Gilles Deleuze’s *Proust and Signs* is a philosophical investigation of Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* revolving around the concept of jealousy. According to Deleuze, Proust expands the experience of jealousy into a veritable “logic of jealousy” which discloses that reality is “a schizoid universe of closed vessels.” Deleuze explicates this logic by tracing how the Proustian lover’s jealousy fuels an apprenticeship in which a beloved is successively experienced in terms of four signs: “material signs” of worldliness, love, and sensuous qualities, and “immaterial signs” of art. At each stage, the lover learns not just something about the beloved, but also about things in general. The signs, however, do not refer to four kinds of entities or experiences. There is only a formal distinction between them, and together they constitute a theory of the experience and essence of any entity whatsoever, be it a love, a memory, a person, a madeleine, or cobblestones.

Reconstructing Deleuze’s analysis is interesting for two reasons. First, probing a seemingly banal feeling for philosophical riches far surpassing its specificity as a contingent passion

---

strongly resonates with the analyses of anxiety, boredom, and nausea in the respective philosophies of Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Jealousy, however, is not among the usual states investigated by such existentialists and phenomenologists, making it a relatively fresh ground to cover. Second, the “schizoid” universe to which jealousy leads us will be one of individual entities! This is, at the very least, quite surprising from a thinker so often considered to propagate the abolition of individual things in favor of more primordial intensities and fluxes of desire.

Material signs

But we must start at the beginning. The lover initially experiences “worldly signs.” These are our everyday experiences of things in terms of colors, sounds, sizes, positions, and so on. They are the qualities we usually treat as being the objects to which they belong: “the worldly sign does not refer to something, it ‘stands for’ it, claims to be equivalent to its meaning.” After all, we say that madeleines are sweet, cobblestones are heavy, and the beloved is a lover’s beloved. These signs characterize the world of habitual recognition, and a non-jealous lover is precisely one who trusts that the beloved is only what she shows him, assuming an identity between her being and his experience of her affections. He believes to truly be part of her world as well, being present to her just as he is. This natural attitude toward things is what Deleuze calls “objectivism”: “To refer a sign to the object that emits it, to attribute to the object the benefit of the sign, is first of all the natural direction of perception or of representation.” Objectivism, however, is illusory. It makes us believe qualities are out there in the object, rather than in here in experience: “we think that the ‘object’ itself has the

2 Ibid., 6.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 29.
secrets of the signs it emits.” Objectivism is false because the same object can sustain contrary qualities. It can be experienced as bright, dull, and ugly now, but as dark, exciting, and beautiful later while nevertheless remaining this entity. A friend we have not seen in years may have changed completely, but it remains her. As Deleuze reminds us, the frivolous nature of qualities already moved Plato to dismiss them as merely superficial. The same object can even sustain contrary qualities simultaneously, as being bigger than something is always also being smaller than something else, and being to the left of this is always also being to the right of that.

For Deleuze objectivism is our natural way of looking at things, deeply ingrained in memories, practical activities, perceptions, passions, and thoughts. Hence interrupting our objectivist habits requires a violent shock to thought, which is what jealousy provides. It makes a lover think that an entity (the beloved) is not the qualities in terms of which he experiences it (her). No matter what he experiences her saying or doing, none of it can be trusted, all of it could be lies and deceptions! Poisonous suspicions rear their heads: if she is not how I experience her, then neither am I how she experiences me. So how can I be part of her world? And if she does not coincide with the affections she gives me, then others may share her affections as well! Since everything is usually known by its worldly signs, their sudden unreliability makes the jealous lover suspect that he does not really know anything! As Proust writes: “his merciless jealousy places him […] in the position of a man who does not yet know.”

Jealousy then makes the lover encounter “signs of love.” These are the same signs as before, but apprehended differently.

---

5 Ibid., 32.
6 Ibid., 101.
7 Ibid., 27, 29.
9 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 7.
Qualitative experience is no longer assumed to coincide with its object, but taken as a sign of something hidden within it: “[T]o love is to try to explicate, to develop these unknown worlds that remain enveloped within the beloved.”\textsuperscript{10} The lover discovers that things are always in excess over and above the qualities they display: “Names, persons, and things are crammed with a content that fills them to bursting.”\textsuperscript{11} He realizes he does not love the beloved’s superficial qualities, but rather the multiplicity which they translate or transmute: “[L]ove does not concern only […] loved beings, but the multiplicity of souls or worlds in each of them.”\textsuperscript{12} Readers familiar with Deleuze will immediately recognize this theme. All his works affirm that “relations are external to terms,” meaning that the being of an entity (the term) is never directly present in how it is experienced (the relation).\textsuperscript{13} In \textit{Difference and Repetition}, the virtual Idea of a problematic being cannot be reduced to its actualization in qualified extension. In \textit{The Logic of Sense}, a body’s singularities engender experienced sense-events from which they differ in kind. The body without organs of \textit{Anti-Oedipus} has its desire which animates how it operates as a desiring-machine, but machines experience one another in terms of partial objects and qualified flows according to their capacities, never in terms of desire as such. Despite changes in terminology, Deleuze’s recurring thesis is that an entity is neither what it is made of, nor how it is experienced, nor what it does, did, or will do. It is what it can do, so that it is always fundamentally in excess over all its actualizations.

