croyais pouvoir encore, je ne peux plus. Il disait qu'il était mort. Il avait un très doux sourire d'excuse, il disait que peut-être ça ne reviendrait plus jamais" (133).

The affective event defies the lover's comprehension, and it is doubly programmatic. It is programmatic first in the sense of a prediction or alert about what is to come that both captures and fails to capture the entirety of what will later transpire. The lover predicts that the protagonist will betray him, and this betrayal comes to pass, inscribed in the form of the verb "trahir," a sonic call back to "tromperai" (54). But the betrayal does not play out in the active and transitive sense ("je le tromperai") that the programmatic alert implies. The betrayal lies in a bodily and subjective truth; the lover perceives his companion as betraying him because she must leave their city, and the perception of that betrayal is solidified by his body, which is no longer able to sustain their sexual rapport in anticipation of her impending departure. The affective program is thus also anti-programmatic (it is the lover, not the female protagonist, who instantiates the betrayal that undoes their rapport). The program's literariness lies in this complex truth that the reader must discover in the nuances of the text's language, which both foreshadows and fails to encapsulate a betrayal to follow. Secondly, this affective event, the feeling that arrives "brutally, unknown," to the man who undergoes it, is programmatic because it appears to be inscribed into the mechanisms of the body. A corporeal force beyond the lover's control dictates his movements against all belief, captured in the simplicity and parallelism of the eight-word couplet, "Je croyais pouvoir encore, je ne peux plus." That which the lover believes, even

that which he appears to desire, does not matter anymore; he is passive, beholden to the program of an affect that catches him by surprise. Yet in this cognitive-behavioral sense, too, the programmatic affect is anti-programmatic because the corporeal mechanism that dictates the lover's behavior is anything but algorithmic. Irreducible to a set of logical rules, the program driving the lover's final rejection of the female heroine is not just ambiguous but incomprehensible and unprecedented. It leaves him at a loss, wondering if his body will ever work as it previously had again in the future ("peut-être ça ne reviendrait plus jamais"). The sensation the lover experiences is an "absolutely other singularity," precisely the kind of event of feeling that I propose we call an affect.

Before I progress to a more extensive discussion of programmatic affects in *Lol V. Stein*, I want to acknowledge, as my readings of *Le camion* and *Moderato cantabile* suggest, that it is tempting to use the language of Freudian psychoanalysis and of the drives in particular to refer to the connections between affect and the program. In *L'amant*, the lover is forced to grapple with the impending absence of the female heroine in the form of an affective, programmatic (and thus also anti-programmatic) event. It might be said that he undergoes, as if for the second time, the fundamental trauma that constitutes the Lacanian subject as a being imbued with language, a being who is a part of society and must thus contend with the negotiation needed to procure the "satisfaction of needs": castration (Apollon, "Letter," 104). That the lover may be forced to grapple with the "symbolic order of language," and with it, the indirect fulfillment of desire and even the prohibition of desire, "as a wound," is all the more substantiated by the details of the text (Ibid. 105). Namely, the Chinese lover is specifically forbidden by his father from seeing the teenage protagonist, who is white, and his wound, the wound of castration no less, appears to manifest physically when he suddenly finds himself unable to consummate his relationship with

the young girl destined to leave him. In *Moderato cantabile,* Anne and Chauvin seem beholden to "the compulsion to repeat," in the very fact of their meeting, in their drinking, and in their persistent return to the death of the woman murdered by her lover, that Freud identifies as a manifestation of the death drive and that "must be ascribed to the unconscious repressed" trying to break free (*Beyond* 20).[40] It is all the more compelling that Anne and Chauvin repeatedly meet precisely to discuss something that, as the text avows, they can never know ("on ne peut pas savoir" 29), seemingly hurtling toward the *reality* of their, or at least Anne's, own affliction. This would be the thing "working them over from within, undermining their lives, and ravaging their being" that Lacanians call "the real of the subject" (Apollon, "Psychoanalysis," 8).

To be sure, there is much to be said about feeling in Duras from a psychoanalytic perspective. Nevertheless, the affinities between psychoanalysis and programmatic affects as I theorize them here should not lead us to equate the program with psychoanalytic drives or to reduce affect and the program to synonyms for psychoanalytic terms. To be driven to a certain behavior that might be called programmable (e.g., the lover's inability to have sex with *L'amant*'s protagonist) is not necessarily to become the object of a Freudian drive, though the two terms may both apply in certain cases. This is to say nothing of the particular knowledge the analytic relation, or social link, between the analyst and analysand makes possible through transference, a process that cannot simply be substituted for the text-reader relation in literary

[40] It would also be fruitful to consider Anne's repetitive consumption of wine in relation to Lacan's discussion of the distinction between objects of *Not,* or need, and objects of *Bedürfnis*, which in Lacan's idiosyncratic discussion is translated into English as pressure (*Fundamental Concepts,* 167-8). Lacan specifically notes that when it comes to the oral drive, the food or drink consumed is not at issue. One continually drinks or eats not to achieve satisfaction from the food or drink itself but to engage in the process of eating or drinking ("the pleasure of the mouth"), a process that harkens back to another, more fundamental scene, such as the consumption of milk from the mother's breast. For *Moderato,* this means the wine itself, or alcoholism, is not at issue; Anne's wine consumption marks a manifestation of a drive, which would lead us to some more fundamental psychic dilemma.

reading.[41] By contrast, I have endeavored to show that in the cases of all the Duras texts I have considered, programmatic affects are at work: singular, at least initially incomprehensible, and unprecedented feelings that drive behaviors which are both predicted and unpredictable, mechanical and erratic. The paradoxical forces of Duras' programmatic affects are most evident in *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein*.

Reading the affective event

Lol V. Stein's is a narrative that centers on an event. That event marks the arrival of an affect. But it is not the nineteen-year-old Lol who, at first, most apparently becomes the object of an affective strike. It is her fiancé, Michael Richardson, whose life is changed in an instant, who experiences the surprise arrival of an incomprehensible affect at a ball he and Lol attend in a place called T. Beach. As a result of the event that takes place at T. Beach, Richardson will find himself beholden to a program that triggers unexpected behaviors, which in turn set the broader narrative of the novel in motion.

An older woman, Anne-Marie Stretter, is the apparent source of the troubling event that takes Richardson by surprise. Stretter is herself, like the affects she provokes, markedly inscrutable or incomprehensible, a key epistemic frame that should inform our interpretive approach to the events of the novel. Jacques Hold — Lol's eventual lover, the text's narrator, and the lover as well of Tatiana Karl, Lol's friend who also attends the ball in question — remarks that it is impossible to pin down the moment when Richardson falls for Anne-Marie Stretter because it is impossible to know ("impossible de savoir") precisely when Stretter first lays eyes on Richardson, precipitating the *coup de foudre* that leads him astray (16). This is because

[41] See Apollon, "Psychoanalysis and the Freudian Rupture," particularly 8-9, for more on the social link, transference, and the particular knowledge psychoanalysis makes possible.

Stretter's eyes are discolored, their surface "teinte en roux," a blend of pleasure and pain suggestive of the simultaneous heartbreak and enchantment Stretter's appearance at the ball provokes (16). Hold's characterization of Stretter, combined with a series of questions ("Qui était-elle ? … Était-elle belle ? Quel était son âge ? Qu'avait-elle connu, elle que les autres avaient ignoré ?), render the fabrication of the narrative — its creation or fictionalization and thus its originary multiplicity or lack of an origin — all the more apparent. And if it were not sufficiently obvious, stated in the text as it is ("c'est impossible de savoir quand … commence mon histoire de Lol V. Stein), that the events of T. Beach do not lend themselves to a reading as indisputable historical fact but must rather be wrestled with or interpreted as fiction, Hold prefaces the tale of the ball at T. Beach with a disclaimer. Noting his discomfort recounting events to which he himself did not bear witness, Hold tells the reader, "Je vais donc la chercher [Lol or more particularly her adolescence], je la prends, là où je crois devoir le faire" (14). As Hold himself tells us, then, his uncertainty vis-à-vis the facts to be laid out must be the point of departure for an investigation of *Lol*, its affects, and its programs. Lol's story is not Lol's story, nor is it the story of an impartial or omniscient narrator. As a result, the impossibility of knowing or understanding *just what* happens to Lol, a component of affect in general as I have theorized the term, is a recurrent feature of the text.[42] This is true of the novel's overall narrative framing as well as of the references both the narrator and characters within the text make to other characters, all of whom markedly evade each other's, and the readers, grasp. Hold's program, his

[42] Monika Boehringer points out that the many efforts from different characters to tell the truth of Lol's story only exacerbate the extent to which that story and Lol herself remain unknowable : "C'est précisément la concurrence entre les instances énonciatives qui est à la base de l'altérité de Lol : recherchée assidûment et constamment déplacée, elle est au centre de ce labyrinthe discursif, mais elle reste inaccessible, toujours ailleurs, jamais à l'autre," 166.

alert of what is to come, sets up the novel's anti-programmability, its capacity to surprise, its semiotic and epistemic remainder, which lies beyond the reaches of a finite interpretation.

The ambiguity of the particulars notwithstanding, what we know for sure about the events of T. Beach is that a particular event happens: Richardson sees Stretter, falls in love with her, and his engagement to Lol comes to an end, affecting Lol for years to come. But before training our eyes on Lol, it is worth considering how the event strikes Richardson, for it is he, not Lol, who at first appears to be moved by an affect. Hold notes that, after Richardson lays eyes on Stretter, Tatiana Karl "l'avait trouvé pâli et sous le coup d'une préoccupation subite si envahissante qu'elle sut qu'il avait bien regardé, lui aussi, la femme qui venait d'entrer" (17). In French, *sous le coup*, literally under or subjected to the force of something, is often used to refer to a law, sentence, or mandate that regulates behavior. *Coup* also has a particular resonance in psychoanalysis and the French theory of *Lol*'s era, as Lacan translated Freud's *Nachträglichkeit,* the being-deferred of traumatic feelings that only manifest in symptoms after the traumatic event, as *l'après-coup*, the blow that comes after the event. In Richardson's case, it is fair to say he is subjected to a coup that becomes a sort of law, regulating his behavior and ramifying to shape the course of the rest of the text, for some time after the *coup de foudre*, or lightning-like strike of love, that afflicts him when he initially sees Stretter at the ball. The text attests to just how dramatically the encounter with Stretter changes Richardson, of whom it is said:

"Il était devenu différent. Tout le monde pouvait le voir. Voir qu'il n'était plus celui qu'on croyait. Lol le regardait, le regardait changer. Les yeux de Michael Richardson s'étaient éclaircis" (17).

Duras' matter-of-fact statement is attributed not to no one in particular but to every single person in the room, the closest Hold's thoroughly mediated representation of the event can get to fact. In the space of two pages of prose and temporal gap of several minutes, the very person Richardson

is appears to change. A "*sudden* [or unexpected] preoccupation," an affect, changes the way he sees the world and, with it, his former lover, Lol, who is quickly sacrificed in the name of another. Richardson is now under the law of another attraction, the "force of [another] desire," as Duras herself puts it in *L'amant*.

I say Richardson is beholden to a law not simply due to the diction with which Duras describes his metamorphosis, nor to the simple syntax with which she describes the decisive change in his character, but to the insistence with which Hold describes Richardon's break from Lol in favor of Stretter. Hold notes that

> "aucun mot, aucune violence au monde n'aurait eu raison du changement de Michael Richardson. … Il lui faudrait maintenant être vécu jusqu'au bout. Elle commençait déjà, la nouvelle histoire de Michael Richardson, à se faire" (17).

Like the lover who says what he "must say," who says "what one says when one lets speech produce itself" ("Il me dit que je suis son seul amour, et c'est ça qu'il doit dire et c'est ça qu'on dit quand *on laisse le dire se faire*"), Richardson finds himself beholden to an affect whose power over his behavior is total. In love with Lol just moments before, he now operates like a machine, his actions set into motion by a program. His "story" from here on out will simply play itself out, writing itself (*se faisant*) in a language chosen by some force other than that of a conscious, knowing subject. Duras herself drives home the comparison between Richardson, or who he becomes after seeing Stretter, and a programmatic actor or machine, noting that the two freshly minted lovers, the last on the dance floor, do not stop dancing when the music ends but rather resume "comme des automates" (21). Hold notes that someone, likely one of the musicians, indicates to Richardson and Stretter that it is time to stop, a gesture made "in vain" (21). Driven to pursue whatever has taken hold of them to its end, the lovers are blind, like

Stretter's eyes tinted with the color of desire, to any force but the one that "invades" Richardson at the scene's decisive moment.

As far as Lol is concerned, what is first striking is that she is not immediately seized by a similarly distinct affect upon the apparent collapse of her engagement. If Richardson's story appears to adhere to less complex notions of both affect and the program, Lol's occupies the role of a foil, encouraging us to identify the contradictions at work in a feeling supposed to strike as an event, and in a metaphor for rote behavior (the program) that nevertheless leaves room for spontaneous divergences from what is projected or expected (the anti-programmatic). Like the protagonist of the tale within *Le camion*, who is said to have, and not to have, the decisive relationship that defines her story, Lol experiences an affect that she seemingly does not experience and acts within a program that only indirectly reveals itself as such.

Lol's apparent inability to feel, or at the very least the inability of others to discern what she is feeling and put a name to those feelings, manifests before the ball. Tatiana tells Jacques that, as a child, a part of Lol had always been "en allée loin de vous et de l'instant," not toward some simple "adolescent dream" but, "on aurait dit dans rien encore, justement, rien" (13). This theory that Lol somehow belongs to nothingness, that she appears to be present but is always absconding into nothing, is then explicitly tied to the realm of feelings:

> "Tatiana aurait tendance à croire que c'était peut-être en effet le cœur de Lol V. Stein qui n'était pas — elle dit : là — il allait venir sans doute, mais elle, elle ne l'avait pas connu. Oui, il semblait que c'était cette région du sentiment qui, chez Lol, n'était pas pareille" (13).

Lol defies comprehension and even perception. It is unclear that she is present or even that she exists at all, that she belongs to the phenomenal world. What's more, it is the "realm of her feelings" that is most inscrutable. Tatiana suspects that Lol has a heart — it is going "to come," to make an appearance, perhaps in the form of an unpredictable event — but Tatiana does not

know how to recognize it (*le re-connaître*), does not know it *(ne l'avait pas connu*), does not know *how to know* Lol's feelings. Lol herself, and her feelings in particular, are thus positioned even before the ball at T. Beach as phenomena particularly resistant to knowledge, especially simple empirical or perceptual analysis. Through Tatiana, Jacques sets up Lol's feelings as peculiar objects of knowledge that, like affects in general, defy immediate comprehension and demand a particularly subtle reading, should they be expected to present themselves for inspection.

At the ball, once it becomes clear to "everyone" that Stretter and Richardson have fallen for one another, Hold notes, again via Tatiana's recollection, that the sight of the two lovers and the apparent certainty of their nascent affection "ne parurent pas s'accompagner chez Lol de souffrance" (17). Hold remarks that it seems "La souffrance n'avait pas trouvé en elle où se glisser, qu'elle avait oublié la vieille algèbre des peines d'amour" (19). It is notable that Lol is positioned here not as a sovereign being in control of her own emotions but rather as an object of a feeling that, itself personified, fails to figure out exactly how to make an object out of her. Suffering does not know precisely where to afflict her. It is also striking that suffering is described as having forgotten "the algebra" of heartbreak, as if heartbreak itself were an algorithm that could be applied to a woman who had just lost her fiancé, and that suffering cannot "find where to *slide* into her." This form of suffering, one that slides or slips into a person, suggests further that whatever pain Lol is to experience is to strike by surprise, almost at random or by accident — to strike as an event. There is evidence here, then, for what I would call an affect, but it is an affect that apparently does not arrive, a feeling that should slide into Lol but does not, at least not right away. Instead, Lol is quite literally not moved. She stands still behind foliage plants behind the bar, as Hold mentions multiple times, smiles at least twice, and

does not appear to understand just what is going on or to react accordingly until her mother arrives to take her away. At this point, her mother acting as a "screen" between Lol and the newly formed couple, Lol appears to register what has occurred: "Elle avait compris seulement à cet instant-là qu'une fin se dessinait mais confusément, sans distinguer encore au juste laquelle elle serait" (21-2). She screams "pour la première fois" and then begins to scream, without stopping, that "il n'était pas tard, l'heure d'été trompait" (22). As the bodies of Stretter and Richardson disappear into the distance, Lol faints ("elle tomba par terre, évanouie") (22).

Once more, there is evidence here for the beginnings of both a program and an affect. As for the affect, a sudden realization, and with it a sudden feeling, appear to strike Lol. After initially observing the emerging reality of Stretter and Richardson's affair without feeling the impact of its logical counterpart, the collapse of her engagement, Lol screams. Her affect appears to be one of distress and confusion, which manifests as resistance to reality itself in the form of a matter-of-fact statement, a rather odd one to scream: "It wasn't late; the early summer dawn is leading us astray."[43] Hold notes that this is not an insane thing to say — "Lol avait crié sans discontinuer des choses sensées" — but it is nonetheless disturbing because Lol's feelings, the feelings of the girl whose heart was never there ("c'était peut-être en effet le cœur de Lol V. Stein qui n'était pas — elle dit : là"), are once more out of step with the reality before her. It does not matter how late it is, what season or time of day it is. It is too late *for Lol*, too late for her first love with Michael Richardson, an affair that, like Lol herself at the scene's culminating point, has vanished, died, fallen away ("évanouie"). Like *Moderato cantabile*'s Anne Desbaresdes and that text's murderous lover, Lol experiences the end of a world at the ball at T. Beach.

[43] I consulted Richard Seaver's rendering of the novel in English for this translation. The other translations are my own.

In a manner also reminiscent of Anne, Lol's confusion and heartbreak force her into an untoward and painful repetition: screaming, as Hold puts it, about her new state, her "abandonment" (31). A straightforward programmatic reading would have it that Lol is destined to repeat this scene of abandonment, that she will heretofore prove unable to connect to anyone or show any love or feeling at all.[44] This is what Hold himself suggests, noting perhaps the opposite of what his seemingly insatiable curiosity about Lol and her past would suggest, namely that her affliction "était explicable : Lol souffrait d'une infériorité passagère à ses propres yeux parce qu'elle avait été abandonnée par l'homme de T. Beach" (24). According to this reading, Hold's reading, Lol's program might be one of self-destruction, her affect one of self-loathing or lost confidence manifesting in the form of silence ("elle cessa même petit à petit de parler" (24)). Silence itself would then prevent Lol from forming the kind of genuine romantic connection that provided the basis for her formative trauma. But if a trauma of abandonment destined to repeat itself in the form of silence and thwarted connection constituted the whole of Lol V. Stein's story, her program would be a less literary one (programmatic as opposed to programmatic and anti-programmatic at once), and her unknowable feelings, simply "explicable" as a sense of "inferiority" fostered by an event of abandonment, would spark less dogged speculation.

Affective ambivalence, programmatic indecision

[44] In a much-cited reading of the novel, Lacan explicitly rejects the simplicity of a reading of the novel as the story of an event destined to repeat itself. But he also claims the whole novel is but the "remémoration," or recollection, of the event at T. Beach, and more pointedly that Lol is "realized" by the fantasy she is able to project onto Jacques Hold's tryst with Tatiana. I argue that the logic driving Lol's relation to Hold, whom Lol witnesses seducing her friend Tatiana, is not the reconstruction of a fantasy fostered by the ball at T. Beach, nor the repetition of an inaugural abandonment that must repeat, but a programmatic force of indecision. If Lol has a fantasy (in a broad, not necessarily psychoanalytic sense), it is not necessarily to see the other possess another woman (as occurred at T. Beach) but to possess the other without possessing him, to connect to the other while experiencing the piercing uncertainty of connection.

I would suggest that we read Lol not as a broken woman destined to repeat her own abandonment, nor even as a traumatized subject condemned to repeat her trauma because she cannot put an ineffable affect into words.[45] What makes Lol V. Stein's affective program something other than this oft-told story of a trauma that repeats is the same component of her story that makes it so likely to be read in a literary fashion. The literariness of Lol's tale, manifest in the paradoxes to be found in the language of the novel, lies in the following curiosity: that she is a woman who does not simply stage her own abandonment but rather *abandons others* by opening up to them. Her program, one of indecision, is to decide to be with others without deciding anything. In a similarly counter-intuitive structure, the most precise term for the affect she experiences at the ball at T. Beach is ambivalence. This affect of ambivalence, the precise lack of a decisive feeling, in turn drives her programmatic indecision in the ball's wake. Consider the paragraph I took as this essay's epigraph:

"Ainsi, Lol fut mariée sans l'avoir voulu, de la façon qui lui convenait, sans passer par la sauvagerie d'un choix, sans avoir à plagier le crime qu'aurait été, aux yeux de quelques-uns, le remplacement par un être unique du partant de T. Beach et surtout sans avoir trahi l'abandon exemplaire dans lequel il l'avait laissée" (31).

Hold's observation of Lol's acceptance of marriage to Jean Bedford, an older man who encounters her in the street and then requests her hand in marriage, implies that she is locked in a state of cyclical abandonment. His interpretation, still centered on Richardson and Lol's relation to him, focuses on Lol's supposed unwillingness to replace the latter. But this reading does not go far enough, and it focuses on Richardson to the detriment of its incisiveness vis-à-vis Lol. It is not enough to say that Lol is passive, that she is not invested in her life, that she is emotionally absent or still hung up on Richardson and therefore consents to a marriage in which she has no

[45] For a take on Lol as the subject of an unrepresentable trauma that must be repeatedly staged, see Pierre Saint-Amand.

interest. Lol's decision, as the text portrays it, is more radical than that: It is a decision that contests the very possibility of deciding, a decision that Lol makes "sans passer par la sauvagerie d'un choix" (31). Wherein lies this savagery, this wildness, this untoward violation that the text associates with "a choice"? The indefinite article implies that Lol is averse not just to this specific choice, to the choice of being with a man other than Michael Richardson, but to choice, or choices, in general. Thus, I would propose that the savagery Lol avoids is the savagery, the hastiness, the error, not of making one specific choice but of presuming to choose or decide at all. In the wake of her so-called desertion by Michael Richardson, a desertion that is, itself, something less than a decision, Lol's ambivalence becomes her driving affect, indecision her defining, literary, and anti-programmatic program. Lol's fraught connections with others in the aftermath of the ball are not the primary manifestation of her unusual orientation to the world; her relationships with men are not her defining feature. Instead of reading Lol's fraught relationships as signs of a fear of abandonment or a "complete retreat of the libido," we should see them as ramifications of a more structural, programmatic indecision, which is itself rooted in an affect of ambivalence (Léopold 161).

To understand more clearly what it would mean to challenge the very notion of decisions, one might return to the scene of the crime. It is not rigorous to say that either Richardson or Lol decides to leave the other. On the contrary, as the figure of the program highlights, both Richardson and Lol's behaviors are far from decisive in the sense Western philosophy has most consistently accorded to the word: a choice made by a rational subject fully aware of what he or she is doing and with full and individual control, or sovereignty, over that choice.[46] Neither

[46] Deleuze and Derrida both provide instructive critiques of this notion of the decision, a notion that is inextricably bound up in the illusory notion of a self-sovereign, individual, and rational subject. Both thinkers critique the historically dominant way of thinking the decision in Western philosophy on the basis of the unconscious, which conditions all thought, and on that of a subject's irreducible relation to others and to its environment or context, all

Richardson nor Lol makes such a decision; they are both, as in the cases of so many of the Duras characters I have considered, powerfully swayed by less-than-conscious and contextual (or extra-individual) forces. Let us recall that, at the ball, Tatiana finds Richardson "sous le coup d'une préoccupation subite si envahissante qu'elle sut qu'il avait bien regardé, lui aussi, la femme qui venait d'entrer" (17). The figure of invasion is no accident here, nor is the parallel established between the change in Richardon's behavior after seeing Stretter and that of his appearance; the sighting of Stretter pierces him, puts him under the influence ("sous le coup") of an affect ("une préoccupation subite") that steers him in an unanticipated direction. A foreign agent conquers the spirit of Michael Richardson, after which it is said that nothing in the world could conquer the programmatic change that seeing Stretter incites within him ("aucun mot, aucune violence au monde n'aurait eu raison du changement de Michael Richardson," 17). Richardson's story is markedly not that of a self-sovereign subject who chooses to spurn his fiancée; it is the story of a man who spurns another in spite of *himself*, the story of a subject undone.

The breakdown of any pretention Lol might have to complete mastery over her own decisions, to the ability to make fully self-conscious and individual decisions, is even more dramatic. It is not just that Lol appears to have no say in the departure of Richardson and the subsequent dissolution of her engagement; she has nothing to say and says nothing. She watches and even smiles while Richardson dances with his new beloved, her replacement, and it is only as the ball draws to a close that she screams. But this scream is not directed *at* Richardson; Lol does not angrily or decisively affirm that he should forgo Stretter, nor does she say clearly that she is sad to see him go, later affirming to Tatiana that she did not suffer. Her scream is aimed,

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of which undermines the notion of a pure, individual decision. Cf. Deleuze, *Différence et répetition*, 257-8, and Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, 88. Derrida discusses the centrality of this understanding of decisions to the Western philosophical tradition from Plato and Aristotle to present in *Voyous*, 68-69.

or addressed, at no one, and when she does put her feelings into words, they appear to institute a break not between Lol and Richardson but between Lol and reality itself: "Il n'était pas tard, l'heure d'été trompait" (22). Musing on Lol's "prostration" afterward, Hold asks pointedly, "Qu'est-ce à dire qu'une souffrance sans sujet?" (23). Once more, I'd suggest on the basis of Lol's reaction at the ball that we read Hold's words, his assessment of Lol, somewhat indirectly. It is true that a certain prostration, a collapse, occurs at the scene of the ball at T. Beach. But what collapses is not Lol's confidence or ability to connect with men; the scene does not usher in a period of cyclical abandonment that Lol will later strive to realize by seeking men to scorn her. What collapses in the scene at T. Beach is Lol's subjectivity itself and, with it, her propensity for deciding her own fate.

To be clear, the putative power to make fully self-conscious or individual decisions is in all cases illusory, as the cases of Richardson, Anne Desbaresdes, and any other number of characters subjected to the program, to the programmatic force of desire, illustrate with particular clarity. But the rejection of this model of subjectivity and decision-making that can be theorized on the basis of Lol's behavior — Lol's embodiment of another kind of subjectivity, one that foregrounds the unconscious and relations to others in lieu of the atomic, conscious subject — is particularly emphatic, as not only her reaction to Richardson's departure but also a number of subsequent events in the novel demonstrate. Examples of these include Lol's "indifference" in the face of her mother's death, which receives but a sentence (32); her walks, which take her where the streets please ("Les rues portèrent Lol," 39); and her proclamation that she knows not to what end she and her new lover, Hold, are advancing, as if they are pulled forward in spite of their own wishes (130).[47] To flesh out this reading of *Lol* and further consider the programmatic

[47] Gina Stamm proposes that Lol's meandering walks be read as a reflection of her desire "for a place to which her body belongs so that it can rest" (96). I would suggest that the walks are rather a stage on which her perpetual

logic of indecision that overtakes her, I will consider two seminal sequences: first, a conversation between Hold and Lol in the company of Tatiana, followed by a meeting between Hold and Tatiana that Lol orchestrates and watches from a field of rye; and, secondly, Hold and Lol's return to the scene of the ball at T. Beach, followed by their final conversation.

Lol's ambivalence and indecisiveness play out in a series of scenes that take place at her home, to which she invites Hold, Tatiana, and Tatiana's husband, Pierre, despite the presence of Lol's own husband, who would assumedly pose an obstacle to the desire brewing between her and Hold. In other's words, Hold's lover is present, Lol's husband is present, and the husband of Hold's lover is present. But this scene, less a love triangle than a matrix, is precisely to Lol's liking. The level on which her indecision manifests is a social one: Lol chooses Jacques Hold ("Je vous ai choisi," she tells him), but she can only choose him on the condition that she does not choose him (112). That is, she urges Hold, even begs him, not to leave Tatiana after he professes a wish to do just that: "Je vous en supplie, je vous en conjure," she says (117), invoking a word, "conjurer," which means to beg in this intransitive context but may also mean to plot or to conspire. Lol conspires to steal Tatiana's lover, to orchestrate an act of betrayal that, to Tatiana, may feel like theft, but she is only interested in that act as long as Hold consents to stay with the woman he and Lol are betraying. When Hold asks why Lol is so intent that he maintain his relationship with Tatiana, Lol simply says, "Je ne veux pas" (118). This statement with no object dovetails with the form of an earlier one, in which Lol, asked by Hold what she wants in or from him, simply says, "Je veux." Two halves of one whole that is both less clear and more significant than either of its unclear components, Lol's statements represent a latent, persistent affect that is not so much unrepresentable as radically multiple. Lol V. Stein wants and

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unrest, her indecision or uncertainty about what to do with herself, can manifest, taking a physical form. The walks have no goal; that is their precise nature, which, like Lol's, is "indécise" (*Lol* 41).

she does not want; she wants to be with Hold and she does not. Both are true, and neither is (definitively, wholly) true. Her apparent romantic indecision is the manifestation of an affect of ambivalence. This ambivalence reaches its climax in a scene shortly thereafter, when Lol waits outside a window at the Hôtel des Bois, where Hold is scheduled to seduce Tatiana. Of this "instant d'oubli absolu de Lol," this moment in which two lovers consummate their relationship while Lol remains outside, unable even to see them, Hold says, "Lol désirait qu'il fût vécu. Il le fut" (123). What Lol desires is not the realization of her own exclusion — Hold has already offered to leave Tatiana, and he is due to see Lol the very next day — but the realization of a complex social and romantic relation, a connection that is not firm, nor uniform, but multiple and open, pierced at its core by the possibility of failure. The spectatorial scene at the hotel marks the realization not 'of Lol,' as Lacan suggests, but of her forbidden romance's unreality, its impossibility.[48] If there is a fantasy here, it is that of a paradoxical desire, a connection that is not, a decision that undermines itself qua decision.

That Lol's indecisiveness vis-à-vis Hold is related to the event she undergoes at the T. Beach ball is further supported by her conversation with Hold, Tatiana, and Tatiana's husband at her home. Tatiana twice calls out Lol for lying about the events that occurred at T. Beach. But it appears that Lol is not simply or self-consciously lying; she is rather unable to figure out or articulate just what she felt or saw at the ball. For example, Lol fabricates having heard Richardson and Stretter say that she was going to die, but when Tatiana points out that Lol's claim must be false because Lol and Tatiana stood side by side the whole night behind the foliage plants, watching Richardson dance with his new lover from afar, Lol assents to Tatiana's account almost immediately (104). Lol also asks Tatiana whether she suffered, saying matter-of-

[48] See Lacan, 10.

factly, “Je n’ai jamais su” — “I never found out.” The implication of Lol’s statement is not that she forgot or even was unsure about how she felt at the ball but rather, more dramatically still, that she was not there herself and did not witness or experience her own feelings. Her experience, then and now, remains a mystery to her. Further developing the case for an affect of ambivalence — for Lol having suffered an “absolutely other singularity” at the ball, a sudden feeling of contradiction, multiplicity, or confusion — is Tatiana’s husband. Pierre points out that even if Lol were capable of disclosing the “secret” Tatiana is after, “Il ne serait peut-être pas celui qu’elle croit, malgré elle, il serait différent, de celui” (108). What is at work in Lol’s recollection of the event at T. Beach, then, is not simply lying, as Tatiana — and Hold, earlier — charge. The more radical mystery manifesting itself in Lol’s response is that her experience of the event is itself multiple, a copy of a copy that, like a literary text, is unidentical to itself. Lol’s story has no single truth, her feelings about it even less so. As Hold puts it earlier, “Ne rien savoir de Lol fut la connaître déjà. On pouvait, me parut-il, en savoir moins encore, de moins en moins sur Lol V. Stein” (81). A literary figure par excellence with a most literary story to tell, Lol and her experience at T. Beach only grow more complicated the more one delves into their complications. It is impossible to exhaust Lol or definitively pin down her identity, which she herself describes as of a “nature indécise” (41). Like literature itself, which must differ across its various readings or iterations, Lol marks the limits, or the end, of the very notion of identity. Each day, each reading of or conversation with Lol V. Stein, the novel as well as the woman, presents a new iteration, a new interpretation, of the character, her feelings, and the curious event she undergoes at the ball at T. Beach.[49]

[49] I am not the first to identify a particular link between the ambiguity of Lol’s sense of self, an ambiguity that allows her to be read again and again with different outcomes, and the ambiguity of literature itself. See Collington.

I close this reading of *Lol V. Stein* by traveling with Lol to the end of her story, which takes Lol herself and Jacques Hold back to the beginning. Lol and Hold visit the room at T. Beach where the ball took place. Once more, Lol has nothing to say — she only screams, this time when an attendant turns on the lights in the ballroom, prompting Hold to tell him to turn them off. Light, permitting what we typically recognize as an eyewitness or lucid account, will not do justice to Lol V. Stein's memory of the night at T. Beach. Seeing the space in which the definitive event of her life took place will not clarify her feelings, the ones she never "found out" about, the ones of which she can only learn through an inherently multiple dialogue with others. No, it is neither the truth nor a conclusion that Jacques Hold and the reader find by returning to the scene of Lol's legendary desertion; what Hold realizes instead is that Lol V. Stein's is a "jeunesse sans histoire" (181). Staring into the scene of her past, Lol can only "revoir indéfiniment … revoir bêtement ce qui ne peut pas se revoir" (181). To say Lol's youth has no history is not to say it did not happen; to say she cannot re-see it, witness it again, is not to say she missed the sight of it the first time. On the contrary, what Hold's narration suggests, subtly here and more explicitly at other moments in the text's final pages, is that Lol's story, like her feelings about it, is radically mutable. It is not an empirical account but a fabrication, irreducibly so, and for Lol as for others. Lol's history is not historical in the metaphysical sense; it is a literary history, a nonlinear and more-than-factual one, a story that comes into being singularly, and thus as if for the first time, each time it is read, bespoken, re-seen, recreated.[50] Her feelings

[50] For Derrida on the difference between history and a "metaphysical concept of history," see *Positions,* 77-8. Thinking history in the non-metaphysical, nonlinear sense would require thinking events not as facts to be arranged in a chronological line or gathered together but as an interpretive confrontation shaped by limited knowledge, language, and the context in which the event is thought. In such a historical structure, past events, like the ball at T. Beach, would never simply be past. They would return eternally, different each time thought beckons them to recur.

can only be read or understood in these literary, programmatically indecisive, and thus also anti-programmatic terms.

Affect and literariness in the programmatic present

This dissertation sets out to think the relation between the language of technology and literature. Each chapter takes a technological figure and thinks, in the manner of a chiasmus, both how this figure is literary — in what ways the signifier itself is paradoxical, complex even when it would seem to refer to a superficial or uniform reality — and what this figure may be said to elucidate about literature: how literature creates meaning, what it is, and how it emerges from an encounter with a reader. Chapter one focused on the machine, theorizing it as a figure for the literary text and, in so doing, contesting the notion that the machine only repeatedly produces the same result with no difference. My theorization of the literature machine also disputes the common use of mechanization, which typically refers to the simplification or acceleration of a process (in the case of literature, reading or interpretation). The literature machine accomplishes the opposite effect through the same apparent process of repetition: It produces difference by repeating. A literary text, twice read, is unequal to itself. In the present chapter, I attempt the same literary experiment with the program, which is not here the name of a deadening agenda or set of immutable and unambiguous instructions. In this essay, the program is rather a figure used to describe texts and characters that adhere to somewhat predictable formal patterns while exceeding those patterns, leaving room for surprise. Forces constrain reading but also provide the possibility of reading differently. Context, history, and trauma shape characters, leading them into patterns of behavior and speech, but their words and actions, read or witnessed any number of times, still possess an epistemic remainder: something to be discovered that no set of

instructions, formal pattern, or fixed interpretation can fully capture. Literary programs point not just to the repetition of a foreshadowed event but to that event's capacity to arrive as an event in the philosophical sense, bringing with it unexpected results related to literature's irreducible difference from itself, its multiplicity of meanings, its propensity to mutate across contexts.

The contemporary forces — incompatible with the irreducibly multiple and negative understanding of literariness that I theorize — which encouraged me to rethink the relation between literature and machines encouraged me to do the same in relation to the program. As regards machines, I discussed at length in chapter one the mechanization of literary study as a pattern detection process via studies of data in lieu of the subjective interpretive practice that, in my view, makes literature literary and machines mechanical in a literary way. In a similar fashion to this mechanization of literary study, the program is, today, the name of an increasingly ubiquitous political, economic, and *epistemic* strategy of control. I have attempted to theorize the literary program as a constellation of forces that both controls literary reading, or the thought that takes place in dialogue with the texts we tend to call literature, and provides the means to surpass that control. The content of a text, the economic and industrial forces shaping readings of it, the sociohistorical context in which the reader approaches it, and the reader's ideology control interpretation, but they also contain the resources needed to defy expectations and produce an unprecedented, or singular, iteration of a text. On the contrary, the ascendant programmatic forces to which I am referring do not paradoxically constrain potentiality while multiplying the possibilities of difference. Rather, they are engineered to elicit specific outcomes with the utmost certainty and are thus anathema to the difference I associate with literary reading and thinking.

These programmatic forces are deployed in the name of a wide-ranging political and economic system that the social psychologist and business theorist Shoshana Zuboff calls surveillance capitalism. She defines the term as, among other things:

> "A new economic order that claims human experience as free raw materials for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales; a parasitic economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavioral modification… As significant a threat to human nature in the twenty-first century as industrial capitalism was to the natural world in the nineteenth and twentieth… A movement that aims to impose a new collective order based on total certainty" (vii).

Surveillance capitalism is not only a material and technological system but also an epistemic one. When Zuboff claims that surveillance capitalism is a "threat to human nature" and that it "aims to impose a new collective order based on total certainty," she alludes to the fact that surveillance capitalists, best exemplified by Facebook and Google, not only collect as much data about our purchasing habits, manners of speech, relationships, and feelings as possible, but also sell predictions to advertisers about how we are going to act: for example, what we will buy, whom we will date, and for whom we will vote *based on how we are feeling, what we are thinking, and who we are*. Thus, when Zuboff writes of a "collective order" of "total certainty," she is not referring to the totalitarian societies of the twenty-first century predicated on molding individuals into conformist worshippers of Dear Leader; she is referring to an economic and political system that marshals technological stimuli to manipulate people, based on data collected about them, into taking certain actions beneficial to advertisers with the power to pay for the realization of those actions. This is what I wish to emphasize: Total certainty about what we will do when presented with technological stimuli rests on total certainty about what we already do — how we feel, how we speak, what we think, *who we are*. I would not so uncritically use the term 'human nature' to describe what is at stake here; as my earlier meditation on independence and choice attempted to show, we are always already shaped by our environments, leaving any

pretention to natural behavior, or a true, authentic identity, impossible to maintain.[51] But when she refers to a threat to human nature, Zuboff identifies a significant threat that comes from the presumption that people's behaviors and feelings can be modeled to the point of total or near certainty. What is at stake in this political, economic, and epistemic regime of total certainty is less human nature than what a literary theorist might call difference, or even, following Derrida, différance: those aspects of beings that can never be definitively named, that always remain to be reconsidered another day, that exceed the logics of identity, presence, and objectivity. Surveillance capitalism's epistemic norms, themselves rooted in material imperatives, threaten to sacrifice the anti-programmatic, removing its noisy complications from the totalizing certainty, homogeneity, and predictability of the uncomplicated, industrial program.

The link between the surveillance capitalist present in which this dissertation was written and the major concerns of the dissertation itself, then, is an epistemic and linguistic one rooted in a changing material reality. The question is the same that confronts the many characters of *Lol V. Stein*, who wonder just what happened to Lol, how she's feeling, and whether those feelings can ever be pinned down or definitively named. How do we, meaning specifically those of us who inhabit this programmatic present, know and name what we think we know about literature and the many phenomena manifest in it? How do we know what we know, and can we be certain about what we claim to know? What determines or controls what there is to know about the meanings of literary texts and about the phenomena we might seek to understand through the production of meaning that literature machines make possible? What, through literature, can we learn about affect? About events? Politics? Language? Are the meanings of these phenomena, these literary signifiers, programmable or capable of being rendered as data?

[51] I attend at greater length to the question of the human and subjectivity under surveillance capitalism in chapter three.

It is not a coincidence that I bring up surveillance capitalism and its programmatic effects on knowledge in this chapter largely focused on affect. The treatment of feelings under surveillance capitalism is among the clearest cases for the threat the system poses to difference, and this treatment clarifies the need for ways of thinking that are more than programmatic — that respect that which is undecidable or unidentifiable in the phenomena they assess. Zuboff notes that surveillance capitalists pursue "the everywhere, always-on instrumentation, datafication, connection, communication, and computation *of all things*, animate and inanimate, and all processes" (202, my emphasis). In order to generate marketable insights about their users, readers, and customers, surveillance capitalists, be they social networks, search engines, online media sites, or car manufacturers, must endeavor to articulate every aspect of customers' lives, every piece of information they can acquire or predict about them, as data. This extends to feelings, and the capture of feelings as data is not limited to those who willingly spill their guts online. Studies have shown that, judging by "likes" on social media networks alone, data analysts can decipher traits such as "sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious and political views, personality traits, intelligence, happiness, use of addictive substances, parental separation, age, and gender" (274).[52] A slew of startups have sprouted up in the past decade, promising to partner with the makers of our phones, cars, and preferred websites to render our faces, speech, and behavior as monetizable data that can be used to sell us things, keep us coming back to a website, or even to set the rates for a home loan or auto insurance. This bears a direct relation to the ways we understand and respond to feelings, especially the more unknowable feelings that I call affects. A world in which the medical system, including mental health care, is predicated on the collection of data and programmatic predictions about whether we are depressed and what

[52] See Kosinski et al.

medications would be most appropriate is far from unimaginable. Indeed, the most powerful tech companies of our age are widely considered to view health care as an industry ripe for datafication and disruption. Ambitions of this kind are why Google bought the hardware maker and behavioral data collector Fitbit, which collects information about its users' hours of sleep and heart rates (Bensinger). It is also why Amazon is researching health solutions and, in 2018, bought PillPack, an internet pharmacy (Farr).

We should read these industrial ambitions as among the latest salvos in the surveillance capitalist movement to compute, program, and of course capitalize on the most intimate aspects of our lives. The increasingly prolific and lucrative computation of feelings and other aspects of subjective experience that are perhaps not widely thought to be the disciplinary or epistemic domains of engineering and computer science rests on an epistemological presumption: that everything not only should be computable but *is computable*, that engineers should not only try to render feelings as data and program medical responses to those feelings but that feelings, like everything else, are inherently expressible as data. The whole architecture of the affective computing economy rests on a conceit floated by landmark affective computing theorist Rosalind Picard of the influential Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab more than two decades ago: the notion that feelings can be boiled down to a "pattern recognition problem" (33). This is the presumption I aim to contest, not only in this chapter but in the entirety of this dissertation. I turn to the language of technology at a dominant moment in the history of surveillance capitalism to make the case for a kind of thinking with technology that directly opposes the presumptions and incentives of a surveillance capitalist culture that treats all phenomena as though they are computable and should be computed. This does not mean I am under the quixotic impression that literature or literary theory will save us from surveillance

capitalism, from corporate and political control, or from economic exploitation. It means the prevailing, programmatic norms of our time, represented in literary studies by the increasing popularity of algorithmic methods, animate my commitment to an argument for literariness as a decidedly *other* and marginal form of thought, which is neither empiricist nor positivist, neither primarily quantitative nor objective, but interpretive, contextual, multiple, and largely defined by its attention to that which exceeds patterns and rules, as opposed to a focus on the delineation or identification of them.

Thus, I propose literature itself as the name of that which, in language, is incomputable, undecidable, and unidentical to itself. I propose affect as the name of a particular kind of experience that literary reading, with its attention to the negative, is particularly apt to articulate: a feeling that is singular, irreducibly complicated, difficult to understand, and defiant of expectations even at a time when we are increasingly led to believe all experience can be boiled down to data and programmatic patterns. The truth of Lol V. Stein will never be expressed as fact or number; the language of the novel named for her will exceed all patterns and all critical structures that do not consider that which exceeds those structures, differing in the time and place of each reading of them. What's more, even these most literary of truths will and may be thought, in a manner meant to surprise us once again, in and through the lexicon of machines. Literature's production and figures, its semiosis and conditions of interpretation, may be theorized in the language of the program and that of the literature machine.

Chapter 3

Automata: The Subjects of Perec, Surveillance Capitalism, and the Literature Machine

"It is no longer enough to automate information flows *about us*; the goal now is to *automate us*" (Zuboff 8).

Imagine this: You do not do anything — not in the sense that you do not perform actions but in the sense that you do not perform those actions of your own volition. You do what you must do, what you are told to do, what the inexorable currents from an imaginary circuit board controlled by whomever compel you to do. In the parlance of chapter two of this dissertation, you are programmed — your actions and feelings predetermined, your story, like every novel, written in advance — and despite the anti-programmatic facets of your life, those events that, planned or unplanned, retain something of the spontaneous and surprising in just how they affect you and others, you cannot completely and uncomplicatedly say you have chosen any of it. You did not choose the family, nor the country, nor the language, nor the body, nor the time. You are, as a dutiful leftist opposed to the individualist rhetoric of personal responsibility might say, the product of your circumstances. In this case, are you — machine man or woman or someone else, product of a program, algorithmic subject — human?

I propose that we call the character caught up in the situation I describe above the automaton. This is a character one finds in the novels of Georges Perec, especially *Les choses* and *Un homme qui dort*, though the automaton's relevance by no means expires at the borders of one author's literature. Indeed, there are several reasons to rethink the human subject in relation to technology and to take up the figure of the automaton. These, variously political, philosophical, and literary, include the rise of surveillance capitalism, a form of capital premised on technology-enhanced marketing manipulation, which Perec parodies avant la lettre in his own

novels; increasingly automated forms of politics tied to rigid identities and the algorithmic push and pull of such surveillance capitalist firms as Google and Facebook; more and more popular critiques of the human as a concept, or the rise of posthumanism; philosophical objections to the still-common illusion of total personal freedom, which remains to be reformulated in a way that takes into account freedom's complications, or obstacles, such as quasi-deterministic contextual forces and the unconscious; and literary experiments, such as Perec's, that call into question the freedom of language, or its signification and interpretation, positing that machines, literal or metaphorical, can automate interpretations of literature or master a literary text's meaning via algorithmic and/or quantitative dissection. Each of these social and epistemic developments, interrelated, calls into question one of the most fundamental assumptions about the so-called human subject, especially that which distinguishes it from machines: namely, that humans act freely and spontaneously, while machines are programmed and act automatically, that humans are independent where machines are dependent, that humans control their own behavior and thought, while machines are controlled by others and lack the capacity for free thinking.

This chapter takes up this distinction, to argue not that the concept of the human needs to be replaced entirely or that we would-be humans are all drones without an iota of free will, but that the human subject is fundamentally, if partially, automatic, or automaton. That the human subject is part automaton is particularly pertinent and obvious in the time of surveillance capitalism, as I will consider. But Perec's novels show us that earlier iterations of capitalism already partially automated the human. More radically still, as both Perec and philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida were at pains to show us, capitalism or no capitalism, the human subject has always been and always will be entangled in networks of control, or more simply, contexts, that undercut uncomplicated claims of pure subjective or personal freedom. In

a sense that remains to be explored in greater depth, then, we have always been posthuman or, more precisely, subjects *other* than the exemplarily and individually free humans Western thought has often made us out to be.

But my interest in the automaton originated with readings of two mid-1960s novels of Perec's, *Les choses* and *Un homme qui dort*, and it is with the former that this essay begins. I consider the automation of the novel's main characters, Jérôme and Sylvie, articulating how capitalism's spectacles compel them to pursue objects that do not bring them happiness and, more nefariously, foreclose the subject's ability to imagine other futures, whether in terms of personal destiny or social and political order. I move on to a broader and more historical reflection on automaticity, marketing, and the subject, exploring how post-war capitalism and then surveillance capitalism increasingly seek to automate or manipulate the subject with the asymptotic goal of eroding any remaining claim to freedom from the powers that be. The chapter's third section takes up Gilles Deleuze's theory of control societies, of which surveillance capitalism is an iteration, and Perec's *Un homme qui dort*, which I read as a failed experiment on the part of the protagonist to regain independence from social forces through isolation. This section radicalizes the essay's challenge to the very notion of freedom, especially personal freedom as the cornerstone of a theory of human subjectivity, arguing that we have never been free in the way much of Western thought, including that of Shoshana Zuboff, the theorist of surveillance capitalism, takes for granted. In section four, I situate my understanding of human subjectivity in relation to recent work in what is often called posthumanism, drawing especially on Carey Wolfe's theory of posthumanism as a phenomenon that does not simply come after the human and Laurent Dubreuil's insistence that humanity itself is more partial quality, a quality not itself limited to what we tend to recognize as humans, than it is the unified

theory of one species' homogeneous subjectivity. Section five explores the politics of automata, articulating how surveillance capitalism seeks freedom's destruction. It also proposes a revised notion of freedom, or quasi-freedom, and attends to the freedom, or lack therein, of so-called identity politics, which surveillance capitalism turbocharges and appropriates for its own purposes.

In the essay's final section, I consider *The Machine*, a radio play of Perec's that aims to identify the essence of poetry and algorithmically encapsulate a famous Goethe poem. This final turn allows me to consider what literariness as a singular discourse teaches us about subjectivity. To put my conclusion in the parlance of this dissertation, I argue that the literature machine paradoxically produces the opposite of the outcome Perec himself, or at least the opening pages of *The Machine*, appears to imagine. That is, the literature machine, which produces difference via copies of itself, destroys or deconstructs the very notion of subjectivity as a stable phenomenon reducible to a logic of identity. Literary texts may allow us to glimpse the automating effects of capitalism, or context in general, on the would-be human subject. But insofar as there is an essence of poetry or literariness, it is precisely, through the mechanical and relentless production of semiotic difference, to root out the notion of subjectivity as identity, leaving a scattered and unstable, perhaps hardly recognizable or identifiable, subject, as well as a more creative and capacious understanding of language and signification, in the wake of each of a text's truly literary readings.

***Things*' Automata**

The title of Perec's 1965 novel *Les choses* would seem to refer to the material possessions with which the main characters, Jérôme and Sylvie, obsess themselves. It is with

things that the narrative begins, listing as if conducting the inventory of a department store a carpet, prints, curtains, and a sofa. But the novel quickly calls its titular signifier into question, prompting the reader to ponder not only things' centrality in the lives of the main characters — "ils auraient aimé être riches," the second chapter begins — but also the reduction of the twentysomethings *to things*, to something less than human, as one might colloquially posit (17).[53] One suspects that these characters may be things not only because they do not receive names until chapter three, nor simply because they are deprived of dialogue, indeed of almost any glimpse of interiority, but also because they appear to be "pawns" of the very "machine" that they operate: that of a growing French marketing industry, which employs them as "psycho-sociologues," or "market researchers," in David Bellos' English (79 and 26; 35). Here, of course, Perec's "pawns" can be understood in multiple senses. It is not just that Jérôme and Sylvie are pawns as workers, cogs in a vast industrial machine that employs them on an as-needed basis. It is also that they are, and even before they had enlisted in the industry appeared to have been, pawns to marketing chess masters commanding their wishes for the things the characters both pawn off on others and come to resemble. Indeed, it is the same marketers for whom they toil that inspire Jérôme and Sylvie's unqualified desire to be rich. But the narrator's vision of this dynamic — the text's challenge to illusions of total self-control or freedom — is even more dramatic. It is not simply marketing that chooses the lead characters' vocation of market researcher, or social psychologist; guiding their choices is history itself: "L'histoire, là encore, avait choisi pour eux" (26).

[53] In a study of control in late capitalism, Seb Franklin contends that "Control introduces the programmable object in the place of the subject" (117). This is consistent with the argument I advance here about the power of capitalism, especially surveillance capitalism, to automate the subject. Of course, as sections to come explore at length, I contend that the partially or quasi-free subject is nevertheless never wholly *replaced* by the programmable object, or, in the language of this chapter, the automaton. I also argue that this automatic control that appears to replace the subject with a programmable thing precedes the current historical period.

According, then, to the program of this literature machine — the text's text, or the most obvious facet of the novel's program — the reader is to believe that Jérôme and Sylvie do not necessarily choose what they believe, nor what they choose. History, or the industrial and historical force of the marketing industry and the couple's concomitant, self-perceived need for money and things, chooses their profession. Right from the start, then, the novel provokes us to consider questions of subjectivity: Who are these people without a line of dialogue, with nameless friends and families, no thoughts to speak of, and something less than total freedom? Who are these people entirely beholden to the forces of history? This question grows more insistent as Jérôme and Sylvie's initial contentment with the life they have built collapses before the realization that they have not deliberately built anything at all: "Leur vie n'était pas conquête, elle était effritement, dispersion. Ils se rendaient compte, alors, à quel point ils étaient condamnés à l'habitude, à l'inertie" (76). United by little more than greed, characterized solely by the norms of their generation and the desires mass-distributed by the firms for which they shill, Jérôme and Sylvie realize they have chosen none of it and that the life they have failed to choose does not inspire. Their life can be disaggregated into a "ritual," no longer able to "protect" them, of "des phrases creuses, des gestes vides, sans densité, sans ouverture, sans avenir, des mots mille fois répétés, des mains mille fois serrées" (76). Like machines, they have reproduced a "received order," reaffirming both the commands they receive and the broad social order those commands subtend (Derrida *Papier Machine* 35). But unlike the literature machine this dissertation has sought to theorize, their repeated actions do not foster difference, nor creativity, nor deeper understanding of themselves or their society. In the repetition that characterizes their lives, Jérôme and Sylvie see "no opening, no future" — nothing to interpret or appreciate, but rather empty signs, "des phrases creuses," signifying nothing. They see their lives as repetition without

difference, imitation without interest. It as though they have merely printed a list of statements they were programmed to spit out, acquiring a list of things and practicing a series of social habits that make for a "hollow," "empty" life.

The arbitrariness and historical specificity of Jérôme and Sylvie's seemingly automatic desires, which are but cravings for *signs* of wealth as wealth is defined in the environment of 1960s Paris, becomes more apparent when they leave the French capital, taking up a new life in Sfax, Tunisia, where Sylvie works as a teacher. Traveling around France earlier in the novel, the acquisitive lovers daydream of lavish trappings, which parade through their minds like montages of increased status:

"Ces images scintillantes, toutes ces images qui arrivaient en foule, qui se précipitaient au-devant d'eux, qui coulaient en un flot saccadé, intarissable, ces images de vertige, de vitesse, de lumière, de triomphe … il leur semblait d'abord que leurs sensations se décuplaient, que s'amplifiaient à l'infini leurs facultés de voir et de sentir … leur liberté était sans contrainte" (92-3).

Perec's passage is reminiscent of one by Karl Marx, in which he suggests that, liberated from the demands and desires of private property, humankind's "senses" will "have therefore become directly in their practice theoreticians" (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* 107).[54] By this, Marx means that the subject freed from capitalist norms will no longer experience life under the confines of an imagination relentlessly focused on what it can and cannot possess; the eye will appreciate what it sees and the hand what it feels unconditioned by the ever-present anxiety over whether the sensation can be commodified, the pleasing object bought. In Jérôme and Sylvie's case, of course, the ideological frame is just the opposite: They dream, inexorably, in a "halting flow," not of observing but of having, and not even of having for the sake of feeling or enjoying an object, but of having in order to signify their wealth in turn. At bottom, the all-too-

[54] I first encountered this passage in Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (31). I will attend to the pertinence of cruel optimism to *Les choses* and the automaton in this section.

illusory "freedom" on which Jérôme and Sylvie fixate in the course of their musings on "images" of wealth is not predicated on the ability to do things or even possess them; it is based on the capitalist cultural and economic incentives to which they always, no matter how subconsciously, respond: their desire to *appear* rich, to live "fast," to embody "triumph" as that idea is articulated by the marketing masters for whom they labor and the social climbers with whom they spend their time. The couple's most fundamental desire, to be "rich," is to inhabit a simulation, which Jean Baudrillard describes as follows: "Il ne s'agit plus d'imitation, ni de redoublement, ni même de parodie. Il s'agit d'une substitution au réel des signes du réel" (11). For the young couple, what matters is not so-called reality — really owning the things that signify wealth or possessing the power and experiencing the material pleasures wealth may confer — but wielding the signs capable of supplanting reality. The reality of wealth, or capital, is hollowed out by the couple's spectacular conception of it, a conception that supersedes reality in importance.[55]

In and around Sfax, Jérôme and Sylvie get a taste of the things, and the life, they have for so long believed themselves to crave. Sauntering around Tunisian cities, where nice-looking "things" are cheap and the apartment they rent is spacious, they visit markets teeming with "objets … somptueux" (117). But faced at last with the prospect of buying something luxurious, "ils ne se sentaient pas attirés," because "aucun de ces objets … ne leur donnait une impression de richesse. … Tout ce qu'ils voyaient demeurait étranger, appartenait à un autre monde, ne les concernait pas" (117). Here, it is evident that Jérôme and Sylvie do not quite desire things, nor even to be rich in a material sense; their desire, manufactured by the machines of industry to

[55] Here, one thinks of the famous opening of Guy Debord's *La société du spectacle*, also written in the decade of which *Les choses* is said to be "une histoire": "Toute la vie des sociétés dans lesquelles règnent les conditions modernes de production s'annonce comme une immense accumulation de spectacles. Tout ce qui était directement vécu s'est éloigné dans une représentation" (12). Translated into Debord's lexicon: Jérôme and Sylvie do not fundamentally seek to accumulate wealth, or things, but the spectacle of wealth.

which they are beholden, is to attain the appearance of wealth that they see in the cinemas they frequent and the magazines they read. They are not attracted to the luxurious objects in Tunisia because, sumptuous as they may be, they are not part of the aesthetic order, or simulacrum, that signifies wealth in Paris. What's more, even if the beautiful things surrounding them were consistent with their metropolitan understanding of riches, they would have no one to whom to flaunt those signs of wealth; their life in Sfax is remarkably isolated, and signs of wealth are worthless with no spectators to interpret them as such. Once, the novel puts it, "ils se seraient damnés" to obtain the riches they see up close in Tunisia (119). But by the time they get a glimpse of opulence up close, their world has changed: "ils n'étaient devenus que des Sfaxiens, des provinciaux, des exilés" (119). The couple's flight from status-obsessed, cosmopolitan Paris does not lead them to embrace an alternative life to the one of unfilled desire they had led in metropolitan France; their departure leads to yet another void, not, this time, of unfulfilled desire, but of desire's absence. "Que s'était-il passé ?" the texts asks in free indirect discourse, indicating that this is a question for more than just the troubled protagonists (120). What has happened to them since their days of longing in Paris, when they did not have what they wanted but at least knew what they wanted to have? "Il ne restait rien," the text responds (120). No things remain to crave. No member of their social set lingers to interpret them as the phantasmatic, triumphant heroes they had once hoped to become.

To name these subjects who pursue mass-produced visions of what Lauren Berlant, in *Cruel Optimism*, might call the good life, who robotically repeat empty rituals and whose stories seem programmed, or written in advance, I propose the automaton. Perec himself alludes to this form of subjectivity, describing in the novel's final paragraphs on the couple's time in Sfax the breakdown of the conventional human subject, awake and in control of her own destiny: "Leur

vie continuait, identique… Ils étaient des somnambules. Ils ne savaient plus ce qu'ils voulaient. Ils étaient dépossédés" (119-120). It is not just that Jérôme and Sylvie live lives reducible to a logic of identity, lives devoid of difference or spontaneity, which in itself suggests that they are at least partially automated subjects rather than the impulsive and spontaneous creatures we typically take humans to be. The text literally redefines who they are via the simplicity of a four-word sentence: "They were sleepwalkers," robots, automata. What is it that led them to live this way?

Berlant writes that cruel optimism "is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object" (24). Of course, one example of such an object would be the dream of having things that are supposed to a confer a sense of wealth and therefore fulfillment and respect, though, in reality, enough things can never be had, and fulfillment remains ever deferred despite daydreams of eventual triumph. Writing lines that might have been penned to describe the conditions of Perec's characters in Sfax, Berlant continues:

> "What's cruel about these attachments, and not merely inconvenient or tragic, is that the subjects who have *x* in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object/scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the *content* of the attachment is, the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world" (24).

Recall that for Jérôme and Sylvie, after Paris proves suffocating and their experience in Sfax goes sour, "Il ne restait rien" (120). That which dissolves for them upon realizing that they do not even crave *things* anymore after living in Sfax is precisely what Berlant describes: their "sense of what it means to keep living on," to inhabit the world, or a world, the world as these automata can understand its incentives and borders. Without their attachment to things and the normative sense of wealth those things signify among their Parisian social set, Jérôme and Sylvie's world dissolves.

The text describes Jérôme and Sylvie as "somnambules," sleepwalkers, unsure of what they want and dispossessed. But this description, which appears to suggest that the couple is even worse off, now that they have forgone *things*, than they had been in Paris, warrants a counter-intuitive reading. On the one hand, Jérôme and Sylvie seem like sleepwalkers, automata merely repeating meaningless rituals, because the primary attachment of their Parisian lives appears to have disappeared, robbing them of a sense of purpose. This ritualistic and disoriented behavior is indeed a form of automaticity, and it might seem to mark a divergence from their dispiriting, but focused, pursuit of wealth and status in Paris. But the automaticity of their comportment in Sfax is, in fact, a continuation of their cruelly optimistic attachment to things rather than a divergence from it. Life in Tunisia challenges the couple's simulated Parisian world and offers them the opportunity to embrace an alternative, where things and the simulacrum of wealth are not the standard for always-deferred happiness. That, faced with this world- or simulation-shattering absence of normative and cruel desires, the couple sinks into detached, rote routines is a sign not that their departure from Paris offered no alternatives from their previously dissatisfying lives, but that the life they live in Sfax is merely the inverse of the automaticity to which they had fallen prey in Paris. The key is that Jérôme and Sylvie never fully detach from things. This is the source of their utter disorientation and failure to build a new world for themselves in Sfax. Thus, to the extent that they become sleepwalkers in Sfax, they are the same sleepwalkers, or automata, they had always been, still navigating a depressing relation to the things they cannot have.[56]

The novel's epilogue underscores the continuation of Jérôme and Sylvie's consumerist fantasy and, with it, their automaticity. All but the first paragraph of the epilogue is written in the

[56] See Berlant on the political depressive, *Cruel Optimism*, 27.

future tense. The first paragraph is written in a past conditional that looks back on events in the characters' lives as if those events had already happened when, in fact, they have not. It is a musing on what could have been as if what could have been had already, definitively, not transpired, when the foreclosed future of the first paragraph should remain an option to the main characters. In this future that will not come to pass, Jérôme and Sylvie stay in Sfax. They will have enough money, make new friends, buy a car — "Ils auraient eu," even, "une belle villa, un grand jardin" (123). In short, the text acknowledges that Sfax does in fact offer the protagonists the opportunity, not only to definitively leave behind the social world of Paris where they find themselves continually disappointed, but also to attain the very things they supposedly craved, the putatively essential things for their long-sought-after happiness. However, this conditional dream, relegated to an imaginary past that will not take place, is just that: a dream, and an infeasible one at that, no match for the enduring fantasy of wealth that will drive Jérôme and Sylvie toward a different and dissatisfying future. The past conditional tense of the first paragraph underscores the certainty of the text's outcome and therefore the complete automation of the couple.

Thus, in the remainder of the epilogue, the text tells us with full confidence, in a future *with no conditions*, that for Jérôme and Sylvie, "Il ne leur sera pas si facile d'échapper à leur histoire. Le temps, encore une fois, travaillera à leur place" (123). Here, the polysemy of "histoire" in French, possibly signifying both history and story, marks not a divergent set of competing meanings but the two possibilities' convergence into one. History *is* their story; or, as we say in English, the rest of their story is history. For Jérôme and Sylvie, as the tense of the story's final several pages suggests, there is no uncertainty. Time will make of them what it will have had to make of them — they will pine for Paris ("ils se languiront de Paris"), they will pack

their bags ("ils feront leurs bagages"), they will try to live as before ("ils tenteront de vivre comme avant"), and they will, once again, suffocate ("ils étoufferont") (123-127). They will continue to chase unattainable things and then become disappointed again upon realizing that proximity to those things does not foster the happiness that ownership of them is expected to inspire. This tale of cruel optimism and cyclical disappointment is the only history and the only story possible for automata whose lives are written as though they could not have turned out otherwise. Tellingly, the text's narrator, as well as Jérôme and Sophie themselves, are aware of this unavoidable fate. When, "one day," the two take up full-time jobs at the Bordeaux branch of a marketing agency, the narrator interjects, "N'avaient-ils pas toujours su que ce jour viendrait ?" (127). The future is foretold, the socially systematic fantasy uninterrupted, the action of its heroes automatic. Sophie and Jérôme were always destined to be pulled along like things, caught in the tailwinds of history and capitalized spectacle.

Automaticity, marketing, and the subject

Perec frames the story of *Les choses* as "une histoire des années 60," and there is no doubt historical specificity to the novel's account of what I am calling automatic subjects or automata. Theories such as those proposed by Debord and Baudrillard underscore the proliferation of consumerist spectacle that drove mass-produced subjective automation in the mid-to-late twentieth century. But the simulated worlds, spectacular displays of capital, and willful automation of the subject that these aesthetic and philosophical texts describe are not unique to the mid-twentieth century and have, in fact, only intensified in the decades since.

To understand the growing, present-day relevance of the mid-twentieth-century challenges to the autonomy of the subject at work in *Les choses* and envisioned by theorists four to six decades ago, it is helpful to delve further into their claims. Debord argues that the

spectacle to which he refers "est à la fois le résultat et le projet du mode de production existant. Il n'est pas un supplément au monde réel … Il est le cœur de l'irréalisme de la société réelle" (14). Baudrillard, for his part, presses the point further, saying not that spectacles or simulacra reveal what constitutes the false consciousness or unreality of so-called real life, but rather that imaginary places such as Disneyland exist to propagate the putative reality of a real life that no longer exists at all: "Disneyland est posé comme imaginaire afin de faire croire que tout le reste est réel, alors que tout Los Angeles et l'Amérique qui l'entoure ne sont déjà plus réels, mais de l'ordre de l'hyperréel et de la simulation" (26). Putting aside differences in terminology, in both cases, what is at stake, and what is denounced, is the increasing disappearance of so-called 'real' social relations. I would posit that, in both Debord and Baudrillard's cases, we might understand these vanishing 'real' social relations as ones that are not always already obscured by ideology because they are conducted in contexts orchestrated by the manipulating forces of capital. In the worlds Perec, Debord, and Baudrillard describe, spaces untainted by the distortionary fog of false consciousness are disappearing or have completely disappeared. Here, false consciousness — which exemplarily plagues Jérôme and Sylvie as part of their own participation in 'unreal' social relations — would include misconceptions about what one wants and how to obtain happiness, how one relates to others and objects, and whom or what is to blame for a systemic lack of material and affective well-being.

The ties among false consciousness, the suffering of subjects beholden to it such as Jérôme and Sylvie, and the intensification of capitalist manipulation from the 1960s to the present may be understood in terms of alienation. Marx, who is quoted on the last page of *Les choses*, writes: "The proletarian class … feels destroyed in [its] alienation, seeing in it its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence. … This class is, within depravity, an

indignation against this depravity" (133-4). The hollowing out of reality to which Debord and Baudrillard refer marks the increasing inability on the part of those afflicted by alienation to recognize it as such and understand its genesis. In other words, a spectacle or simulation society prevents its alienated inhabitants from understanding the sources of their own malaise and envisioning alternative desires and social possibilities. This inability of afflicted subjects to reckon with the sources of their unhappiness is fully evident in *Les choses*: Thus, Jérôme and Sylvie lament their small apartment, the constant display of images of objects they are unable to attain, and the banality of the jobs available to them. Crucially, though, they do not attribute their structural discontent to systemic factors; on the contrary, they *envy* "la perfection des grands bourgeois" (43); maintain little to no political consciousness except a vague belief in "le technocratisme" (67); and, of course, lust endlessly after the images of wealth that are in fact the signs of capital concentration, inter-class exploitation, and their own dispossession.

What I want to suggest is that this hollowing out of political consciousness, distortion of social relations, and automation of self-defeating and consumerist desire has only accelerated since the decade of which Perec's novel purports to be an exemplary "histoire." In the twenty-first century, technology has turbocharged the distortionary and manipulative forces of capital, rendering more convincing Marx's claim that the proletarian class experiences alienation as the "reality of an inhuman existence." Indeed, this inhuman existence, one in which the subject's relations to other people and to the objects the subject needs to survive are distorted by forces with a pernicious economic agenda, merits a novel conception of subjective experience to go along with the novel theory of surveillance capitalism: that of the automaton.

In chapter two, I turned to Shoshana Zuboff's theory of surveillance capitalism to explain how the pretention to program the meaning of literary texts, or reduce their meanings to data and

algorithms, relates to an emergent epistemic regime, which views all human experience as potentially reducible to data. It is among Zuboff's primary theses that this epistemic power grab represents "a threat to human nature" (vii). I would propose a more radical conception for the threat the datafication of human experience, including feelings and language, for the purpose of "behavioral modification" poses to the human subject (vii). Namely, surveillance capitalists' use of technology to render our speech, feelings, and behavior as data and manipulate us — coaxing us to click, buy, and vote via technological stimuli — based on that data shows that, in significant if not totalizing ways, we, the subjects of surveillance capitalist society, are not humans, but automata. When we pick up our phones without thinking, we are automata. When we thrill at positive responses to the content we post online and publish again to receive yet more positive feedback, we are automata. We are automata when we submit to recurring purchases on digital commerce websites, continue to engage with digital properties owned by companies we proclaim to detest, and subject ourselves to the algorithms of dating and job-hunting sites in hopes of a match with a company or lover chosen for us. This does not necessarily mark a radical break from the automation of Jérôme and Sylvie. Rather, surveillance capitalism marks the intensification of the automation of desire and concomitant alienation that the mass media and marketing of the mid-twentieth century already proliferated. Images in *L'Express*, a glitzy French weekly that Jérôme and Sylvie worship as the standard-bearer for what to want, constitute a quaint threat of manipulation in relation to Twitter's notifications, Instagram's personalized advertisements, and Tinder's promises of love and pleasure. The obfuscation of so-called real social relations — the inability to understand why we want what we want, what we need to secure happiness and material well-being, and who is responsible for the deprivation of the above — has intensified amid Amazon's monopolization of commerce, social apps' co-

optation and commodification of community, and Apple and Google's arrogation, via their duopoly on smartphones, of the power to set the agenda for our attention.

As a theory, the automaton revises Zuboff's approach to surveillance capitalism's impact on the subject, as she takes for granted the notion that there is such an unqualified being as the human and such a state of being as nature. Crucially, Zuboff ascribes to this human being an uncomplicated sense of personal freedom, writing:

> "Our freedom flourishes only as we steadily will ourselves to close the gap between making promises and keeping them. Implicit in this action is an assertion that through my will I can influence the future. It does not imply total authority over the future, of course, only over my piece of it. *In this way, the assertion of freedom of will also asserts the right to the future tense as a condition of a fully human life*" (332).

In her model of the human, which clearly centers free will and the ability to plan for a future as key components of humanity itself, Zuboff is careful to stipulate that she does not believe the human subject has "total authority over the future … only over" the individual subject's "piece of it." But here, too, lie assumptions that deserve more scrutiny, namely, that the human subject has "total authority," or even substantial authority, over her "piece" of the future, and that this notion of authority over one's future, or the existence of free will, should be central to an understanding of human subjectivity. To these presuppositions of which to be skeptical, I would add that there is such a thing as a fully integrated, not at all inhuman, or automatic, human subject. Zuboff is certainly correct that the forms of technological manipulation, including the datafication of human experience, that form the bedrock of surveillance capitalism pose a threat to both human subjectivity and the sovereignty on which it is oft supposed to rest. But understanding the threat surveillance capitalism poses to the subject requires a deeper investigation of human subjectivity and our supposed sovereignty over ourselves. In other words, we need to understand how much control the human has over itself to begin with and what 'the

human' is in order to assess just how much surveillance capitalism erodes that control and a conception of the human. This is the path, too, to understanding why the contemporary human subject — and perhaps the human subject of *any* time — might be understood as automaton.

Control, context, freedom

In a short essay on societies of control, Deleuze revises Michel Foucault's thesis on disciplinary societies for the twentieth century, announcing the arrival of control societies. Foucault had argued that power produces "l'individu et la connaissance qu'on peut en prendre," describing specifically how various institutions of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, such as the family, the school, and the factory, discipline and bring the subject into being as "éléments corrélatifs d'un pouvoir et d'un savoir" (*Surveiller et punir* 195-6). Deleuze has no objection to Foucault's elaboration of what I might more broadly call the power of not just institutions but also context in general to form the subject, but he adds that in the late twentieth century, the disciplinary power of the "système clos" is increasingly supplanted by an ever-present, diffuse, and digital power that chases the subject wherever she goes (6). Deleuze writes that while in disciplinary societies, one constantly recommences one's engagement with disciplinary institutions, moving from one to the next, "dans les sociétés de contrôle on n'en finit jamais avec rien, l'entreprise, la formation, le service étant les états métastables et coexistants d'une même modulation, comme d'un déformateur universel" (8). I would suggest that control always has been and always will be diffuse, and therefore positing historical periods characterized by certain kinds of control is a fraught exercise. Other work of Deleuze, as I will consider later, encourages us to think in precisely this transhistorical way about the ever-contextual shape of the 'human' subject. Nevertheless, Foucault and Deleuze do capture something salient about broad historical shifts in means of control, and Deleuze's theory of

control societies is a prescient way to describe the particularly ubiquitous and decentralized manipulation at work in surveillance capitalism.

Indeed, in the control society of surveillance capitalism, one is never outside zones of power meant to extract human experience for the sake of capital accumulation. Mobile phones collect location data, facial recognition devices consume faces on the street, smart beds and watches monetize the tossing and turning of the most clueless as they sleep, and private thoughts become just more deferred content for the machine, liable to be transformed into fodder for targeted advertising or training for chatbots if uttered in the recording zones of smart speakers or on the keyboards of a laptop.[57] Deleuze's theory acknowledged already, at the time of the essay's publication in 1990, *how* the control society would drag people into its borderless sphere of influence: "Le langage numérique du contrôle est fait de chiffres, qui marquent l'accès à l'information, ou le rejet" (8). This is precisely how the capitalism of the twenty-first century exercises its power over an ever-deformed subject. From the first days of its life, a still-forming surveillance capitalist subject's experience is capitalized, its subjectivity constituted, and its sovereignty called into question by a digital system that compels the burgeoning being and its caretakers to share and find out more information. Resistance is only relatively possible. To access the information needed to earn the money to reproduce one's own material existence, hardly anyone in a present-day, digitally saturated society can stave off the networks that seek to shape and vacuum up human experience. So-called sovereignty over oneself — "authority," as

[57] In their own treatment of the control society, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri contend that capital itself is at odds with the possibility of individual sovereignty, arguing that "Capital … demands not a transcendent power but a mechanism of control that resides on the plain of immanence" (326). In other words, to enter into relations of capital is already to leave behind the myth that one can exercise total authority over oneself. Surveillance capitalism maximizes these conditions of capitalized connection that should force us to rethink a model of human subject premised on individual sovereignty.

Zuboff writes, "over my piece" of the future — is always already compromised, even for those who shirk the iPhone. No one evades the informatic checkpoints.

Un homme qui dort, a novel of Perec's published two years after *Les choses*, tells the story of a protagonist struggling against the demands of an ascendant control society. A sort of companion novel to *Les choses*, *Un homme qui dort* poses the question of what would unfold if Jérôme and Sylvie lived even more detached from the spectacles of cosmopolitan society than their life in Sfax entails. That is, the protagonist of *Un homme qui dort* is isolated not only from the mass media and marketing that control Sophie and Jérôme's desires in Paris but also from other people and almost every avoidable institution. The twenty-five-year-old quits school, takes up no job, cuts off contact with his friends, and boils his life down to simple algorithms, repeating each day what he eats, where he goes, and what he reads. Apparently explaining the reasoning behind this break from society to himself, he thinks:

> "Ce n'est pas que tu détestes les hommes, pourquoi les détesterais-tu ? Pourquoi te détesterais-tu ? … Mais c'est trop cher pour des pouces opposables … cette chaudière, cette fournaise, ce gril qu'est la vie, ces milliards de sommations, d'incitations, de mises en garde, d'exaltations, de désespoirs, ce bain de contraintes qui n'en finit jamais, cette éternelle machine à produire … cette douce terreur qui veut régir chaque jour, chaque heure de ta mince existence" (42-3).

What the protagonist rails against is a control society that has not yet developed into a fully technologically enhanced surveillance society. The "machine" he decries is that of capitalism and the society it permeates, a society that the protagonist experiences as a "cauldron" or "furnace" incessantly dragging his feet to the fire, inciting him to produce, to forge a more impressive future, a higher net worth. What is particularly remarkable is the way the text frames these forces: not as the enclosed institutional forces of the disciplinary society but as the sprawling and ever-present network of the control society, intent on reigning over or controlling "each day, each hour" of the subject it shapes into being. Deleuze describes the decentralized

power of the control society as a "gaz" (7). Perec describes this same power as an all-consuming oven or bath ("bain"), the latter of which Andrew Leak translates as "atmosphere" (155). The implications of these metaphors, however translated, are clear: The forces of control to which the character is subjected are not the stuff of institutions one enters and exits; they are the very air of the world the human being must breathe to survive.

Seemingly cognizant of this sordid world's inescapability, the protagonist nevertheless attempts to exit it, cloistering himself in his small apartment and limiting his behavior to simple rituals. In other words, he embraces the life of an automaton, performing "gestes d'automate: te lever, te laver, te raser, te vêtir" (91). His daily routine is but the execution of a series of commands, one "pas mécanique" after the other (93). At times, he seems convinced that this automated and automotive life — a life guided by the inertia of routine and lived under the pretention of total isolation — has granted him precisely the individual freedom or autonomy he seeks from the scattered forces of social and capitalist control. "Tu es patient, et tu n'attends pas, tu es libre et tu ne choisis pas, tu es disponible et rien ne te mobilise" (90). This is a vision of freedom *as* isolation or autonomy: not necessarily freedom *to* do as one pleases or the freedom to plan one's own future, as Zuboff suggests, but rather freedom *from* all external forces and social structures. This is a different kind of automaton posited as the epitome of freedom; the subject acts automatically not due to social or cultural pressure, as in the case of the automaticity of Jérôme and Sophie, but in response to some unthinking combination of material and unconscious forces. Summarized in a phrase: "Tu es inaccessible" (96).

The problem is that this form of freedom, this pretention to autonomy born of isolation from society and all others, is just that, a pretention, and the protagonist himself inevitably comes to the same conclusion. This is the first strike against a vision of freedom as uncomplicated

"authority" to govern oneself or one's own future: The would-be free, human subject always exists in relation to others; one's sovereignty and even, at the limit, one's own individuality are compromised from the outset by the relations of reproduction and cooperation that make up even the most isolated of lives. The protagonist's bid to achieve independence from all outside forces is doomed, in advance, to fail. Thus, he ultimately concludes:

> "Non. Tu n'es plus le maître anonyme du monde, celui sur qui l'histoire n'avait pas de prise, celui qui ne se sentait pas la pluie tomber, qui ne voyait pas la nuit venir. Tu n'es plus l'inaccessible, le limpide, le transparent. Tu as peur, tu attends. Tu attends, place Clichy, que la pluie cesse de tomber" (144).

In the text's final passage, the protagonist ceases to see himself as the anti-conformist, socially disruptive hero as whom he sometimes imagines himself at earlier moments in the novel. Instead, if the man who endeavored to sleep in a society of wide-awake strivers had ever succeeded in sleeping, it was only to dream a delusional dream, one whose fundamental impossibility — that he could ever stay asleep, unalert to contextual forces, in the first place — anti-climactically strikes him as he "waits" at Place Clichy, just another wet striver in the rain. Recall that "l'histoire" is precisely the force from which Sophie and Jérôme are said to be unable to escape (123) — "L'histoire, là encore, avait choisi pour eux" (26). *Un homme qui dort* turns out to be the story of a man who gives his best effort at this most Herculean task and fails. In the atmospheric control society that the character himself describes, there is no escape, no pure independence, no hope even of abandoning all desires and giving oneself entirely over to the automatic forces of the unconscious or material randomness.[58] Appearing to abandon one's own history, or story, and ceasing to speak to one's neighbors does not an anonymous master of the world make. Isolation is not possible, nor is it equivalent to freedom.

[58] See Cadieu for an extended account of free will, chance, and materialist determinism in Perec and other Oulipo writers.

The insight the novel imparts is more radical than a commentary on the history of a certain period or the forces of capital and control in *one* control society. The lesson, as underscored by the narrator's realization that he cannot escape rain, nor the night, nor history writ large, is that beyond any one period of history or social structure, life, human or otherwise, is irreducibly entangled, social, something less than independent. In the final instance, the narrator may indeed be said to live the life of an automaton, but it is not isolation, nor the pure displacement of his will to the power of chance or the unconscious, as he initially hopes, that makes him an automaton or his actions automatic. It is, as the protagonist fears from the beginning, his ineluctable relations to others and to events, even those as basic and unavoidable as dusk and rainfall, that limit his never complete freedom. Awake, the man who dreams of sleeping cannot entirely evade either social pressure or material stimuli.

What Perec's novel portends for this chapter's theorization of the automaton, for the existence of freedom, and for freedom's potential subversion under the controlling regime of surveillance capitalism, then, is that pure freedom, like pure automaticity, has never existed, and the automaton, while increasingly pertinent as a theory of subjectivity in the age of surveillance capitalism, is a transhistorical concept, by no means limited to the age of the Internet, nor even to capitalism itself. To argue for automaticity as an irreducible component of human subjectivity, one that exists in relation to a never full freedom, is at odds with a Western philosophical tradition that has historically posited freedom as a feeling or political state that exists precisely where relationality fails and mediation disappears: the freedom *from* external constraints and the freedom *to* do as the individual subject pleases converging into one ideal. Derrida argues that this "definition of freedom … as the sovereign power to do as one pleases," attaining "power, mastery, and independence" predates the Enlightenment era to which it is frequently attributed,

and traces it back to Plato and Aristotle (*Rogues* 43). But philosophies of difference such as those of Derrida and Deleuze — ways of thinking that privilege relationality, seeing it as prior to an atomic, individual being's existence —teach us that this notion of freedom qua independence is illusory; like Perec's protagonist at the end of his adventure, they reckon correctly that pure independence is impossible. We always exist in relation — in contexts, both material and social. This primary relationality or contextuality, which precedes individuality, always already contaminates claims to pure freedom as independence, urging us to consider freedom not as a pure, natural, or preliminary state but as something that exists in degree and in relation to the subject's necessary submission to various forces of control. In addition to context, theories of freedom as "mastery" over oneself or as "authority" over one's "piece" of the future, as Zuboff would have it, are complicated by the simple fact that we do not always act due to fully conscious, planned-out processes. In other words, even if one were able to put contextual forces aside and posit a subject with a will unimpeded by her environment, there would remain the problem of those unconscious forces or seemingly automatic actions — impulses, if one prefers — that make each human subject something less than the master of her own fate. I would summarize this subversion of fully conscious decision-making, which undermines pretentions to mastery or self-determination and thus historically dominant understandings of freedom, in the name of the unconscious, be it Freudian or otherwise.[59]

Considering both the unconscious programming and social as well as capitalist manipulation of desire, thought, and action, I would propose that we are never fully free nor automatic, but rather always operating in the overlap of two spectra, one of freedom, whose asymptote is independence and self-mastery, and one whose asymptote is freedom's complete

[59] For more on the unconscious and its subversion of freedom qua self-mastery or sovereignty over one's own decisions, see Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, 88.

negation, or pure automaticity. We are always something less than fully automatic, something less than fully free. Thus, it is possible to arrive at such paradoxical formulations as 'I choose what I do not choose,' 'I am free, but I am not free,' and so on. The upshot for this essay on the automaton is that we would-be human subjects are, always have been, and always will be automata, but not as a pure or simple replacement for the human being who would be free. We are, rather, polyvalent beings, fractured subjects. It is fair to say that freedom is a characteristic of the human species, and freedom may be a privileged qualifier for defining the human. But we are not completely free, nor completely human. But, of course, to understand just what it means to be human without being human, or to be part human, part automaton, we need to further consider just what the human subject is. By better understanding the human, we will also better understand how the human evolves from the unified subject Zuboff posits to an adjective among others for describing the subjects it is commonly thought to name.

Partially human subjects

It has become more fashionable to declare that there are not, perhaps never have been, humans. Or, to put it more succinctly and fashionably still: We are now posthuman. Of course, within this discussion, the temporality of the "now" — just when we are supposed to have become human and when, and to what degree, we can be said to have left humanity behind — is the site of contestation. Foucault famously asserts that "l'homme … est une invention récente," an arbitrary "effet d'un changement dans les positions fondamentales du savoir" (*Les mots et les choses* 398). Foucault's position, still relevant, is that "man" as we know him is both the guarantor and result of epistemic norms specific to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The human being — what she knows, the language in which she knows it, and the freedom she possesses to pursue that knowledge — both disciplines post-Enlightenment Western thought as

an ideal and is the object of that thought. Taking both a historical and materialist approach, N. Katherine Hayles notes in 1999 that "The human is giving way to a different construction called the posthuman," an ongoing process Hayles attributes to both the increasing reliance of humans on machines — to a point where, in daily life and in the cultural imaginary, the literal, embodied borders of human subjectivity are blurred — and intellectual trends that privilege the transmission of information as a frame for thought over specifically human, embodied consciousness (2). Carey Wolfe improves on these models by attending to both the ways humanity can be said to have always been something other than what is typically understood by 'human' and the recent historical developments in technology and thought after the ideological moment of humanism. In short, Wolfe argues that posthumanism "comes both before and after humanism" (xv). In other words, the posthuman has existed as long as the human itself; the reality of human subjectivity, even before putative humans would have recognized or articulated it as such, has always been that of so-called individual human subjects fundamentally reliant on their surroundings and thus neither purely individual nor human — if the human is understood as a universal, self-sufficient, and free creature reducible to the species *homo sapien*. Just as Hayles highlights in relation to our increased communion with contemporary technology, the borders of the human subject have always been porous in relation to the human's material and cultural context; there has never been a simple, universal human subject.[60] But in addition to this a priori existence of the posthuman, Wolfe contends that posthumanism comes after humanism as an ideology. That is, posthumanism is a collection of beliefs that seeks not only to de-center the human in its thought but also to move beyond "the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon" (xvi).

[60] For more on the limits of human subjectivity and context with a focus on technology, see Hansen and Wills.

Wolfe's before-and-after framework is helpful for clarifying the two levels on which this essay on the automaton engages with the posthuman and posthumanism. In theorizing the automaton, one faces two kinds of questions: What factors determine the automaton's relation to the human, and what are the political and philosophical (or, in a word, ideological) ramifications of proposing such a subject?

It is not for nothing that the so-called human subject is also called, variously, an "ideological expression of liberalism" (Wolfe xxix), the "liberal humanist subject" (Hayles 4), and "the core of a liberal individualistic view of the subject, which defined perfectibility in terms of autonomy and self-determination" (Braidotti 23). Liberty, or free will — the view of the human subject as a free one able to determine his own fate independent of context — is key to a dominant conception of human subjectivity, still offered more or less uncritically by contemporary thinkers like Zuboff, that the automaton as I theorize it contests. But in proposing this critique of the would-be free human subject, my objective is not to replace the free human subject with a fully integrated, holistic alternative but to argue that the human has only ever partially existed. In a more polemical register, the human as such, as the fully integrated subject it sometimes feigns to be, has never existed. What has existed is a subject that, in some ways, might be what we recognize as 'human' (free, independent, master of himself) while being other things at the same or other times (unfree, dependent on context, always navigating freedom in relation to external forces). Thus, I would contend that to call the automaton posthuman would be something of a misnomer. The automaton is not posthuman, and we, the ideologically posthumanist subjects of surveillance capitalism, are not automata in lieu of being humans. Rather, we have always been both automaton and human — variously, even at the same time, free and unfree, contextual and independent, impulsive and calculating. There is no foreseeable

post- to this situation, no point at which that part of me that corresponds to the so-called liberal humanist view of humans will disappear completely, no point at which my automaticity, whether in response to stimuli or the whims of my unconscious, will entirely fall away (as *A Man Asleep* teaches us). There is also no prior historical time when the species we call humans would not have been both free in the distinctive sense specific to our species — inimitably capable of complex planning toward its own future and able to construct that future — and automatic in its thought and behavior.

Another way of framing my view of the automatic human subject, or the human automaton, is that we are only ever partially human. Human is more precisely deployed as an adjective, fit to describe a subject who is that thing but also other things, than as a noun. Here, the perspective of what is sometimes called animal studies is instructive. Laurent Dubreuil considers the various distinctions that have typically been used to distinguish the human from all other animals — our use of tools and language, our brain size, and the politics of our society, to name several examples — and points out the impossibility of ascribing these uniquely and universally to humans (*Intellective Space* 97-8). In a longer discussion focused on the relation between humans and other apes, he writes, "Being a human … is a particular *process* emerging from the ongoing development of the symbolic meta-mind. It is not a durable attribute. It is never granted once and for all — except in a legal or political fiction" (*Dialogues* 44). To the extent that there is a collection of characteristics that composes 'the human,' we, ostensibly humans, may correspond to it sometimes and not others and to varying degrees. That we appear particularly human in one instance does not guarantee that we remain human or will appear equally so in the successive instance. The same goes for the parts of us that are automatic.

Science fiction films such as Spike Jonze's *Her*, which features an automated assistant named Samantha who graduates from the rapid and factual response functions of today's Google Assistant to a loving subject who can engage in complex relationships and intellectual debates with her apparently human interlocutors, generate curiosity and Hollywood profits because they blatantly call into question whether humanity is a "durable attribute … granted once and for all" — to one species and not another, to the animals we call humans and not machines. The same can be said of chimpanzees and bonobos, whose physical resemblance to humans and capacity for what are commonly taken to be human faculties, such as language, social order, and love, call into question the limits of the human and therefore make for culture industry fodder. But these extreme examples from film and fiction, including Samantha and the apes of *Planet of the Apes*, merely dramatize the always-already unstable category of the human. The reality is that Samantha is manifestly human in some ways, such as her use of language and her high degree of cognitive freedom, and not in others, such as her lack of a body and some unique constraints imposed on her by design. But the same can and has been said, often with nefarious political ramifications, of the group of people most of us would today readily recognize as human beings. If one were to settle on a hard-and-fast definition — faculty with language, affinity for political and social order, freedom, use of tools — one would only expose the heterogeneity, at present and throughout the millennia, of the species known as human. The consequence of this dilemma for rigorous speculative thought is indeed to do away with humanity as "a durable attribute," as Dubreuil suggests, understanding instead that one can be more or less human at different times and in different ways. For the purposes of this essay, which in its investigation of the human subject focuses on the axis of freedom, the upshot is that one can be both automatic and free, dependent and independent, automaton and human.

Of course, to say that the human subject has always also been, to some degree, automatic, a corrective to arguments against surveillance capitalism and control societies that uncritically affirm the freedom of the putatively durable human subject, does not mean that the threat of surveillance capitalism to the subject's autonomy should be disregarded. In other words, the fact that one is always influenced by external forces does not mean the specific forces attempting to exert control are not important, nor their growing power irrelevant to politics. On the contrary, I would suggest that the automaton teaches us that just who is performing that control and to what extent is *precisely what matters* when it comes to discussions of the subject's so-called freedom. Affirming contextual forces antithetical to metaphysical understandings of freedom qua independence does not mean giving up on freedom as a value; rather, it is the departure point for devising more rigorous theories of freedom, not as independence but as empowerment amid unconditional interdependence among subjects.[61]

Politics of automata

If I am part automaton, always operating in zones of control, the question for me as a person who would be free is not how to achieve independence but rather to whom I exist in relation and to which influences I am subject. That is why philosophers who take as a precondition to their thinking that relations to others are inescapable, preceding even the being of individuals or being *tout court*, have argued for ethics and notions of freedom that privilege interdependence instead of touting the possibilities of so-called individual freedom (or metaphysical freedom or freedom qua independence). For example, following Nietzsche, Deleuze writes that "On commence par promettre, et la dette ne se fait pas à l'égard d'un dieu, mais à l'égard d'un partenaire suivant des forces qui passent entre les parties, provoquent un

[61] For a take on freedom as affirmative interdependence or, as he puts it, "the sharing of being," see Nancy, 70-1.

changement d'état et créent quelque chose en elles: l'affect" (*Critique et clinique* 160). To the extent that there is a human subject, it is always both exerting force on those around it and experiencing the force of others, and this ever-present force is preliminarily neither nefarious nor beneficial. I enter the world or a world and, from the start, I risk exerting force upon others and experiencing their force; at the limit, I risk being automated and automating others. I cry from the crib and create a new routine for my sleepless parents; I circulate among the infantile patients in the hospital, automating the care and labor of nurses and doctors just as they design a path for me. The political question is not whether control will exist but how the many systems of control that characterize all lifeforms are organized; the ethical question is whether I am aware of those forces and actors who would control me and can adjust my relation to them.

Viewed through this lens, the gross ethical violation of surveillance capitalism is not only that control is ever more frequently and ubiquitously exerted upon those of us who engage in the digital economy but also that we are often, and intentionally made, unaware of the control exercised upon us and the ends to which that control is applied. Perec's novels attest to this, showing how an earlier and less pervasively controlling form of capitalism already wore out the subject, making him feel like social participation is itself anathema to the good life it is supposed to subtend. Jérôme and Sylvie's tragedy is not simply that they pick up desires from the magazines they read and movies they watch that undermine their happiness; it is that this manufactured desire for things that repeatedly fail to bring fulfillment is so penetrating, and the alternatives in the society in which they live so unappealing, that they feel compelled to go back to their marketing masters and ultimately take up a full-time post working for them even in the face of dissatisfaction. Their downfall is not simply automation or that they become automata; it is the complete hollowing out — as the novel frames it — of what one might call quasi-freedom:

the ability to choose one's relations, one's context, and the forces of control or reciprocity within which to build a life. This ethical violation — the absence of even the quasi-freedom to choose the zones and forces of control in relation to which one lives — is made particularly evident in the novel's final chapter when the text states, "N'avaient-ils pas toujours su que ce jour viendrait ?" (127). Exemplary victims of Berlant's cruel optimism, Perec's characters feel — even if this is not, at the limit, the case, given that complete automation, like complete freedom, is impossible — as though their disappointing life could not have ended any other way. Similarly, the protagonist of *Un homme qui dort* muses about performing the actions of a man society would interpret as insane, knocking passersby's hats off their heads or covering his head in filth, but concludes that this would not in the least disrupt the social machine. "La révolte la plus violente ne ferait sourciller personne … ton lit est déjà fait dans le dortoir de l'asile, ton couvert est mis à la table des poètes maudits" (48). Like Jérôme and Sylvie, the character is convinced that the zones of control in which his life plays out cannot be deterritorialized. He is not merely subject to dispiriting forces of control; he feels as though he has no choice but to submit to a set of manipulating forces *without alternatives*. The forfeit of his freedom is both unavoidable and immediate, the genesis of the coercive system, its beneficiaries, and its ends obscure.

Under surveillance capitalism, this destruction of quasi-freedom and the good life it might portend is more dramatic, and the automation of the subject is more immediate and subterranean.[62] Surveillance capitalist advertising platforms including Google, Facebook, and, increasingly, Amazon and Microsoft earn digital advertising dollars by predicting the behavior of interest users. What makes their business so much more powerful than the advertising model of

[62] Zuboff herself emphasizes the inescapability of involvement in surveillance capitalism's data extraction and behavioral modification processes or, in my words, the total automation of the subject and destruction of her claims to quasi-freedom. "Consider," Zuboff writes, "that the internet has become essential for social participation, that the internet is now saturated with commerce, and that commerce is now subordinated to surveillance capitalism" (11).

the Madison Avenue firms of decades past is that they do not merely sell ad spots to marketers for widely viewed properties, substituting a Times Square billboard for a popular webpage; they extract data on individual Internet users' behavior, speech, and preferences, predict the sort of campaigns that are likely to get us to take a marketer's preferred action, and sell marketers not just widely viewed properties but predictions as to what we will do in the future. This is a greater force for automation than the society of the spectacle on display in Perec's novels for two major reasons. First, digital surveillance on ecosystems such as those of Facebook and Google is constant and frequently conducted unbeknownst to those being surveilled. The average Facebook user may not be aware that the very way they punctuate sentences posted on the platform may factor into the marketing campaign they see while scrolling on the platform later. Second, the advertising mechanism, at its most effective, aims not just to predict based on user data how users will respond to ads but to automate future responses, thereby eliminating even quasi-freedom, or the necessarily limited power to choose our future actions. Zuboff quotes the research director of the Internet intelligence and insights firm Gartner, who once claimed that the proliferation of "smart" devices such as speakers, fridges, and even beds, all of which collect data used to predict even the most intimate parts of people's behaviors and personalities, would be "a key enabler in the transformation of business models from 'guaranteed levels of performance' to 'guaranteed outcomes'" (203). Zuboff writes that the pursuit of "guaranteed outcomes" for advertisers is consistent with surveillance capitalists' "vision of individuals and groups as so many objects to be continuously tracked, wholly known, and shunted this way or that for some purpose of which they are unaware" (204). In other words, the dream of surveillance capitalism's operators is to forge the world Perec's characters somewhat hyperbolically lament: one where we are not part human, part automaton, free and unfree,

independent and dependent, but rather fully automated subjects, or objects, utterly beholden to the will of our digital puppeteers. Surveillance capitalism births "a new kind," or perhaps, more precisely, a new degree, "of automaticity: a lived experience of stimulus-response-reinforcement" (379).

Of course, the reality of subjectivity under surveillance capitalism is something less than the society of unqualified automaton of which digital advertising executives might dream. But advertising-driven automation designed to manipulate Internet users into buying or even voting a certain way is not the only way surveillance capitalism infiltrates the realm of the political via ethical infractions. The system also fuels certain kinds of politics, particularly those of so-called identities or homogeneous groups. Writing in the halcyon days of 2005, David J. Phillips praises the possibility that increasingly "ubiquitous computing environments" might "multiply the number of separable contexts and self-identifiers" — something that indeed came to pass, as spaces online for the creation of identity-based communities expanded far beyond the common political identity signifiers of race, gender, and sexual orientation to include Reddit threads for people with uncommon fetishes and Facebook groups for those who like to pretend they are ants (106). And indeed, there is no doubt that a world increasingly connected by digital networks has in some ways facilitated the very notion of freedom, or quasi-freedom, I advocate. These networks have empowered Internet users to organize social movements while connecting and even, to parrot the parlance of the social media firms, forging communities. Empirical studies have corroborated the benefit of this community-building facilitation online, and global events such as the Arab Spring as well as the surge of decentralized social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter and the gilets jaunes in France attest to the efficacy of online organizing on

the very surveillance capitalist networks such as Facebook whose political influence is often decried.[63]

However, it is obvious in the third decade of the twenty-first century that one ought not to be entirely sanguine about the automating processes of digital community formation and identity proliferation under surveillance capitalism. For one, those concerned with social justice do not have a monopoly on the automatic politicization and organization of Internet users. In addition, whether on the left or right, the same algorithmic processes that facilitate online organizing for social justice movements automate users, dragging them into digital communities and influencing their politics for the sake of monetized engagement. This means that the very community formation processes that might pass for the exemplary digital facilitation of quasi-freedom — and social justice movements — in the eyes of techno-utopians look like freedom's subversion from a more critical vantage point.

A prime example of the danger of digital politics is the radicalization of members of the largely online conspiracy group QAnon, or Q Anonymous, a group that believes a satanic network of elites, many of whom are also believed to be child traffickers, secretly runs the world.[64] A September 2020 analysis by the New York Times found that not only had QAnon groups flourished on Facebook despite the social network's repeated promises to thwart radicalization on its platform, but also, "Facebook's own platform — the algorithm that surfaces content for people on the site — [had] pushed users toward the very groups that were discussing QAnon conspiracies" (Frankel and Hsu). The media is increasingly crowded with testimonies about family members, whether grandmothers or teenage boys, who embraced right-wing

[63] For empirical studies of the role of online activism and social media in these and other sociopolitical events, see Hetrick et al., Kim and Lim, and Boyer et al.
[64] See Roose.

conspiracy theories such as QAnon or white supremacist ideology after following recommendations from Facebook or YouTube. The tech giants have taken steps to curtail the influence of radical users and interests. But the massive growth online of these fringe, prejudiced groups and their ability to deploy user engagement algorithms for their own purposes show not only the capacity of Internet community formation and identity proliferation to promote violence and discrimination but also, and more centrally for this essay, the automation of the digital political denizen and the automaticity of online, identity group-based politics.

Even beyond the rise of right-wing groups, the balkanization of politics in a culture of automation does not come without risks. On one hand, there is an obvious case that all politics is identity politics insofar as my politics are always that of an embodied and contextually embedded subject, one who speaks unavoidably from the vantage point of his own experience and knowledge. Furthermore, the apparent absence of identity in political discourse — the absence of race, perhaps most exemplarily — itself often signals the presence of majority-group identities and interests that are taken for granted as the primary set of legitimate political concerns. On the other hand, so-called identity politics is of apiece with polarization and limits the possibility of quasi-freedom as well as unforeseen political arrangements insofar as it automates the subject's approach to political discourse. At the limit, politics of identity require that if one belongs to a certain identity group or is even a so-called ally of that group, one must be against X and for Y, in favor of X way of talking and against Y.[65] This is an exemplary case of the automation of politics and, with it, the subject itself.

What's more, the increasing transformation of politics into a list of identities associated with a putatively homogeneous set of beliefs, personality traits, and interests is both a product of

[65] For polarization and political identities in the US, see Klein. For identities' capacity to automate the subject and limit freedom, subverting political possibilities in the process, see Dubreuil, *La dictature des identités*.

surveillance capitalism and an optimal result for those who benefit from it. Indeed, digital marketers compile and make use of something called an identity graph, which raises in material terms the philosophical question of whether identity is stable and can be put into words or ones and zeroes capable of predicting what one will want and who one is. Longtime Facebook users may remember that, despite the platform's many changes over the years, among its most constant features are the demand, upon signing up, for a user's age, name, and gender as well as a profile page where the user can fill in her education history, place of residence, and political and religious views. This has never fundamentally been about allowing users to get to know another user better; it is about the fantasy that identity can be packaged into a few discrete data points that can themselves be probabilistically tied to ads that will produce Zuboff's rightly feared "guaranteed outcomes," eliminating quasi-freedom and realizing the world devoid of freedom that Perec imagines in his texts. In our digital control society, willfully identifying ourselves comes at the risk of saying, "Please exploit me," or in the parlance of this chapter, "Please automate me."

The subject of the literature machine

I have argued that the literary text can be understood as a machine. This is a paradoxical wager that aims to invert the typical logic that associates mechanicity with homogeneity or the reproduction of the same — as Derrida says, the machine is thought to reproduce the "received order." I contend that the literary text is, instead, a machine that, through repetition, produces semiotic difference. The text, even if it is a novel or poem, only becomes literary in the event of a reading that wrestles with its differential semiotic production. If literariness is understood in this way, literature is radically incompatible with identity *sensu stricto*. In fact, what the

literature machine produces is precisely the destruction of identity, and if the identity graph used by digital marketers raises the question of whether identity can be written, literature and any *literary* theory respond that, in writing, identities always risk falling apart. This is because to write at all is to risk the possibility of a literary reading, and a text becomes literary, or a literature machine, precisely when, in the repetition or copying of its words, it produces difference, making other what is the same, unidentical the identical. In common parlance, we tend to call literary those texts that, by virtue of being fiction and not obviously referring to any one given reality, resist the presumption that their meanings can be reduced to one falsifiable and empirical set of meanings. The more ambiguous the text, the more tempting it is to treat it as a literature machine.

The crossroads between the dissertation's development of the literature machine and the present chapter's investigation of identity and automation raises this chapter's final set of questions: Who is the subject of the literature machine? Does the subject of the literature machine have an identity? Where might one locate literature and its subject in the age of surveillance capitalism, in the age of exemplarily automated subjects and identities? What does the literature machine singularly teach us about subjectivity, identity, and automation?

In *The Machine*, Perec compels us to ask these questions.[66] The text "seeks to simulate the functioning of a computer programmed to analyze and decompose Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Rambler's Lullaby II*" (33). *The Machine* refers to itself as a machine and claims to contain programs that "enable it to approach the poem from different directions" and even "grasp it in all its diverse aspects" (33). It also possesses "processors" with information, or, if you will, stored data, about the poem, its author, famous poems of various languages, alphabets,

[66] There is no French version of this text, which was initially broadcast as a radio play in German in 1968.

vocabulary, and grammar. Perhaps most crucially, the machine has a system control, which dictates its computations, and five protocols, which comprise the functions it will carry out: analyzing the poem numerically, manipulating its "lexical material," applying "restrictions and modifications" that change the poem's semantic content, examining "the possible relationships and cross-references" between Goethe and the poem, and releasing "an explosion of quotations" of different poems from different national literary traditions in order to "identify … what one might call the essence of poetry" (34). I quote directly much of the machine's description of itself because, of course, if the machine is to be read as a literature machine, we must assume that its narrative about its own mechanisms is just that. Indeed, one should go a step further and propose that the machine's articulation of its own program — its specifications, as a computer programmer might say — is not just narrative but ideological and even manipulative. The machine, it might be said, comes with a manual, and its manual tries to program, like the "system control" that dictates its would-be computations, how what the machine produces will in turn be read. Yet through this fraught effort to control interpretation, the machine provides a hint in its specifications as to the likelihood of its own malfunctioning. It touts its ability to control literary meaning, to "grasp" Goethe's poem "in all its diverse aspects" and even "identify … the essence of poetry" in an effort to program its own interpretation, but in so doing the machine announces its fear of the unavoidable fact that, as a potentially literary machine, it plays host to just the opposite of fully mechanized control: chaos, the impossibility of control, the free-wheeling machinations of reading and semiosis that, as literature, the machine itself cannot automate in advance. There is a ghost in Perec's machine, the specter of the very literariness the machine

would feign to master, to identify, to automate into submission. I want to argue that *The Machine,* despite telling us it is just the opposite, is a story of the limits of control.[67]

I will not comment at length on each of the machine's protocols, which sequentially dissect, deform, disorder, and respond, in the form of quotations, to the poem. I want instead to focus on the status of subjectivity, or the identity of what might be called a subject, in the various iterations of the poem that the machine produces. Goethe's poem goes like this:

Wanderers Nachtlied II	Rambler's Lullaby II
Über allen Gipfeln	Over all hilltops
ist Ruh,	is rest,
In allen Wipfeln	in all treetops
Spürest du	you feel
Kaum einen Hauch;	hardly a breath;
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde.	the birds are silent in the forest.
Warte nur, balde	Only wait, soon
Ruhest du auch.	you too shall rest. (Perec 35)

The machine's specifications, an imperious component of its overall program — in the sense I outline in chapter two, that is, the collection of forces that condition its interpretation and thus its semiotic output — claim that it will set out to "identify … the essence" not just of this poem but of poetry in general. To the extent that the machine identifies the essence of poetry or literature, it accomplishes the opposite, showing not that the poem can be distilled to a single identity but that it, like all literary texts, is destined to differ from itself, to become something else depending upon which facet of it comes into view and the context in which it is interpreted. The machine presents the poem upside down (42), declares its average number of letters per line "irrelevant"

[67] In an alternative reading, Marc Kohlbry points out that the text also displays the far-reaching powers of control or programmability. He adduces as an example of this the text's ability to control not just semantic or referential context but also the "nonreferential," aesthetic response of the reader, for example in provoking emotions in response to the machine's allusions to Nazism. I would contend, as discussed at length in chapter two, that this programmatic aesthetic response must be understood as being paradoxically so: programmatic in that it marks a necessarily relational and thus not entirely independent response but anti-programmatic in that it is far from guaranteed, singular in the way it may or may not manifest in a given reading, and thus ultimately un-programmable in its character.

(38), spaces out its words typographically in order to distort the rhythm of its reception (39), and splices it into strings of incomprehensible letters streaming down the page in vertical lines (48). It replaces the poem's nouns with random dictionary selections and "fairy tale motifs" (63), replaces "hilltops" with proper nouns such as "Mount Everest" to which the original word might refer (73), spits out vaguely fascist slogans such as "Germany above everything in the world" (45), and quotes Nietzsche, ostensibly writing of Goethe, saying he is "the last German whom I have respect for" (77). Not a single data point suggests that the poem can be reduced to a single and essential version of it identical to itself, nor that the contents of this textual machine will yield an essence of all poetry (other than poetry's essential refutation of attempts to identify its essence, even with the help of computation).

In fact, each of the machine's observations, binary or complex, quantitative or qualitative, underscores the necessarily perspectival, contextual, and contingent conditions of interpretation. By declaring the average number of letters per line "irrelevant," the text underscores its own ideological positioning; the text is making a judgment, one that another reader may well not make. By introducing "fairy tale motifs" or quoting Nietzsche on Goethe, the machine not only adds arbitrary supplements to the poem but foregrounds contexts which indeed change its meaning in the eyes of a knowing interpreter but that are by no means a part of the poem's essence. Finally, through the output of "Germany above everything in the world," the text anachronistically alludes to the context of its own mid-twentieth-century production, showing that it is not only not providing an "essence" of this poem or poetry; it is not simply showing "the poem in all its diverse aspects," either. It is *adding* aspects, as any reading does, thereby highlighting the way all texts fundamentally change over time, taking on meanings they could not have possessed at the time of their writing or publication and being no less themselves for

doing so. Goethe's poem does not cease to be the same poem, the same fragment of text, if it is read with attention to a valence of twentieth-century German nationalism despite having been written before the emergence of the German nation-state; it is just becoming itself, or being written again, in the way that all literary texts come into being — contextually, in the eyes and ears of a given reader at a given time. In short, the poem contains no data; nothing about it is given *a priori*.

The question of greater interest, then, is not whether the machine can succeed at its stated goals of identifying the essence of poetry and showing the poem in *all* its diverse aspects. The question is whether *The Machine* is performing a unique set of mechanical operations, which have the effect of multiplying the poem's meanings, or whether Goethe's poem is always already, in itself, mechanical in precisely this way. Of course, it is the latter that this dissertation has tried to argue by deploying the machine as a metaphor for the fundamental dynamics of the literary text and the process of reading to which the literary text is inextricably bound. But I will try to make this point about the irreducible mechanicity of literary texts once again. This time, I will do so while considering the ramifications of mechanical literariness for the status of subjectivity, particularly potentially automated subjectivity, in literature. In short, I want to ask: Who or what is the subject of Goethe's poem? Does this subject have an identity? Can subjectivity in literature be automated?

Who or what? It is no doubt tempting to read the poem as having an obvious subject, as it contains, indeed, only one subject pronoun repeated across two lines. "Du" would be the person who wanders the forest, the hiker or rambler who "feels," as the English translation made available in the English rendition of Perec's text would have it, "hardly a breath." But here already, the engine of translation is whirring, and the arbitrariness of the poem's semiotic output

is evident. For it is hardly obvious that the thing felt by the "du" to which the poem refers is a breath. "Hauch" might just as well be rendered as breeze or draft. Indeed, the setting of the poem in a forest would seem to make "breeze" or "draft" more obvious. Presumably, "Hauch" would refer to a modest wind rustling the leaves of the trees to which line three refers. But the translation has it, and the polysemy of the original "Hauch" allows, that what is "hardly" present in the world presented by the poem is a breath. This facilitates a reading of the poem that, like its title, posits a human subject who is now traveling through the forest, literal or perhaps metaphorical. The poem's title, "Rambler's Lullaby," literally "night song," suggests the trope of the weary traveler who, feeling all that the natural world has to offer in lines three through five, will soon imitate line six's silent birds, laying his head, perhaps literally that of a hiker, perhaps metaphorically that of a serenaded child or world-weary person, to rest. One might also opt for a morbid variation of this arbitrarily anthropocentric interpretation, positing, also metaphorically, that the rest at issue, as in the common understanding of Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," is the so-called eternal repose of death. The forest, then, stands in for all of Earth or even organic matter, which, playing the substrate for so many odd years to the human traveler's moribund body, closes the poem by coming into communion with that body. "Rest," then, which is said in the first two lines to exist *über allen Gipfeln*, a ubiquitous and natural state untouched by the scattered disturbances to be expected, comes full circle, subsuming the poem's human addressee back into the Earth and restoring him or her to the peaceful state of inactivity that marked the period before his or her life began.

Who or what, though? The text-machine inevitably produces copies of itself; these copies are arbitrary, dependent on a detail noticed here or there, the reader's particular linguistic competencies, the English-German dictionaries, online or analog, that may or may not be

consulted on the path of interpretation. The range of perception *dramatized* by Perec's machine is always already underway. In the paragraph above, metaphorical readings and literal readings alike — those positing literal travelers and voyages as well as those taking the common trope of travel to metaphorize life or the time of a single day — assume, perhaps automatically, as the translation, too, would appear to have presupposed with its reference to "breath," that the addressee of the poem is a human subject. Posthumanism, of course, teaches us at its simplest to beware this assumption. It is not obvious that the subject of this poem, its "du," can be said to have an identity; even the various anthropocentric readings above show that much. It is even less obvious still that the poem's subject can be assumed to be human. In fact, I would privilege an interpretation of the poem not as having a stable human addressee, nor even as having an animal or plant-like subject, but as presenting the absence, disappearance, or deconstruction of subjectivity altogether. The poem sidelines its would-be subject, resisting not only subjectivities reducible to logics of identity but also the putatively more automatic presumption that the addressee, some living thing, should be the focal point of the poem at all.

The poem begins, "*Über allen Gipfeln* / *ist Ruh*,." This marks a flattening out of the heterogeneity and population of atmospheric space, which, in the long pause allotted by the second line's comma, expands to fill the void-like world of the poem's manufacture. The poem continues, "*In allen Wipfeln / Spürest du / Kaum einen Hauch;*." Now, there is a trace (*eine Spur*) of you, a "you" who is there on the condition of hardly being there in the middle of a thought, a "you" who "hardly" feels a breath or breeze, a "you" who hardly leaves the trace (*spuren*) of a breath. Your breath, there in translation or granted by a slightly miscalibrated reading of an umlaut, is a trace of a trace of life, carbon dioxide taking its leave of a living being's mouth. This is not the image of a subject, a rambling hero or protagonist, making his noble way through time

and space, slowly inching toward a dignified death or even a day's rest. It is the image of a subject, perhaps human, perhaps not, perhaps partially human, deserted in the middle of eight ambient lines that, rather than centering subjectivity or the experience of some living subject, marginalize the former. The poem gives us a trace of a trace of life (a breath hardly felt or left behind), and thus life's frailty, its finitude, its always already having existed in the margins of the world's vast, mostly quiet expanse.

Line six is the poem's only to bequeath a full sentence: *Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde*. Let us recall that *schweigen*, intransitive in German (to be silent), has its dangerous English corollary, which is not to say its translation, in the transitive verb "to silence": not just to quiet others momentarily but to spell their end, as in the German *jemanden zum Schweigen bringen*. What is silenced by the perceived silence of these would-be innocent "little birds"? Like the "Ruh" of line two, the lack they signify constitutes a closed world unto itself; a period punctuates the thought, leaving the auditory vacuum uncontested. But this is a vacuum that, like the vacuum to which Derrida likens literature, speaks precisely for having said nothing.[68] Inorganic and mechanical, thus potentially eternal, erratic, endlessly othering itself beyond any lifeform it could be said to contain and any one human compelled to interpret it or stake a claim as to its essence, the poem, fully machine, silences the subject who would walk among its trees or lines and think himself the center of its story. And if the poem has the audacity to address the putative subject who would pass for its addressee upon a first or second reading, imparting an imperative couplet, "*Warte nur, balde / Ruhest du auch*" — it is only to dance on the grave of an idea of subjectivity that, in its lines, never had the time or space to live, let alone die the tragic

[68] See *L'écriture et la différence*, "La force et la signification," where Derrida likens literature to a vacuum that produces many iterations of itself, or its own meanings, precisely because it is not present in the first place as a stable, obvious, uncontested set of signifiers.

death an anthropocentric and facile reading might want for its protagonist. *Warte nur, balde* — not for the death or rest to affirm, by contradistinction, the vivacity or vitality of your storied life, but for a blank space or void, that of enjambment, itself exemplary of the endlessly productive silence of the literature machine, which like Goethe's birdies exists to kill the subject, the hero, to bring them once and forever more to silence. It is the reader who waits, perhaps forever, in the white space between two poetic lines, never quite resting but re-interrogating instead the subject of a poem that demands another reading.

The subject of the literature machine, then, is neither identical nor stable, neither reducible to data, nor automatic in its construction or deconstruction, its first writing or interpretation. Literary texts may well teach us about automation's effects on the subject, about surveillance capitalism or its earlier iterations, about history and context, technology, and freedom. But fundamentally, the literary text produces difference and remains to be read another day. It gives us subjects who remain to be reformulated and cannot be understood the same way across two readings — automata whose essence is the antithesis of automation. Literature may even give us no subject at all, much less a subject reducible to the logic of identity or cultural forces of automation. In our automated age, the literature machine is more singular for this. The literary text is not efficient, and its interpretation cannot be optimized or taken for granted. Once more, it must be read. As Goethe may have understood, its reader does not rest.

Chapter 4

Nietzsche and the Codes of Literature and Philosophy

"Qu'est-ce que la littérature ?[69] Et d'abord qu'est-ce qu'écrire ? Comment l'écrire en vient-il à déranger jusqu'à la question « qu'est-ce que ? » et même « qu'est-ce que ça veut dire ? » ? Autrement dit — et voilà l'autrement dire qui m'importait — quand et comment l'inscription devient-elle littérature et que se passe-t-il alors ? A quoi et à qui cela revient-il ? Qu'est-ce qui se passe entre philosophie et littérature, science et littérature, politique et littérature, théologie et littérature, psychanalyse et littérature, voilà dans l'abstraction de son titre la question la plus insistante."

— Derrida, "Ponctuations: le temps de la thèse," 443.

After turns toward affect and the politics of surveillance capitalism, this dissertation returns in its final chapter to, if I may parrot the language of the Derridean epigraph above, its most insistent question. That is, "What is literature?" But I focus here more specifically on a related question: What is the relation between literature and other forms of texts? Other forms of thought? What does the language of literature have to do, not only with the language of technology, but also with the language of whatever discourse in which the dissertation itself purports to participate? Criticism? Philosophy? Theory? Literature itself? What would be literary about these discourses, and why would their literariness matter? What are the apparent codes of these discourses, and can, or should, they remain distinct from one another?

When one is bold enough to ask what literature is, one transcends the would-be boundaries of the body of texts typically called literature, at least in the dominant cultural

[69] In asking this question, Derrida appears to refer to the essay of the same name by Jean-Paul Sartre. Indeed, Sartre anticipates Derrida's emphasis on the reader in the event of literary signification, writing that "Since the artist must entrust to another the job of carrying out what he has begun … all literary work is an appeal. … The appearance of the work of art is a new event which cannot be *explained* by anterior data" (54). But Sartre will ascribe to texts the sort of moral purpose and reconstitutable wholeness that later thinkers such as Derrida and de Man will dismiss as incoherent with literature's radical difference from itself and at best contingent relation to humanity's moral education. Contradicting Derrida before the fact, for example, Sartre claims that "The aesthetic object … does not play; it is called upon to recompose the beautiful object beyond the traces left by the artist" (55). This is not consistent with the theory of the literature machine, nor with Derrida's emphasis on the literary text as vacuum. The literary object is not recomposed, nor is it necessarily "beautiful." It repeats across a series of radical differences and has far less of a necessary relation to its author than Sartre imagines.

understanding of the word "literature" in the West. That is, asking what literature is marks the first step toward a recognition that literature is not, at least not simply, a collection of texts published as novels, poems, or perhaps theatrical plays. These texts may pass for literature; this is emblematic of their intentions, or the intentions of their authors and the latter's co-conspirators: the publishing houses, marketers, booksellers, and would-be readers who all participate in an industry that is no doubt its own form of literature machine. But this necessarily superficial and commercial production of what commonly passes for literature — this superficial or rigidly empirical understanding of what literature is — only speaks to a marketer's or salesman's understanding of it. The actors of the commercial literature machine understand, at the very least, that the texts they call literature are wont to produce fiction, or what I would crucially call *fictions*, meaning these novels, poems, and plays (to name the most prominent examples in the Western context) can signify multiply and must be reckoned with in their semiotic uncertainty. But this *potential* literariness is not a given, and it does not exclusively apply to the texts that the commercial world calls literature. A literary text, such as a novel, becomes literary not because it contains metaphors or fictional characters but because an individual reader in a singular event of reading treats its semiosis, linguistic negativity, or multiplicity of meanings as fundamentally and primarily at issue.

This fundamental semiotic uncertainty *is* literariness; it is the quality that makes a text literary. But, of course, not all would-be literary texts are read in this manner, not even by those who fancy themselves scholars or critics or perhaps even theorists of literature. What's more — and this, the capacity of literariness itself, is surely what literary theory's opponents or resisters (to whom I will return) find so off-putting about it — texts that do not purport to be literature may be read as such and may thus become literary. Those potentially literary texts, if read as

literature, cease to simply mean what they mean or to be what they may appear to be. They trigger a crisis of trust in those who would prefer to approach a text with certainty, to take its aims for granted by virtue of its apparent genre, the biography of its author, or the historical context of its production. Readers of these ideological orientations — those who shirk the signifier's undecidable effects in favor of definitive historical or formal explanations — do not write *literary* theory or criticism.[70] At the very least, they try to diminish what is potentially literary in even the most ambiguous and generous of texts, be they novels or philosophical works, poetry or theory.

This brings us back to Derrida's question: What is literature, how does it relate to other discourses or forms of thought and textuality, and how does literature, or writing, which always threatens to become, or to be read as, literature, even trouble such fundamental and seemingly obvious questions as, "What is it?" and "What does that mean?" If philosophy can be read as literature and thus, in my understanding, become a literature machine, what is philosophy? If literary theory or criticism must take on the quality of literariness to be what it purports to be — *literary* theory or criticism — does that make theoretical or critical texts themselves literature? What does that mean for the literature machine, for what it tells us about affect, subjectivity, and the future of the discipline of literary studies? These questions recur throughout the dissertation, but I tackle them most profoundly here, enlisting among the only Western philosophers to trouble the would-be border between literature and philosophy as insistently as Derrida: an interlocutor and influence of his, Friedrich Nietzsche.

[70] For the distinction between *literary* criticism or "literary thinking" and modes of literary scholarship that "miss the raison d'être of their own objects," see the preface to Dubreuil's *Poetry and Mind* (vii). As I mention in the introduction, it is not coincidental that the thoughts that led to this dissertation originated in a seminar of the same name.

In an interview on Nietzsche, Derrida describes Nietzsche's thought as possessing an "irreducible and singular multiplicity" that resists "any form of *Versammlung*" (Derrida and Beardsworth 20). "As a result," Derrida says, "one must forbid oneself — above all, with Nietzsche — to force his name into the straitjacket of an interpretation that is too strong to be able to account for him, in that it is claiming to recognize *the identity of a meaning*, of a message, of the unity of a word or of a particular work" (21, emphasis added). As I understand literariness, this is another way of saying that Nietzsche's corpus, perhaps more than that of any other with which Derrida himself was familiar, attests to the capacity of philosophy — or of work widely apt to be read as philosophical, theoretical, or primarily thetic in nature — to incite a literary reading. In other words, Nietzsche's texts are as liable as those of any Western thinker widely regarded as a philosopher, though he was a philologist by training, to become literature machines. That is why they resist *Versammlung*: collection, gathering, or a meeting of disparate parts together in one time or place. Literature does not cooperate with the temporal and spatial dimensions of a meeting or gathering; it dramatizes the delay in understanding, or interpretation, that always makes one text two, or a single text irreducibly different from itself.[71] This is true, too, of Nietzsche's texts, be they ostensibly literary or philosophical, if we read them as literature, reckoning with their apparent complexity, their multivalent signifiers and multiple manners of speaking.

Nietzsche's work has immense literary potential; it exemplarily resists the anti-literary urge to "recognize the identity of a meaning," as Derrida puts it. For this reason, Nietzsche also

[71] One word for this delay is, of course, différance. Literature exaggerates this delay effect, which is always at work in signification, understanding, and more broadly in consciousness or perception. I expand on this in section one. For more on literature's relation to this effect, see Laurent Dubreuil, *L'état critique de la littérature*. I have found particularly useful, in explaining this relation between literary language and the operations of language in general, Dubreuil's point that "Poetry" — I would say literature in general, and only on the condition that a so-called literary text is read as such — "maximizes and dynamizes semantics" (*Poetry and Mind* 21).

exemplarily troubles the generic borders between literature and philosophy, or the identities of these two discourses. His texts point us toward — and a reading of his work will in this chapter allow me to explore — the literariness of philosophy, literature's capacity to speculate, think, or theorize (if only with the help of a reader who will make it literature and think along with it), and the full epistemic potential of what I have throughout this dissertation called the literature machine. If so inclined, one could propose the literature machine and all it has wrought, or aimed to produce, throughout this dissertation as simply that: a creator of differential knowledge fundamentally at odds with logics of identity: the self-identical text, feeling, subject, account, history, or theory. This is what it means, as thinkers of great literary potential such as Derrida and Nietzsche show us (though they may not have articulated it precisely as such), to perform an act of literary reading that is also one of literary thinking, to answer the question, through the act of one's own writing and thinking, of what literature is. In literary thought, definitions disperse, as Maurice Blanchot might have said; the concept ramifies and is revalued. What's left is the singularly literary knowledge that only the literature machine produces, a way of knowing the world through and in language that respects the full semiotic and epistemic potential of the latter.

I tackle this investigation of literary and philosophical discourse, and their relation to one another, through the figure of code. Texts may appear to possess certain codes, which are the signals of literature or philosophy: narrative or thetic, fictional or argumentative, for example. But the codes a text comes to possess — literary or non-literary, to name this chapter's most crucial distinction — hinge on the context of a given reading and the biases (*Verurteile*), as Nietzsche might have said, of a reader. Allow me to explain this by referring to one of Nietzsche's two most frequent translators into English, R. J. Hollingdale. He begins his

introduction to Nietzsche's most literary work (an abbreviated way of saying the text of his with the most literary potential), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

"The first thing a reader of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* will notice, even before he/she notices what is being said, is the manner of saying it: or rather, the *excess* of manner. The book's worst fault is excess. … It is clear that the rhetorical-oratorical is something Nietzsche was impelled to, gave way to and thus *got rid of* in *Zarathustra*: the eruption of words, metaphors, figures, and word play suggests an eruption of feeling. It will be our job here to try to discover why this eruption became necessary … and thus to understand better what this great odd book is really about" (11).

These are not casual remarks by way of introduction; they are a profound reflection of and poor case for what I will call the will to decode: the imperative, felt and espoused by many scholars of philosophy and literature, to tell a text's definitive and simple, or at least simplified or summarized, truth, to say "what" a "book is really about."[72] This ideological orientation, one that assumes it is possible to arrive at a conclusion about what a text is "about," presupposes that the text possesses a certain kind of code: a cipher that, once deciphered, will reveal once and for all why the text is written as it is and what it means.

What's striking about Hollingdale's introduction is not only the code it presupposes — for the works of an author who, as we will see, exemplarily shows that the presupposition of such a code is illusory — but also the embarrassment it displays at its own recognition that *Zarathustra* exceeds the logic of this code of semiotic essences and definitive truths. Hollingdale's introduction shudders before Nietzsche's resistance against its own vulgar-historicist archaeology, which would *identify* the truth of *Zarathustra* in its author's diaries or hospital records. Indeed, the "excess" that Hollingdale identifies is not merely an "eruption of feeling," though Hollingdale's effort to liken feeling with excess and embarrassment — as if

[72] While I will contextualize the will to decode at length in relation to Nietzsche's will to power, my theory also draws inspiration from Michel Foucault's will to knowledge, as theorized in *The History of Sexuality*. Like the will to knowledge, the will to decode is concerned with knowledge relations as relations of power and control. However, I focus more on the fundamental conditions of *interpretation* that govern the subject-object relation and frame the goals of critique than on broad social or discursive practices.

feeling were necessarily exterior to scholarship or philosophy and ought to be edited out of it — is common among scholars and philosophers beholden to the will to decode.[73] The excess one truly finds in Nietzsche is its surpassing of the logic of codification that Hollingdale himself is wont to impose upon the text. This excess, a sign of literary potential, is by no means at odds with the power of thought, philosophical or otherwise, though philosophers who seek simplicity as the highest virtue of writing are ever inclined to extinguish literary potential. In fact, the excision over which Hollingdale hallucinates — the dream that one could exclude manner, the so-called "*excess* of manner," from any kind of text — is radically impossible. The way all texts signify matters. They are always already potentially literary, and their excess is ever liable to erupt. This is especially true of texts that display great semiotic ambiguity and thus a great deal of literary potential such as *Zarathustra*, but it is true, too, of any of Nietzsche's works, including the ones after *Zarathustra*, which are supposed to have shown that Nietzsche "got rid of" his taste for excess. I will show through my own readings the utility of engaging with signification, this so-called excess or manner of speaking, in Nietzsche's other texts. And this excess exists in texts in general, even in those whose authors might themselves be beholden to the will to decode.

Finally, this excess of manner, this potential literariness, is true of my text and of any worthy of the name of *literary* theory, criticism, or scholarship. If my treatment of texts is truly literary, the meanings of the texts I write will themselves differ upon different readings. My text

[73] The decoders' hallucinatory desire to remove feeling from philosophy, especially to clearly demarcate a falsely simple distinction between philosophy and literature, is an unfortune and long-running facet of the Western philosophical tradition, even among its more pluralistic thinkers and philosophers of difference. See, for example, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on affects and percepts being the territory of the arts in *What is Philosophy?* See also Derrida's discussion of Freud's positing of himself as "métaphysicien classique et … *Aufklärer* positiviste" (*Mal d'archive* 146). Of course, the implicit reference to the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) is no mistake and reflects the broad and long history of philosophy's will to decode as well as its related attempt to exclude feeling. This aversion to feeling, or desire to isolate it in any but one's own thetic discourse, is even true of Paul de Man, who, in a reversal that is still incorrect, draws the line between philosophy and literary theory precisely in regard to the aesthetic, asserting that philosophy is the thetic discourse that deals with feeling, which would be absent from literary theory, which 'only' deals with the machinations of language (*Resistance to Theory* 7).

owes the essence of what it is to that mutability, contextuality, or arbitrariness, as I argued in chapter two's theorization of the singular program that attends each event of literary reading. However, this does not mean there is no stability or structure to be found in literary works, ostensibly fictional or scholarly. On the contrary, a degree of stability in the theses of theoretical work can and, in the case of literary criticism or theory, must exist *alongside* ambiguity. The meaningfulness of literary theory, if it is to be literary, hinges on the latter without presupposing the disappearance of the former.

I pursue my investigation of Nietzsche and the codes of literature and philosophy in four sections. The first assesses the relations among language, literariness, and code, arriving at an understanding of what one might mean by literary code and theorizing its conditions of appearance in literature and philosophy. Chapter two posits multiple wills to decode, critiquing the will to find non-literary code in literature, theorizing a literary will to decode, and conceptualizing these in relation to Nietzsche's will to power. Chapter three clarifies the stakes of these divergent wills to decode by considering Nietzsche's autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, thereby showing what literary code singularly teaches us, even and perhaps especially about seemingly non-literary texts. Finally, chapter four proposes a reading of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* in hopes of articulating two types of literary code, complicating the binary of literary and non-literary code. This final section aims to illuminate the forms that make any text, including an apparently philosophical one, all but irreducibly literary. Throughout this final chapter, I attempt to situate my arguments on code in relation to the previous three chapters. I show what this dissertation's various readings have in common and return to my theories of the literature machine, the program, and the relation, in literature, between identity and automation.

Language, code, literariness

To understand the relations among language, code, and literariness, one must first consider temporality, subjectivity, and the forces that govern how the subject goes about knowing the world. Nietzsche mocks the "harmless self-observers who believe that there are 'immediate certainties'" as well as the logicians who, presupposing a subject, I, "on the condition of the predicate 'think,'" neglect that "even the 'it' [in 'it thinks'] contains an *interpretation* of the process, and does not belong to the process itself" (*Beyond* 23-4). That immediate certainty is impossible reflects Nietzsche's view that all knowledge is conditioned by the subject who produces it, a view he advances in his critique of philosophers in the tradition of Plato. Those thinkers, Nietzsche contends, have a habit of "standing truth on her head and denying perspective" (*Beyond* 2). They presume to see an object for what it is without accounting for the distortionary effects of their own point of view. More radically still, though, Nietzsche asserts that the proponents of immediate apprehension of phenomena, or "immediate certainties" ("*unmittelbare Gewissheiten*"), neglect the reality of "falsification on the part of *either* the subject *or the object*" (*als ob hier das Erkennen rein und nackt seinen Gegenstand zu fassen bekäme, als 'Ding an sich,' und* weder *von Seiten des Subjekts,* noch von Seiten des Objekts, *eine Fälschung stättfinde*") (my emphasis, *Beyond* 23, *Jenseits* 26). Much more radical than perspectivism, Nietzsche's contention is that in the object itself, a *Fälschung*, a fake, forgery, or copy, takes place (or takes the place of the would-be indivisible object). Even in the moment of apparent immediacy in which an object, or phenomenon, might be perceived, apprehended, or interpreted, the object doubles, or copies, itself. A single object is not present; rather, multiple objects are present or, to put it more rigorously still, nothing is present, or immediate. Even in the infinitesimal temporal interval that might, to the unscrupulous eye, pass for an immediate, indivisible moment, the object differentiates itself or, to use language of which

Nietzsche is fond, reveals itself only through a mask, or prism, that hides its evanescent and ultimately indecipherable essence.

Nietzsche's contestation of the object in itself extends to the notion of an indivisible or purely individual subject endowed with free will. Nietzsche implies as much in his discussion of the logician who would assume that a stable subject, I, exists because I "think," thus appearing to show that something, an 'it,' thinks which may be called an I, a subject, an ego. Nietzsche disputes this chain of assumptions, pointing out that even to propose a unitary subject, a singular 'it,' who thinks is itself an interpretation and a dubious one at that. He replaces the assumedly simple or self-sufficient cognitive mechanism of this univocal subject who would think of his or her own accord, of his own free will, with a relational notion of will. Nietzsche contends that, far from a unified or simple process of cause and effect, the very possibility of an action, or a thought, is predicated on relations between the subject who thinks and the subject's environment as well as the many subjects who make up the apocryphal individual we tend to recognize as 'the' subject. Our own subjectivity, the visible or material result of our wills, is an "effect" of a bevy of "'under-wills'" or "under-souls" (*Unterwillen* or *Unter-Seelen*), which make up their own "social structure" (*Beyond* 260). If the subject is fundamentally multiple and can only be conceived in relation to others, the notion of free will, or the capacity of a subject to act entirely of its own accord, crumbles: "We are at the same time the commanding *and* the obeying parties" (*Beyond* 26). When we act or think, we respond, neither offering thoughts or acting in ways that are fully *sui generis* nor finding objective realities in the world that precede our own fractured subjectivity.

This same understanding of will and the relational possibility of the subject's actions or freedom conditions the mechanisms of language and interpretation. To interpret — and we are,

in Nietzsche's correct understanding, always interpreting, down to the question of 'it' or what 'is' thinking — is to affirm a victor in a play of forces. The force that triumphs — in the case of language, the apparent meaning — must then submit itself to a play of forces in the eyes and ears of the next interpreter, who will necessarily make what 'is,' the force that has won out, into something else. Nietzsche lobbied for this irreducibly relational and contextual way of thinking about objects and meanings against an "unconcerned dialectic" ("*unbekümmerten Dialektik*") (12/13) that would naturally arrive at the objective or correct truth of the phenomenon or text it endeavored to describe. In so doing, his thought prefaces that of later philosophers such as Deleuze and Derrida, who reject even the epistemic and linguistic negativity of the dialectic as insufficient. In their emphasis on repetition as difference and on thought as necessarily relational, all three thinkers show us — though by no means uniformly, and they would not necessarily have articulated it in this way — how to read texts in a literary fashion. Deleuze writes, "In its essence, difference is the object of affirmation or affirmation itself. In its essence, affirmation is itself difference" (*Difference* 52). To say yes, to affirm a thought or interpretation, a reading of a text or thought, is to exercise a will that one cannot fail to exercise, to instantiate a difference that cannot fail to differ from the forces, or, in the case of language, meanings, in relation to which it exists. I argue that a text becomes literary precisely when an interpreter affirms this necessary subjective and contextual difference, grappling openly with uncertain semiosis, or linguistic negativity. This is how language becomes literary and the code of an ostensibly literary *or* philosophical text becomes literary code. It is the understanding of signification as necessarily interpretive, subjective, and contextual — an understanding Nietzsche pioneers and the so-called poststructuralist philosophers, especially Derrida, further elaborate — that sets the stage for the theorization of the literary that I propose.

In a commentary on Nietzsche, Derrida uses the language of codes and coding to describe this process, though he uses "code" in a less capacious way than I intend it. He writes:

> "C'est à partir du déploiement de ce même comme différance que s'annonce la mêmeté de la différance et de la répétition dans l'éternel retour. Autant de thèmes qu'on peut mettre en rapport, chez Nietzsche, avec … toute la thématique de l'interprétation active qui substitue le déchiffrement incessant au dévoilement de la vérité comme présentation de la chose même en sa présence. Chiffre sans vérité ou du moins système de chiffres non dominé par *la valeur de vérité* qui en devient alors seulement une fonction comprise, inscrite, circonscrite" (*Marges* 18-9, my emphasis).

"Chiffre" can mean code, but it also means, seemingly more simply and without the epistemological implications of codes and coding, figure or digit. In chapter one, I discussed a variety of contemporary computational approaches to literary study that aim to use code, in the sense of a computer program, to transform literature into quantitative evidence, or *chiffres*, as a means of understanding it: a *chiffre* for the number of female possessive pronouns, adjectives of some sort, or titles of a given length unlocked as if this numerical knowledge could unleash the truth of the literary text. This is the code I have in mind when *opposing* the will to decode, but as we see, in Derrida's parlance, the *chiffre* as metaphor for textual object designates a diametrically opposite conception of truth. That is, the *chiffres* of computational study tend to be the basis of approaches to literature which reduce the textual object to a "truth as presentation of the very thing in its presence." This is the very conception of truth and epistemological possibility Nietzsche rejects as the folly of "immediate certainties" and whose impossibility Derrida shows via the notion of différance. *Chiffre* in this sense would be an epistemologically erroneous moral value, one that, instead of describing the world and the way we know it, substitutes for that real and complicated process a comforting myth of certainty or sure-footedness. Indeed, the very existence of code, which, like a sign, necessarily stands in as a representation for something else, is at bottom illusory — if we accept, as Nietzsche and Derrida

argue, that nothing is immediately present to itself in the first place, then we must also accept that there can be no simple *representation*, or code or sign, (standing in place) of an absent thing.[74] What's more, the value of this certainty, this clarity or simplicity of knowledge and therefore conscience, is far from clear. It was among Nietzsche's missions, most notably in the *Genealogy of Morals*, to contest precisely this sort of assumption about the value of some truths over others: "We need a critique of moral values, the value of these values themselves must first be called into question" (*Wir haben eine Kritik der moralischen Werte nötig, der Wert dieser Werte ist selbst erst einmal in Frage zu stellen*) (20/294). I would argue that the value of the value of empiricist and/or quantitative certainty depends on the qualities of the object to be examined. Certainly, there are investigations for which quantitative evidence and rigid empiricist reasoning are ideal. But to impose these on literature is to impose a code, a certain kind of *chiffre*, that undermines the very essence of the object computational code is, in the case of literary study, deployed to illuminate.

However, what's so compelling about Derrida's gloss of Nietzsche's understanding of interpretation and knowledge is that he uses this figure, *chiffre* or code, in precisely the opposite sense of the simplistic sense I critique. For Derrida, to conceive of language as code is to presuppose not an identity of meaning but the absence of that identity, an understanding of language he attributes to Nietzsche. In "Différance," *chiffre* as linguistic object is more the *Fälschung* of which Nietzsche himself speaks: a metaphor, substitute, or copy that would implore the interpreter who hopes to tell the truth of language to pursue not a single, definitive meaning but rather a chain of significations inviting incessant reconsideration. In this sense, the

[74] See *Marges* 10, 12, 16. Derrida explains here the similarity between "code" and "sign" as well as the impossibility of codes and signs insofar as they stand, as they historically have, for representations of things, such as messages, that were never present or immediately comprehensible in the first place.

will to decode I theorize here might take on a drastically different quality: not the desire to force an illusory identity of meaning on the literary object but, quite the opposite, to operate the literature machine precisely as I have theorized it. The text's language would be code: a code that, in an event of reading, invites the copying of itself or the production of yet more code, a code that one begins to decipher but never quite cracks. We might call this type of code literary code, or a literary conception of code. Moreover, the very fact that code (*chiffre*, copy, *Fälschung*) can be deployed in these diametrically opposite ways attests to the literariness of the code, if you will, of Derrida's own writing. Contrary to the implications of Hollingdale's introduction of Zarathustra, it is neither possible nor desirable to oust the literariness, the semiotic ambiguity and metaphoricity, of language from writing that, unlike most narrative works of what is called literature, principally aims to advance certain theses. Derrida's theses, like Nietzsche's and those of this text, are thetic *and* literary. In the cases of Derrida and Nietzsche, philosophical code is liable to become literary, and the literary code of their works also makes those works, in the eyes and ears of the right interpreter, literature machines.

What, then, are the relations among code, language, and literariness? I would propose that we think of code as itself a potentially literary and therefore polymorphic phenomenon. As a metaphor for language, code may refer to a fixed, quantitative, or unambiguous and purely logical concept of language: language without the complications of language that come to the fore in texts read as literary. This version of code is illusory and rests on the denial of language's necessary difference from itself or signifying multiplicity, but it is descriptive of the way language is often treated — namely, as if it existed without difference or interpretation on the part of the reader or thinker in whose mind it signifies. But code may also, as in the usage of Derrida, following Nietzsche, refer to just the opposite: language as a game of references,

signifiers referring to other signifiers and never quite leading the reader or listener who interprets them to a definitive and isolated truth. The latter is the code we affirm when we read texts as literature. It is a literary code, one that texts called literature are particularly likely to possess as part of their programs and one that makes up the linguistic material of the literature machine. However, literary code is not limited to texts we tend to think of as literature. In using code as he does in the essay "Différance," at least as I have endeavored to read that text here, Derrida's philosophical, theoretical, or thetic essay comes to possess literary code, and that code becomes part of a literature machine that is no less philosophical or theoretical for being, at least in part, literary. This literary code, in literature as in philosophy, always remains to come; it is not guaranteed, and those possessed by the non-literary will to decode are always capable of stripping a text of its literary code and replacing it with code qua quantitative approximation.

Therefore, it must be said that just as there is no definitive code of literature (of the body of texts typically called literature), there is no pure code of philosophy. Philosophy may try to oust literary code: its ambiguity, its affinity for feeling and irrationality, its affirmative subjectivity and contextuality or lack of definitive truth. This would be *a* code of philosophy, an exclusionary code of apiece with the one that would outlaw ambiguity and metaphor from the writing of philosophy. But Derrida and Nietzsche will have taught us this: The potential literariness of code, as a metaphor for language, is part of the way language itself functions.[75]

Wills to decode

The previous section discussed that, to the extent that Nietzsche has an organized theory of will or willing, he actively distinguishes it from the popular notion of free will. Whereas free

[75] For more from Derrida on literariness, metaphoricity, and their role in philosophy, see "La mythologie blanche" in *Marges de la philosophie*.

will is often thought to demarcate the borders of the subject and the latter's uncontested mastery over himself, the will to power is a less subject-centric and more relational concept. Contrary to the assumptions Nietzsche's choice of words might provoke, the will to power does not necessarily designate the conscious exertion of power of one individual over another but rather the necessary triumph of one force over another, be the force that of a human being or not. Nietzsche writes, "The *victorious* concept 'force,' by means of which our physicists have created God and the world, still needs to be *completed*, an *inner* will must be *ascribed* to it, which I designate as 'will to power'" (*Will* 619, emphasis original). For anything to happen, the will to power must come into play; one force must conquer another, and what appears, or what happens, is a sign that a will to power has been exercised. Even in the preservation of things, in inertia itself or in the repetition of the same, it is not the case that no change, or no activity, has taken place. Rather, in cases of continuation, a force reasserts itself in relation to forces of change or disruption that might have otherwise overtaken it; the force returns to itself, triumphing over forces of apparent difference. Deleuze instructively summarizes the will to power as the "principle of the synthesis of forces. In this synthesis — which relates to time — forces pass through the same differences again or diversity is reproduced" (*Nietzsche* 50). This is why the eternal return (*die ewige Wiederkunft des Gleichen)* marks, *not the undisturbed persistence of the same*, but the return, the coming back, of forces that once appeared.[76] The will to power describes the very condition of possibility through which things happen or appear, willing themselves into existence, across whatever variable forms, from one moment to the next.

[76] Pierre Klossowski writes, "By embracing in a single glance the necessity of the Return as a universal law, I deactualize my present self in order to will myself in *all the other selves whose entire series must be passed through*" (57, emph. original). The eternal return vitiate the same, or the essence that would be present to itself; it shows that what exists is always already leaving itself, always already differing from itself.

Nietzsche explicitly uses the language of signs and interpretation to refer to the process through which the will to power operates. If a punishment appears to have a purpose, Nietzsche claims, that purpose is merely the "*sign* that a will to power has become master of something less powerful and imposed upon it the character of a function" ("*Anzeichen davon, dass ein Wille zur Macht über etwas weniger Mächtiges Herr geworden ist*") (77/370). He continues, "The entire history (*die ganze Geschichte*) of a 'thing,' an organ, a custom can in this way be a continuous sign-chain (*Zeichen-Kette*) of ever new interpretations and adaptations whose causes do not even have to be related to one another" (Ibid.).

The same can be said of texts. Texts only become what they are by virtue of the differential exercise of force — in an interpretation and in the persistence of the object in space and time. Every time a text appears as what 'it is,' *a* will to power (*ein Wille zur Macht*, a force that governs all things and not necessarily *the* conscious action of a coercive reader) has been exercised. This forceful disruption may happen unbeknown to the reader, who acts as the medium through which the text becomes, returning differentially to itself as what would appear to be the same text *or* turning into something manifestly different. The latter case, in which the reader-text encounter clearly intervenes in the text, foregrounding the recurrent text's necessary difference from itself, is the case of an affirmatively literary interpretation. One might describe a literary reading as precisely one in which the reader openly wrestles with the will to power that guides the process of interpretation, affirming rather than shying away from the power the reading must exercise over a text. This literary exercise of the will to power, an interpretive exercise that affirms the necessity of wrestling with uncertain semiosis and forging a new text out of the one before the reader, constitutes a different kind of will to decode than the one I critiqued in the previous section: It is the affirmative effort to decipher a text's *literary* code or to

find the potential literariness of the code within the text. As Derrida writes of *chiffres* in "Différance," this process of decoding a text leads the reader to yet another interpretation along the chain of signs (*Zeichen-Kette*) of which Nietzsche himself speaks; there is no end to the literary will to decode, no point at which the code is cracked.

In the case of textual interpretation, one might consider two kinds of chains of signs. The first, perhaps more obvious, is the chain of signs in which the words of the text themselves, and the words of the reader's interpretation, participate. When I read and interpret the words *chiffre* or *Fälschung*, I participate in a chain of interpretations of signs, in English, French, or German, to which these words are connected in my effort to make sense of them. That they must signify something particular to my engagement with them in a particular context and that I must wrestle with their semiotic uncertainty is what makes my reading literary; I affirm the will to power that makes the chain of texts connected to my own text singular. In the process, I also make the texts I read, and their signifiers, into something different than they were in their other instantiations.

But there is also a second chain of signs in which my reading participates. As Nietzsche contends, the very fact that the text as I interpret it may appear to have a certain purpose (*Zweck*) or utility (*Nützlichkeit*) — in this case, exemplifying the quality of literariness, or theorizing the various types of code, literary and non-literary, that inhabit all language — is merely a sign (*Anzeichen*) that a will to power guides my reading (*Genealogie* 370). This will of my text, the will to decode, or to find a literary code in the texts I pore over, marks a response to the program, theorized in chapter two, that regulates my reading. When I interpret, I respond to a range of ideological, historical, and economic forces and affirm my own reading in response to them, thereby signifying the *order* and incentives, possibly ideological and political, of which my own reading is a sign.

In the present case, the will to decode that guides my text also marks a departure from a historical epistemic imperative, discussed especially in chapter one on computational literary study and chapter three on surveillance capitalism, that privileges a will to decode fundamentally at odds with the epistemic conditions of literariness. This will to decode rejects literariness by presupposing decipherable, definitive, or objective answers where ambiguity, as the *sine qua non* of literariness in processes of signification and interpretation, should instead remain. It also reflects a will to power that denies itself, professing to find only, or greater, objectivity in the code of the text it interprets when it in fact does nothing but corral that code into a formation of its own liking aligned with its own incentives and ideology. Nietzsche denounces the figure of this reader, to whom he refers as the archetypal "scholar" (*Gelehrte*). He writes: "His mirror soul, eternally smoothing itself out, no longer knows how to affirm or negate; he does not command, neither does he destroy" ("*Seine spiegelnde und ewig sich glättende Seele weiß nicht mehr zu bejahen, nicht mehr zu verneinen; er befiehlt nicht; er zerstört auch nicht*" (*Beyond* 127-8/ *Jenseits* 151). The reader might assume, especially given the violence of the lexicon ("command … destroy") that Nietzsche is condemning those who study and react, despairing over the very process of studying, interpreting, and *reacting* that he elsewhere upholds. But that would be to miss the paradox that drives Nietzsche's point: namely, that we scholars, thinkers, or philosophers *all* react, and the task of reacting is not to pretend or aim to mirror what we study; it is to affirm the inevitable fact that, in describing or deciphering it, we transform it. This is the will to power that the reader must affirm, the epistemic imperative, or will to decode, to which one must say yes. To feign to mirror a text as a means of interpreting or even studying it is to deny the process of affirmation and denial that always takes place when the reader comes into

contact with a text, the interpretation that even the logician exercises when using “it” to describe the thing that thinks.

The will to decode I privilege and call literary, the will to decode as a will to power that affirms itself and sets out in search of literary code when interpreting texts, has for some time been losing ground in literary studies to another will to decode: the will to foist objectivity or a linear historical evolution or a fixed political purpose on a text. This will to power is an exercise of the will to power that aims to deny itself, substituting what supposedly must be for what in fact happens by chance, what supposedly belongs to the object for what truly belongs to the singular encounter between object and subject, non-literary code for that which could be literary. My dissertation has consistently critiqued this emergent will to decode in and beyond the realm of literary studies. In chapter one, I critiqued a number of approaches in computational literary studies and the digital humanities that presume to revolutionize reading via programmatic identifications and visualizations of patterns in lieu of affirmatively subjective interpretations and critiques. In chapter two, I distinguished my own iteration of affect theory and criticism, one that affirms and considers the feelings of the reader as a condition of interpretation while parsing a text’s signifiers to arrive at an understanding of its affects, from forms of affect theory that pride themselves on eschewing signifiers, form, interpretation, or delayed and mediated deliberation, replacing the latter with pretentions to capture ‘immediate phenomena,’ sometimes via description. Chapter three attended to the rise of surveillance capitalism, Internet-driven politics of identity, and the way the former fashions the subject, arguing for a singular and complicated subject best understood through literary processes of interpretation, a departure from the economic and cultural form that is the automated subject identical to itself. The epistemic assumptions of all the approaches to interpretation that I critique belong to a flattening will to

decode, one that, like the soul of the scholar Nietzsche criticizes, attempts to smooth out both the force of its own interpretation and the differential mutability of the object — be that a literary text or the ipseity of a subject. This will to decode, a rejection of the ever-present will to power and the possibility of literariness in the interpretation of texts, is an ascendant norm of surveillance capitalist culture, even if its individual manifestations — the tendency to search for immediacy or presence in accounts of affect, for example — need not be expressions of surveillance capitalism. In the next section, I will explore, through a reading of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, which is both autobiography (and thus an opportunity to investigate the ipseity or would-be identity of a subject) and text (and thus a chance to consider the conditions of textuality, interpretation, and potential literariness), what the stakes of resisting the will to decode are and how another will to decode, a will to discover literary code, might impose itself.

Before I touch on *Ecce Homo*, though, I want to address briefly three other contemporary schools of criticism that exhibit the flattening will to decode. The first is surface reading. A case in point from a much-cited "introduction" to the practice: "Texts can reveal their own truths because texts mediate themselves; what we think theory brings to texts (form, structure, meaning) is already present in them" (Best and Marcus 11). Many critiques of surface reading have been written, and I do not think it necessary to add a lengthy one here.[77] But I do want to add that the quoted perspective misunderstands the fundamental conditions of reading. Texts do not reveal anything themselves; they only reveal anything insofar as a reader arrives to facilitate the discovery. As I have discussed, this is not a casual or pedantic objection: The reader necessarily alters the text, so to elide that process is to feign an objective understanding of something that does not exist and to deny one's own mediation of the text, which certainly

[77] See Penteado and Weed.

mediates itself (in the sense that all things, even things that would appear to stagnate over time, change in relation to themselves through historical or diachronic force), but is also significantly mediated by whoever chances to read it. Indeed, this perspective on reading denies a will to power in a false show of humility that is in fact a display of arrogance: presuming to tell the very truth of an object, or text, without adding anything to it when one's interpretation is in fact, well, an interpretation and a far from objective or universal one at that.

To surface reading, parts of affect theory, and computational literary study, I would add the decoders of what is sometimes called new formalism, or for that matter any formalism that feigns to merely reveal the forms in a text without accounting for the force of the reading that disturbs those forms, bringing them to light as only a specific encounter between text and reader can.[78] I address this in chapter two in regard to formalist affect criticism, which may produce brilliant close readings of texts but errs insofar as it supposes to entirely elide the role of the reader, or the reader's subjectivity, in interpretation.[79] In *Forms*, Caroline Levine makes a convincing case for tying the meticulous formalist analysis of literary criticism, especially deconstruction, to what are commonly called historical and political structures, asserting that these structures, which she calls forms, help us understand the constraints and possibilities of politics and social life. But even Levine's formalist approach, which is deliberately and affirmatively attentive to historical context, consistently emphasizes what forms, be they ostensibly literary, political, or both, accomplish *in their own right*, as if they produce those effects by virtue of being what they 'are' and can merely be discovered by an observer who does not *force form itself into being*. To be sure, Levine's formalism is not as reckless in its neglect of the conditions of interpretation as some of the other wills to decode I have critiqued; she

[78] For a survey of new formalisms, see Theile and Tredennick.
[79] See chapter two's discussion of Brinkema.

acknowledges, for example, that "Rather than asking what artists intend or even what forms *do*, we can instead ask what potentialities lie latent — though not always obvious — in aesthetic and social arrangements" (6-7). But even here, her theory of formalist criticism does not account for the interpretive force of the reader, the very force — a will to power — that makes the articulation of forms, and indeed forms' very existence in the process of interpretation and in the collective experience of politics, possible. Levine cites William Butler Yeats' use of form as an example of the structure's latent power but appears to shy away from the recognition that it is, in fact, the force of her own singular reading that reveals the power of the forms she identifies.

It is helpful to return to the question of deconstruction in hopes of explicating this relation between form and force, especially seeing as Levine integrates a discussion of it into her contextualization of her own brand of formalism. Levine professes to "love poststructuralist ways of reading," replete with their "intellectual pyrotechnics," and stops short of explicitly agreeing with those by whom deconstructive readings are "called self-indulgent" (ix). But like other formalist approaches, including those preceding the era of deconstruction in American literary criticism, hers "risks stifling force under form" by failing to affirm the readerly force, a will to power, that allows form to become what it appears to be (Derrida, "Force and Signification," 31). Formalism without readerly force substitutes form for the force that creates the form formalism often discusses as if it had always been present, fully formed and waiting for the reader to discover the impossible object in itself. As Derrida himself puts it in an essay on structuralist literary criticism, one must acknowledge "Language's peculiar inability to emerge from itself in order to articulate its origin… Force is the *other of language* without which language would not be what it is" (Ibid., my emphasis).

This force, the other of language that, to some, indulgently evokes the irreducible, but oft denied, role of the reader in the event of signification is the same force denied by Quentin Meillassoux, who in a reading of Stéphane Mallarmé's "Un coup de dès jamais n'abolira le hasard" alleges that the meaning of the text can be deciphered on the basis of a mathematical code. Of course, Meillassoux's desire to comprehend the thing in itself and apprehend language as a quantifiable reality without difference precedes his consideration of Mallarmé. In his first book, he had charged that Continental philosophy from Immanuel Kant to the present day had erred in its emphasis on the subject's role in thought, claiming, "It could be that contemporary philosophers have lost the great outdoors, the *absolute* outside of pre-critical thinkers: that outside which was not relative to us" (*After Finitude*). Indeed, this is the same project of his reading of Mallarmé in *The Number and the Siren*, where he rails against the idea that "We must renounce any attempt to reduce Mallarmean poetry to a key that would unveil its ultimate meaning" (4). Of course, I would contest Meillassoux's reach for the real in speculative thought generally; the desire of so-called speculative realists and object-oriented ontologists to capture the thing in itself is belied by their recourse to language, which, however much they may wish to deny the fact, necessitates a degree of ambiguity and interpretation that undermines an "outside … not relative to us." But as the endeavor applies to literature, the folly of apprehending the thing in itself is even clearer — because it is ultimately beside the point whether a given poem *can* be understood on the basis of a mathematizable pattern or code. Meillassoux's fundamental error does not lie in searching for such a pattern; it lies in presuming that, having found one pattern or code, he will have discovered a text's "ultimate meaning." Here, the key, lost to Meillassoux, is that there is no key, not because an individual poem lacks such a key, but because poetry in general lends itself to be read and to produce viable readings beyond the

existence of a key. The subtext of Meillassoux's reading is that having discovered *a* key, he will have discovered *the* key, the one that puts an end to the infinite debate over the Mallarmé poem's meaning. But this is far from obvious even if "Coup de dés" contained such a key, and if it were the case — if the poem or any other poem contained an "ultimate meaning" that could put an end to the debate over said meaning — poetry would be much poorer in creative and epistemic potential for it.

In their emphasis on objectivity, on code as mathematical, empirical, historical, or structural reality, the various wills to decode I have critiqued shy away from the apparently embarrassing affirmation of the role their own subjectivity plays in the very becoming of a text, especially a literary one (which is only literary on the condition that a very subjective parsing of signifiers takes place). This will to decode is consistent with the broader cultural and economic norms and imperatives of surveillance capitalism, but it would be folly to see it as merely a reflection of the latter. One need only look to "Force and Signification," or further back to Nietzsche's polemics, to see how long-standing and influential the temptation has been to substitute form for force, code for literary code, and humble description for what must always, in interpretation, be a question of the will to power.

How one writes what one is

Literature is anathema to identity as such. But if there is one thread that ties the web of this dissertation's literary readings together, it is just that: identity or its failure, subjectivity as a question not of the subject's identity with itself but of the subject's difference with itself — the radically multiple subjectivity to which Deleuze and Guattari refer in that memorable opening: "Nous avons écrit *L'Anti-Oedipe à deux*. Comme chacun de nous était plusieurs, ça faisait déjà beaucoup de monde" (*Mille Plateaux* 9). "Beaucoup de monde" is translated into English as

"quite a crowd" (3) but is perhaps more commonly understood by the Francophone English speaker as 'many, or lots, of people.' This already-metaphorical expression from just one seemingly philosophical text captures what the literariness of language teaches us about identity: not only that one may be two, and therefore one is not purely identical with itself, but also that the literary one, the literary subject read as such, delivers a blow to the very concept of *a* world, as I discussed at the beginning of chapter one's reading of Blanchot. Writing this one dissertation as one putative author, and in the process reading the traumatic *histoire* of Blanchot's *La folie du jour*, the affective events of Duras' *Lol V. Stein*, and the not-so-simply-automatic automata of Georges Perec's *Les choses*, *Un homme qui dort*, and "The Machine," I have myself mutated, become various multiplicities, differed from myself over and over again, and witnessed my world rupture. This is to say that the subject I am, and the subjects that I have read, conjured into being, and interpreted through these works of literature — my literary subjects, *the literary subject* — have, has, and must literally become something, someone, or some two or three, different as a result of the event of reading, including the one this dissertation produces. As Derrida says of the world that turns over each time a person dies, my world shifts and becomes meaningfully different as I go down the path of literary reading, mutating with the texts that shift shape in my mind.[80] Now, this literary deconstruction of identity and of the very existence of *a* world — the fact that the event of literature, the production of the literature machine, produces precisely the dispersal or deconstruction of identity and therefore the non-identical identities of the subject and the world — need not, nor can it be the definitive *telos* of literature. But it is the effect produced by the literature machine that has mostly consistently programmed this dissertation's readings. A literary understanding of the subject and its worlds is among the

[80] See Derrida, *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*.

highest stakes at least this set of literary readings has to offer for literature itself, for the knowledge literature singularly makes possible.

Thus, to my readings of trauma, affect, and automaticity or its putative flipside, freedom, I want to add a reading in this final chapter of the very possibility of writing the life of the subject in literature. That is, I want to take up Nietzsche's autobiography, *Ecce Homo,* which purports to tell us, as its subtitle suggests, "how one becomes what one is." I will begin, then, with what Nietzsche has to say about life, or perhaps *to* life, a prepositional statement that will recur in the next section's treatment of *Zarathustra*. Nietzsche explains his affirmation of affirmation, his affirmation of all that life contains:

"This ultimate, joyfullest, boundless exuberant Yes to life is not only the highest insight, it is also the profoundest, the insight most strictly confirmed and maintained by truth and knowledge. *Nothing that is can be subtracted*, nothing is dispensable..." (*Ecce Homo* 50).

"Dieses letzte, freudigste, überschwänglich-übermütigste Ja zum Leben ist nicht nur die höchste Einsicht, es ist auch die tiefste, die von Wahrheit und Wissenschaft am strengsten bestätigte und aufrecht erhaltene. Es ist Nichts, was ist, abzurechnen, es ist Nichts entbehrlich" (*Werke* 323)

It is striking that even in regard to the question of the subject's orientation to life itself, Nietzsche is concerned with relationality and interpretation. His injunction is that the person standing athwart her own life affirms what happens, or what comes to pass — not necessarily that the subject arrogates to herself complete control over what is to happen in the manner of the ideologists of free will, but rather that she affirms everything that *does* happen, treating it as though she herself had willed it into being and *subtracting nothing*. This is to say that, for Nietzsche, the possibility of understanding one's own life is wrapped up in the will to decode. Nietzsche exhorts us to will a literary code for our own life, a boundless, or *überschwänglich* way of understanding our lives that — far from the will to decode that would treat life as a thing to be quantified or explained away, ascribed to historical structures or dismissed as simply

written in advance (the programmatic without the anti-programmatic) — celebrates *all* that happens, embracing each event in its full complexity. This *letzte … Ja zum Leben* is both the first and last yes: first in that it precedes all action — by doing, by living on, by interpreting, I affirm the life I receive — and last, or ultimate, in that it follows and supersedes everything else, even things one might be tempted not to affirm. Nietzsche's yes to life is unconditional, "an affirmation even of suffering, even of guilt, even of all that is strange and questionable in existence [*Fragwürdigen und Fremden des Daseins selbst*]" (Ibid.). Thus, Nietzsche does not question or investigate or interpret his life with suspicion or fear, decoding in hopes of identifying the true and dismissing the false. He welcomes the arrival of the unknown other, welcomes that which is incomprehensible or seemingly supplementary. "Es its Nichts, was ist, abzurechnen": nothing to be "subtracted," or left out, yes, but also nothing to account for or tally up, if we may read this verb with its contemporary, commercial valence, affirming the anachronistic, too. When speaking to or interpreting one's life, there is no account to settle — just beings, or events, to affirm and investigate in their multiplicity, and an intellectual imperative, not to moralize about life as it should have been or lament what was, but to affirm the complexity of what is: "Recognition, affirmation of reality is for the strong man as great a necessity as is for the weak man, under the inspiration of weakness, cowardice and *flight* in the face of reality" (Ibid).[81]

All the more significant for the present study of literary code is that Nietzsche devotes half the autobiography to proclamations about his own books and addresses specifically the question of his style, or the codes of his own writing, a style that was of course as unusual

[81] Derrida will cite Nietzsche in an essay largely credited with birthing poststructuralism at the expense of structuralism, "La structure, le signe, et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines." Derrida contrasts Nietzsche's affirmative approach to interpretation with the structuralist nostalgia for the lost centers of texts that must be reconstituted or rediscovered.

relative to that of philosophers of his time as most would consider it today. In other words, Nietzsche theorizes the conditions under which one might presume to interpret the story of his life, and he is very clear that to understand him or his writing will require interpretation. Writing of his "art of style" ("*meine Kunst des Stils*"), Nietzsche makes at least three claims pertinent to the concerns of this essay (*EH* 44 / *Werke* 315). First, that he refers to his writing as possessing an art, a word, *Kunst*, on which he insists six times in this section alone, troubles the border between philosophy and literature, or thetic and aesthetic writing, calling into question the efforts of a reader who would seek to distinguish between *Zarathustra* and 'the rest,' as though the so-called excess of that narrative work could be isolated from his other writings. We need not take Nietzsche's word for it; if this dissertation's readings have attempted to show anything, it is that while no text thinks on its own (always needing a reader to accompany it), ostensibly aesthetic writing is capable of helping us to think or theorize. Nietzsche insists that the writing of his own life, and writing in general, be granted the interpretation I have attempted to allot this dissertation's major thinkers, even in brief citations of them.[82] The literary instructs us to read all texts, even thetic ones, in this all-affirmative way.

What's more, Nietzsche adds to the case that all writing, even philosophical writing, signifies through signs that need to be interpreted, claiming that the "meaning of every style" ("*der Sinn jedes Stils*") is to "communicate a state, an inner tension of pathos *through signs*, including the tempo of these signs" ("Einen Zustand, eingerechnet das Tempo dieser Zeichen, mitzuteilen") (Ibid, emphasis added). Here, the German is meaningfully distinct from the translation, as the English communication carries the connotation of a perfect and undistorted

[82] Michel Foucault claims that among Nietzsche's greatest contributions to Continental philosophy was to, along with Marx and Freud, have "profoundly modified the space of distribution in which signs can be signs" ("Nietzsche," 272).

piece of information that is transmitted, or communicated, from sender to receiver (a myth, as far as language is concerned).[83] By contrast, the German "mitteilen" underscores that Nietzsche is *sharing* or disclosing his inner state *to*, or with (*mit*) *another*.[84] Thus, Nietzsche tells us that what he means to write cannot simply or perfectly be communicated; it must be heard, interpreted, understood by another who cannot purely understand it as such. In his treatment of *Ecce Homo*, Derrida focuses on the question of ears, and in this passage on the "art" of his style, Nietzsche turns to that trope, saying that "good style in itself" is a myth, just like the "thing in itself," because such ways of thinking assume there are "ears" capable of hearing precisely what the writer hopes to share.[85] It should be no surprise that Derrida, always attentive to the difference in writing, focuses on this concern of Nietzsche's, for what the latter's obsession with ears suggests is that no kind of writing can be boiled down to universally comprehensible logic, not even putatively nonfictional writing such as the autobiographical. Nietzsche displays anxiety about how his writing, and in this case his life, will be received; he should, as no form of writing is imbued with laws that render interpretation and the subjectivity of the reader irrelevant. We only write about our own lives with the risk that others will make of our writing what they will.

Finally, salient in Nietzsche's gloss of his own style is the notion that his writing shares the "multiplicity of [his] inner states [*Zustände*]" (Ibid.). Nietzsche, indeed writers in general, do not merely transcribe their thoughts but rather write with their thoughts, feelings, physical body (Nietzsche's attention to ears is far from his only reference to corporeal powers and processes), and experience. In other words, writing is only possible on the condition that thought evolves

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[83] See Dubreuil, *Poetry and Mind*, on Shannon and the will to reduce language to information while dismissing exceptions and apparent miscommunication, or the complications of signifiers, as noise. See also my discussion of this problem in the introduction to chapter two.

[84] In his text on Nietzsche, Georges Bataille revalues communication in a similar fashion: "'Communication'" — note the suspicious quotation marks — "cannot proceed from one full and intact individual to another. … 'Communication' only takes place *between two people who risk themselves*" (19-21).

[85] See *L'oreille de l'autre*.

with and is mediated by the other material and affective components of the writer. As a result, reading, too, or the possibility that one becomes what one is in writing — the possibility of writing oneself, or one's life, which only comes into being as a text in the event of a successive reading — depends not only on the inscription of a thought or the interpretation of signifiers but on the contextual and embodied experience of a text.[86] This marks a radical challenge to the would-be emotionless and purely rational pretentions of philosophical writing. Sarah Kofman, commenting on this same passage of *Ecce Homo*, writes, "All style reiterates a primary writing, that of the 'drives.' Thus, it is as vain to seek to impose a canonical model on writing as it is futile to seek to legislate universally in morality" (2-3). All writing summons the question of will and the will to power. Just as punishments are handed out contextually, in accordance with the judgment of an individual's will to power, and can thus only be aligned retroactively with a putatively universal moral principle, all texts, whether in the event of reading or writing, attest to a singular and contextual act of creation destined to subvert the norms of the genre to which their writer may wish them to appertain. All writing entails a double writing, or a writing and a reading, each of which indeed involves more than the thought, or logic, of writer and reader. This arbitrary and more-than-rational encounter among writer, reader, and text offers any text the ability to transcend the apparent borders of its genre, and it submits every text, even of philosophy or autobiography, to the semiotic risk of the literary as well as the arbitrariness of willing and feeling. Thus, to ask how one writes what one is, or to inquire into the very possibility of an autobiography, one must account for the disruptive force of a reading that cannot be anticipated in advance. Nietzsche's anxiety about his reception reflects his cognizance of this interpretive complication, which robs from philosophy the rationality to which it aspires.

[86] For a deep dive into the relation between materiality and inscription, especially as this relates to poststructuralism, see Bachner.

Having explored the conditions of life, as Nietzsche understands them, and the conditions under which one might write life, or write what one is (to paraphrase Nietzsche's subtitle), we might ask what kind of autobiography this is and what kind of life lives on in its contents. In the interlude between his autobiography's foreword and first chapter, Nietzsche writes, "I tell myself my life" ("*und so erzähle ich mir mein Leben*") (7 / *Werke* 267). What does it mean to announce that one will tell oneself one's life, or narrate (*erzählen*) the story of one's life to oneself? What Nietzsche does in this short line setting the stage for his autobiographical performance is to maximize his own text's literary potential, urging the reader to interpret what the reader has no choice but to interpret given the inescapable condition of the will to power and the necessity of interpretation that Nietzsche sees in all communication. Therefore, I would suggest that, in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche gives us the autobiography *as* literature machine: a text that both theorizes the conditions for what one might in general call a literary autobiography and itself offers ample literary potential. This is why Nietzsche is also painfully cognizant, as his repeated riffs on the ears of his readers reveal, that his text will not necessarily be understood well, nor as he understands it. Nietzsche cannot be sure that the reader will affirm interpretation itself, reading as complicated — what I would call literary — the life the autobiography passes on.

Nietzsche notes in the same interlude prefacing the first chapter that he had "buried [his] forty-fourth year today," leaving behind something "immortal" ("*unsterblich*"): several of his books (Ibid.). Indeed, the majority of the short book's fourteen chapters are devoted to precisely this, commentaries on his previous works, replete with citations. I want to propose that this constitutes the core of Nietzsche's autobiographical ploy: autobiography as rejection of autobiography — the writing of one's own life not as a report of facts such as where one was born, who one's parents were, and so on, but as a doubling down on one's texts, on the linguistic

content of one's life. To include this content in his autobiography via commentary and citation rejects, as much as any author can reject a reading in advance, the possibility of rigidly empiricist reading, of historicism and the various wills to decode that would reduce a text to merely formal features or, still worse, its apparent historical context, a collection of facts that can simply be tied to its author. Nietzsche is more ambitious: Just as he says life itself must overcome itself, he writes his life as an ambiguous intertextual account, as a vertiginous array of references and unclear statements, so that the reader must go into the matrix with him, losing him just to find him again in the game of indirect reference and endless interpretation that characterizes all literary texts. Nietzsche himself offers this message to his "believers": "I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only *when you have all denied me* will I return to you (*will ich euch wiederkehren*) …" (6 / *Werke* 265). Willing himself, through this literary autobiography, to be undying ("*unsterblich*"), Nietzsche kicks off an endless reckoning with signs that will provide for his perpetual loss and return, for his own eternal recurrence (*ewige Wiederkehr*) as his readers grapple with the negativity of the signs of his life only to develop a subtler understanding of those signs, returning to him again. In other words, the program of his autobiographical literature machine rests on a maximally literary code, one that, if read as such, will deny the automation or identification of his subjectivity, allowing him to live on in difference, a ghost in the textual machine. Nietzsche's emphasis on interpretation and his anxiety about it, coupled with his autobiography's lack of factual trappings and citation of other texts, shows that he knows that to write what one is, or become what one is in writing, one must become in an event of reading that the author cannot anticipate. Autobiographies are heterobiographies, potential literature machines. No one writes her life without the signature of the other.[87]

[87] See Derrida, "Signature Événement Contexte."

The literature machine's ultimate code

Nietzsche leaves us, at the end of the preface to his autobiography, with an ellipsis, and it is with ellipses, blank spaces, and elisions that I want to conclude this chapter's readings of Nietzsche in hopes of articulating just what makes a text potentially literary. That is, what makes up the potentially literary codes of the literature machine? Are these codes, like signifiers that have themselves become literary in an event of reading, multiple? How do they differ from one another, and what are the conditions under which they might appear?

In his autobiography, Nietzsche claims that it was in *Zarathustra*'s "Seven Seals" that he flew "a thousand miles beyond that which has hitherto been called poesy" ("*was bisher Poesie hieß*"), adding that in this text he achieves a "*grand style of phrasing*" (*EH* 44-5 / *Werke* 316). This section finds Zarathustra, fresh from a circuitous dance with a woman called "Life" to which we will return, apostrophizing "Eternity" and imparting the wisdom of a "prophet" ("*Wahrsager*"), which he declares himself to be. Zarathustra says the "prophetic spirit" ("*wahrsagerischen Geistes*") that possesses him is:

"ready for lightning in its dark bosom and for redeeming beams of light, pregnant with lightnings which affirm Yes! laugh Yes! ready for prophetic lightning-flashes:

but blessed is he who is thus pregnant! And, in truth, he who wants to kindle the light of the future must hang long over the mountains like a heavy storm!

Oh how should I not lust for the wedding rings of rings — the Ring of Recurrence!

Never yet did I find the woman by whom I wanted children, unless it be this woman, whom I love: for I love you, O Eternity!

For I love you, O Eternity!" (*Zarathustra* 244-5).

"*zum Blitze bereit im dunklen Busen und zum erlösenden Lichtstrale, schwanger von Blitzen, die Ja! sagen, Ja! lachen, zu wahrsagerischen Blitzstrahlen: —*

— selig aber ist der also Schwangere! Und wahrlich, lange muß als schweres Wetter am Berge hängen, wer einst das Licht der Zukunft zünden soll! —

oh wie sollte ich nicht nach der Ewigkeit brünstig sein und nach dem hochzeitlichen Ring der Ringe, — dem Ring der Wiederkunft!

Nie noch fand ich das Weib, von dem ich Kinder mochte, es sei denn dieses Weib, das ich liebe: denn ich liebe dich, oh Ewigkeit!

D e n n i c h l i e b e d i c h , o h E w i g k e i t !" (*Zarathustra* 287).

The metaphoricity and corresponding fictionality or poeisis of this philosophical text that Nietzsche declares extraordinarily poetic are evident from the outset. In other words, the code of this text, the most obvious component of its program, compels the reader to initiate an event of literary reading, to wrestle with its semiosis and the multiple fictions it produces — the text implores the reader to fabricate multiple texts out of it, to make copies through the interpretive mechanism of the literature machine. Zarathustra says that the prophetic spirit — *wahrsagerischer Geist*, all-knowing, soothsaying, literally truth-telling spirit, ghost, or specter — that inhabits him possesses a "dark bosom" or "breast" (*Busen*) that is ready for lightning strikes. The *Geist*'s dark breast is ready for light, among the most dominant metaphorical signifiers for not only knowledge but goodness, or knowledge assumed to be inherently good. In other words, Zarathustra's dark-breasted spirit — a woman in need, literally, of beams of light to rescue her ("*erlösenden Lichtstrale*") — is poised for enlightenment, to receive the benefits of an *Aufklärung*, as in *the Enlightenment*, a turning on of the rational lights that will lead the dark-breasted woman out of the cave that Zarathustra himself departs in the text's first pages. Zarathustra himself is, in fact, "pregnant" (literally, *schwanger*, as in expecting to have children) with his, or the spirit's, own lightning, or *lightnings* ("*Blitzen*"), which will affirm in a typically Nietzschean manner the lightning strikes to come: "*Blitzen, die Ja! sagen, Ja! lachen, zu wahrsagerischen Blitzstrahlen*: —".

What is the significance of this dance of lightning strikes, of these strikes threatening to strike the man already pregnant with his own lightning and haunted by a spirit prepared to affirm the strikes to come? I might note firstly that Nietzsche's recourse to light as an apparent metaphor for wisdom suggests the inescapability, not only of the former, light, as a metaphor *for* knowledge, but also of metaphoricity itself, as Derrida was at pains to demonstrate. That the metaphor may itself be called a "classical philosopheme" or "metaphysical concept" ("Mythologie blanche," 261) does not attenuate its power to crack open the strictures philosophy might seek to impose upon itself. Philosophy may attempt to refute the 'excess' of literariness and the fictional fabrication inherent in signifiers (including metaphors), but it necessarily makes recourse to them. Thus, Nietzsche's passage exemplifies the necessary intermingling of what one might call the superficial codes of literature and philosophy. Philosophy is itself poetic (it participates in poeisis and fabrication, in all the ambiguity "fabrication" itself implies), and when Nietzsche describes the "Seven Seals" as an extraordinary example of "poesy," he is not necessarily designating the excerpt as a work of literature distinct from his broader philosophical enterprise; the literariness is a part of the broader philosophical system. Indeed, that an apparently or generically philosophical text rests on its use of metaphor, as in the case of *Zarathustra*, may make it all the more philosophical — the metaphor being an integral and intellectually capacious part of the latter discourse no matter the latter's efforts to exclude it.

Thus, I would argue that Nietzsche's recourse to a common metaphysical metaphor for knowledge — light as knowledge and as restorative revelation from on high — actually generates the opposite of the effect it might at first be taken to produce. Far from substantiating the codes of theology and metaphysics (with its laws for describing what happens down below), Nietzsche, by integrating the metaphor into a narrative text destined to recur eternally and act as

the mechanism for different interpretations of itself, revalues the metaphor — light qua truth or knowledge — whose long history of divine revelation he invokes. In this passage of *Zarathustra*, light does not signify a *clear* revelation, a command from God or disclosure of the laws of physics or morality that will reign over future knowledge as the clear arbiter of the good, or the true, in itself. Rather, the lightning strikes will meet *multiple* lightning strikes already inhabiting he who is to receive the revelation*s themse*lves: "*schwanger von Blitzen, die Ja! sagen, Ja! lachen, zu wahrsagerischen Blitzstrahlen*." The plurality of the odd "lightnings," as *Blitzen* is translated into English, is significant; it suggests that what is at play here is not the obsequious reception of uncontested wisdom — carrying Nietzsche's hated thing, or good, in itself — but a *play of forces* that will affirm but not merely replicate the flashes of light, or strikes of knowledge, in question. *Zarathustra* appropriates the hackneyed metaphor it invokes; light becomes something less than light (less clear, a form of distorted knowledge) and something more (an irreducibly multiple form of truth, lightnings, where a single strike might more traditionally prevail). Light remains a metaphor for knowledge, yes, but this a different form of knowledge than the one Western thought typically endorses.

Similarly, Nietzsche's ficto-philosophical text appears to invoke certain typical gender dynamics but does so in a way that distorts them, proliferating meaning and revaluing an order that it might initially seem to reinforce. The dark-breasted woman who receives truth, or light, might appear to substantiate the conservative conception of women as ignorant, mysterious, a "dark continent … still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable" (Cixous 884-5). This woman or womanly figure would be waiting for man, or missionary, to arrive and enlighten her, to help her see the light. But gendered signifiers and imagery are strikingly interwoven in the "Seven Seals," which appears to see-saw between

reactionary clichés and radical challenges to the very binary between genders, intermingling opposites. For one, Nietzsche describes Zarathustra himself as pregnant, even using the noun "Schwangere": literally, a pregnant woman or expectant mother. There can be no question that this pregnant woman is the otherwise male Zarathustra, as the pronoun "der" denotes a male figure. The imagery of the passage reinforces the impression of Zarathustra as pregnant woman: Whoever wants to set off the light of the future (*das Licht der Zukunft zünden*) must hang or float above the clouds like "heavy weather," a voluptuous cloud.

In this passage, then, woman is man. She is the spirit set to receive a lightning strike, and she is, or would appear to be, the cloud containing the spark of knowledge itself. Even more troublingly for the prospect of a reading that would interpret this passage as reinforcing typical gender dynamics, as simply receiving or reproducing the gender-exclusionary code of philosophy like a simple machine, is that in the following paragraph, Zarathustra rejects the imperative that his primary relation to women take place within the institution of marriage. He does not seek the standard wedding ring ("*hochzeitlichen Ring*") but rather finds the wedding ring's apotheosis, the wedding ring *of rings*, in the "Ring of Recurrence" (*dem Ring der Wiederkunft*). In fact, Zarathustra rejects the possibility of marriage and heterosexual coupling altogether, saying he has never found a woman from whom he wanted children because he loves another woman, the one he apostrophizes: "O Eternity," "Oh Ewigkeit." This is the only woman Zarathustra loves. So, one might read this passage as a sign that Zarathustra replaces woman, or 'real,' embodied women, with an abstract concept of Nietzsche's, the eternal recurrence of the same, and perhaps one could construe this as the most conservative of philosophical moves. This interpretation is possible; we are already calling the signifiers of a text into question, a text whose lightning strikes meet our own, whose light, or lesson, is far from clear. But I am inclined

to affirm a different reading, one according to which Nietzsche's choice to equate the perpetuation of knowledge with pregnancy, to attribute pregnancy to an otherwise male protagonist, and to call eternity itself woman ("dieses Weib"), disturbs the hierarchy of man over woman in the kingdom of philosophy and even challenges the gender binary itself. In "The Seven Seals," woman *is* (in) man, literally and metaphorically, and she is an integral part of the production, or recurrence and reproduction, of knowledge, which starts with a spark that sets the world aflame and recurs, as text, forever after. Even more significantly, as the apostrophized eternity itself, woman is the very beloved medium in which knowledge lives on. This does not mean that Nietzsche's corpus contains no conservative or even repugnant statements about women or their role in the work of philosophy. But it does mean that even those statements of Nietzsche's about gender which might at first appear retrograde may in fact affirm the opposite.[88] That this is the case is a sign of the role of literary code in the texts superficially coded as philosophy. It speaks to the possibility that every text-machine may become a literature machine.

Nevertheless, what I have read so far only constitutes what I will call the primary code of literature, be it or not within the broader text of philosophy. I want to close by acknowledging a second sort of literary code, which I will call the ultimate code of literature and the most daring challenge literariness poses to the thetic form of philosophical or theoretical thought. To find this code, one need only return to the section of *Zarathustra* preceding "The Seven Seals," "The Other Dance Song" (*Das andere Tanzlied*), which finds Zarathustra circling another woman, this

[88] Derrida hints at this counter-intuitive reading, noting that for Nietzsche "Femme est un nom de cette non-vérité de la vérité": Woman designates the non-truth of metaphysical truth, a truth that would reduce truth to factuality or Nietzsche's much-decried 'thing in itself' and reject the complications of truth in actuality (*Éperons* 50). Nietzsche turns to woman to revalue truth, thereby essentializing her as precisely what is inessential, or what cannot be assimilated to conceptions of truth that do not take context or the distorting effects of interpretation into account. This is at once an essentialist and reductive approach to the category of 'woman' and one that affirms femininity as among the most radical approaches to male-dominated philosophy's typical assumptions.

one called Life (*das Leben*). Like the section that follows it, "The Other Dance Song" at first appears to set up a binary in which Zarathustra chases Life, who professes jealousy of his wisdom. Zarathustra, hitherto playing around with Life and expressing his adulation of her, threatens to whip her when she eludes him:

"I am truly weary of being your shepherd, always sheepish and meek! You witch, if I have hitherto sung for you, now for me *you* shall — shriek!" (*Z* 242).

"Ich bin es wahrlich müde, immer dein schafichter Schäfer zu sein! Du Hexe, habe ich dir bisher gesungen, nun sollst du mir — schreien!" (*Z* 284).

Tired of playing the game of push and pull, that of subtle interpretations of granular movements that accompanies an intersubjective dance of seduction, Zarathustra gives in, here, to the temptation to reassert a more dogmatic masculinity. Gone will be the aesthetic, literary game of singing to which the title of the section refers. Instead, he will seek to silence Life, supplanting his admiration of her "crooked smile" with the crack of a whip, and his parsing of her maneuvers with a scream that signifies nothing but a rote response to brutal force. This is the will to power in the most banal imaginable sense of the term: an affirmation of the physically strong over the physically weak, one that affirms the existing social order rather than creating something novel.

However, the threat of a whipping comes at the end of the first part of a dance song whose dynamic shifts in its second. This time, it is Life who drives what is not monologue but dialogue. She successfully entreats Zarathustra to relent and reproaches him for thinking of leaving her each night when the clock strikes twelve. "Yes," he begins, admitting to the urge to desert her. But then, just when Zarathustra seems poised to leave Life behind and affirm at her expense his foolish friend Wisdom, there is a turn in the dialogue. Having been addressed by Life, Zarathustra's torrent of aphorisms and exclamations ceases at last, and he speaks to her alone in an inaudible whisper:

"'Yes,' I answered hesitatingly, 'but you also know...' And I said something into her ear, in the midst of her tangled, yellow, foolish locks.

'You *know* that, O Zarathustra? No one knows that.'

And we gazed at one another and looked out at the green meadow, over which the cool evening was spreading, and wept together. But then Life was dearer to me than all my Wisdom had ever been.

Thus spoke Zarathustra" (243).

"'Ja, antwortete ich zögernd, aber du weißt es auch —' Und ich sagte ihr etwas ins Ohr, mitten hinein zwischen ihre verwirrten gelben törichten Haar-Zotteln.

'Du weißt das, oh Zarathustra? Das weiß niemand. — —'

Und wir sahen uns an und blickten auf die grüne Wiese, über welche eben der kühle Abend lief, und weinten miteinander. — Damals aber war mir das Leben lieber, als je alle meine Weisheit. —

Also sprach Zarathustra" (285).

In this instance, the Nietzschean text does not stop short and inscribe an end where the necessity of infinite and open-ended interpretation might take its place. Instead, in this crucial moment at the climax of the dance song, we are given the gift of a trailing off (in the English ellipsis), or a pause before the end of the quotation (in the German) — one more dash, an open circle that cannot be closed. What is it that Zarathustra claims to know about Life/life and the possibility of leaving her? What is this thing that nobody knows, as Life herself affirms, denying Zarathustra's pretention to know the unknowable? What does it mean, further, that we, the reader, cannot know the unknowable thing Zarathustra claims to know, the thing condemned to white space on the page — light, even a lightning strike, *qua darkness*, impermeable obscurity that nonetheless signifies? I propose that this answer Zarathustra, the prophet, delivers "hesitatingly," this answer that is not an answer, that is an incitement to endless questioning, that is the spark of revalued enlightenment to which "The Seven Seals" refers, destined to recur as a question haunting the literature machine of *Zarathustra* and its reader-operators until the text disappears from this

Earth and its inter-linking lives — this answer is the ultimate code of literature, its absolute refusal of conceptuality and philosophy's pretentions to total, logical understanding. The ultimate code of literature is a phantom code or the absence of code: an infinite incitation to read because there is nothing clear, no pure light, to interpret. The most literary code is no code at all, no representation of a phantom message that would be whole.

Thus, the status of life, and of woman, and of literature, and of literary code in this passage of *Zarathustra* is to short-circuit in the most definitive way imaginable the presuppositions of a will to decode that seeks data, a given, or finite answers where literariness might otherwise arrive to complicate the computational game. Like Blanchot's trauma, Duras' affects, and Goethe's missing subject, Nietzsche's woman, Life, commands us to keep reading: not to fall back into the arms of "Weisheit," though they may be familiar, stable, and comfortingly so, but to look out, and possibly weep, before the endless richness of a vista with no end. Out there lies the knowledge that only literariness makes possible. The ultimate code of literature compels us to seek that knowledge — even in the text of philosophy — renouncing any self-certain assumptions as to the contours of our world, our identity, what can be automated, predicted, computed, or controlled once and for all. This is what it means to take one's chance at operating the literature machine.

Conclusion

To Differ Again

What is the literature machine if not a war machine against conclusions, against tying the knot and walking away from a string that refuses to be cut or defined? This dissertation, like any text, will only stop pressing out copies of itself on the condition that it is condemned to the trash bin of history, on the condition that it is no longer read. That may come to pass, but as long as a copy of it, digital or physical, remains potentially accessible, its future, too, lies in wait. This is what the literature machine teaches us about the temporality of the text machine, whose history, in the linear sense, is of marginal importance relative to its other history, which comes into being in events of reading, which are also events of copying, and of difference. The literature machine has no conclusion.

As I write this, I imagine the exasperated sigh of the reader who is done with poststructuralism and done with what I would call literary theory in general: done with the allegedly indulgent ruminations on language, on the inevitable rewriting of writing, on the conditions that language imposes on thought. In a dissertation on Derrida and language, Evan Foster writes, “Where claims are made in defense of Derrida’s continued relevance for the humanities, it is less than surprising to find warnings or admonitions or even apologies concerning the role that language plays in his overall project” (1). As Foster points out, apologizing for the emphasis on language in Derrida is self-defeating because any other reflection Derrida may have to offer — political, cultural, ethical, theological, or anti-theological — happens through language *and* a meditation on language. Indeed, the distinctiveness of Derrida’s oeuvre — and, as is among this dissertation’s chief claims, the distinctiveness of literary theory and criticism in general as a practice of knowledge and thinking — lies in its

attentiveness to the dynamics of the language in which it thinks. Thus, to the extent that literary criticism and theory, which hinge on parsing the signifier and the production of meaning, have anything to contribute to theories of politics, ethics, or economics, they do so via the very meditations on language of which literary theory's apologists are ashamed. This attentiveness to language, including the language of our own texts, is the sine qua non of our discipline; without the meditation on language, without the potentially nettlesome aspect of our writing that theorizes its own conditions of interpretation and irreducible inconclusiveness, nothing would remain to differentiate literary theory from political theory, the literature machine from any other text machine. We would lose sight of what literature itself offers to thought.

Throughout the dissertation, I have argued that it is worth thinking about and through the epistemic distinctiveness of literature because in literariness lies a particular and deeper understanding of such matters as language, history, technology, affect, trauma, freedom, subjectivity, and the conditions of philosophy. What makes the dissertation's meditation on all these matters literary, in my view, is that in each case, I depart with a reading of texts that treats those texts not as theses to be summarized, but as ambiguous, signifying, self-differing machines in their own right. (From this vantage point, it is perhaps easy to see why one would regard Derrida as an exemplarily literary thinker.) Thus, whether approaching Duras or Nietzsche, affect or freedom, the dissertation, as an aspiring literature machine itself, reproduces the complexities, the ambiguities, and thus the literariness of the texts it copies. In all the texts it encounters, *Literature Machines* attempts to find the self-differing sort of text machine it takes as its title.

Of course, there will be concerns about *Literature Machines* and the arguments it makes that I wish to acknowledge despite what I would consider to be the impossibility of their

resolution. One might wonder, for example, whether it is fair to make a universal claim about the essence, however inessential, of literature while interpreting only a small number of texts from a couple of national and linguistic traditions. Laurent Dubreuil is right to suggest that literary theory has a lot to gain by becoming "more, much more, than 'global,'" for in so doing, and especially when making claims about literature, culture, or language in general, literary theory becomes more attentive to the very differences that literature produces par excellence (*Poetry and Mind* vii). And yet, I do not believe that detractors of the literature machine or *literary* theory or poststructuralism would assent to this dissertation's way of thinking about literature, or of reading it, because this text were to include a reading of Chinese poetry or popular music that shows it is not just canonical or quasi-canonical texts by European authors that suggest literature's essence or singularity has to do with the undecidability of the signifier. I do not doubt, either, without presuming that it would be equally easy to do so across all texts, that any text may be interpreted in a literary fashion, thus becoming a literature machine. On this issue, I return again to Nietzsche, who criticizes philosophers for "standing truth on her head and denying perspective" (*Beyond* 2). We find in literature the literature we want to find — the literature that reflects its 'original' historical context, the one defined primarily by its formal patterns, the fundamentally ambiguous one that comes into being in an idiosyncratic event of interpretation. This variability is a case in point for the view of literature as a machine with only an inessential essence; your literature is not my literature, and that is another way of saying that all literature is a difference-producing machine.

Others may charge that *Literature Machines* is not about machines or that it is about machines but only in an idiosyncratic or figurative way. In response to this, I could conduct the counter-intuitive acrobatics of maximalist poststructuralist reasoning, proclaiming that *Literature*

Machines is the rare, deep engagement with machines in literary scholarship, to be contrasted with the superficial meditations on patterns and the blunt deployment of machines as data-crunching tools that characterizes much of the digital humanities. Indeed, one need only return to chapter one to find such an argument, conducted at length. But I think it suffices to say here that *Literature Machines* takes the approach to technology that conforms to the theory of literature at its center and thus to its particular concerns and ambitions. It aims to walk the path of language, as Heidegger puts it, taking the lexicon of technology as its point of departure and the ethics of contemporary technology as fodder for thought along its path to expanding what we can do with the signifiers 'machine,' 'program,' 'automaton,' and 'code.' In short, it seeks to make literature machines of these text machines. It is not a history of the program or the machine as technical possibilities or inventions, nor even a history of the word 'program.' It is the performance of an encounter, a display of literary thinking through the language of technology but not beholden to its empirical manifestations. *Literature Machines* is hardly stealthy in its select ambitions, nor in its disregard for those some may consider essential but that it openly posits as marginal to a book-length meditation on literature.

"To Differ Again" is a combative title for a conclusion. It refers not only to the difference of the text from itself but also to the difference of this text from its contexts, from the dominant priorities of literary criticism in the time in which it was written. Knowledge itself, at least as constituted in an increasingly technical and pre-professional academy, is headed in the direction of the simplifying machine and of non-literary code: the direction of identities and sure-footed knowledge, of useful and often moral takeaways, of half-baked ideas of empathy and other skills that can produce returns for capital in the workplace. From these imperatives, *Literature Machines* differs, not for the sake of its own inchoate call to arms or paean to

‘resistance,’ but for the sake of a careful and singular approach suited to the object of its study and for the form of justice, however limited, that lies in reading the text of the other with attention to difference. Literature differs again, its meaning deferred. For that reason, it has something singular to offer to knowledge, something not easily rendered as a technology, at least not the kind capitalists and universities like to tout as commodifiable tools.

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