The lover’s suspicions are thus confirmed: she is not his. How he experiences her is a real expression of her being, but never this being itself. According to Deleuze, this is the bitter truth of jealousy. The jealous lover keeps longing for full possession of the beloved and for a world in which her affections are purely devoted to him, but at the same time he realizes all too well that

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 122.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 9.
this cannot be the case. The beloved always has an excessive world of her own, and at any moment she remains fully capable of dedicating herself to others. Moreover, as the same excessive being applies to all beings, this works both ways: he is excluded from her as she is excluded from him: “the truth of love is first of all the isolation of the sexes.”

Everything has its own world and one can only experience according to what one can do given one’s varying desire, singularities, or puissance. All possible experience can only contain translations or caricatures of other entities, never their raw desire, singularities, or excess itself. Therefore whoever interprets love’s signs is an interpreter of lies and deceptions, though these terms have no moral connotation here. The point is merely that thinking we can be fully present to the beloved has turned out to be illusory. If love “makes it a principle to renounce all communication” it is because the beloved, by definition, never truly appears to us as such.

The lover, however, does not abide. Jealousy has taken hold of him, with all its relentless suspicions, its betrayals perceived everywhere, and its compulsion to possess and exhaust, to “imprison the beloved, immure her, sequester her in order to ‘explicate’ her, that is, to empty her of all the worlds she contains.”

Despite realizing that what he loves in her is her excessive being, the jealous lover can neither tolerate that the beloved cannot be reduced to his relation to her, nor accept that her world may not revolve around him. As Deleuze puts it: “nothing is ever pacified by a philia.” What will be the jealous lover’s next move? He will stubbornly dissect his experience of the beloved in order to isolate those features which characterize her most intimately. Deleuze suggests this is what any subject will attempt after concluding that fleeting qualities cannot be the essence of any object. We can accept that “heavy” and “sweet” are not the essence of cobblestones or madeleines, but our usual response is to look

14 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 80.
15 Ibid., 42.
16 Ibid., 121.
17 Ibid., 122.
for other knowable qualities which would capture the essence anyway. We act as if worldly signs can be separated into two groups, the first consisting of lies and deceptions, the second consisting of truthful signs which communicate the essence of an object to a subject. A Lockean hunt for primary qualities thus ensues. As it is subjects who will have to study their object in order to decide which qualities belong to which group, Deleuze calls this “subjective compensation”:

[W]e are disappointed when the object does not give us the secret we were expecting. [...] How is this disappointment, in each realm, to be remedied? On each line of the apprenticeship, the hero undergoes an analogous experience, at various moments: for the disappointment of the object, he attempts to find a subjective compensation. [...] What is to be done except to compensate for the disappointment? To become personally sensitive to less profound signs that are yet more appropriate [...].18

Subjective compensation is a tremendous increase in effort, a heroic attempt to know and control the beloved’s most profound qualities, to get closer and become more intimate than any possible rival, to strip away all her accidental features in order to unveil what distinguishes her from everything else. As Deleuze keeps repeating throughout Proust and Signs, it is the attempt to encircle and isolate the beloved’s typical talents and traits, so that the jealous lover can say that only he truly knows and deserves her. One could say the lover becomes a passionate Husserlian, trying to isolate and apprehend the eidos or most intimate self-being of an individual.19

As an example of subjective compensation, Deleuze reminds his readers of a scene in Proust involving an actress, Berma, who

18 Ibid., 34–35, 36.
through the act of subjective compensation is found to have a strikingly intelligent vocal style. In isolating such a quality, one may think to have found something that truly characterizes her. At last, something “deep” presents itself in experience, something that cannot possibly be a merely superficial and fleeting quality! A jealous lover will try to uncover a set of such qualities, both to prove to himself that he knows the beloved better than anyone else, and to gain data for his plans to isolate her for himself. At first sight, then, it seems he can solve his problem by becoming a master interpreter of signs of love. Whenever “deep” qualities are found, however, it turns out that “the moment of compensation remains in itself inadequate and does not provide a definitive revelation.”

Despite the lover’s efforts, subjective compensation again results in objective disappointment, in a failure to grasp the essence! What has happened? The jealous lover has discovered that something stands between him and the beloved, that there is always something interfering in the relation between a subject and an object. He discovers a third group of signs which will teach him that encircling and isolating the beloved’s essence is impossible in principle: “nothing can prevent the disappointment.”

The third group of signs are what Deleuze calls “sensuous impressions or qualities.” Again these are the same signs as before, but again they are apprehended differently. Think of what the jealous lover is doing. He is trying to identify the beloved’s most intimate traits, those which deeply resonate with her and that truly make her flourish when “activated.” He is constantly imagining or trying to realize situations in which she will truly “shine forth,” hoping that if he offers her these situations, she will elect to reside in them, together with him and in all sincerity. Have not all of us at some point fantasized about the ultimate gesture and the perfect collision of interests that would unite us with the beloved once and for all, like Bonny and Clyde united

20 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 36.
21 Ibid., 52–3, 35.
22 Ibid., 11.
in a passion for crime or the Curies united in a passion for science? The jealous lover, however, learns that such situations are sources of defeat instead of victory. Even if he manages to create and sustain them he will not have the beloved’s essence, but only her manifestations at a certain place and time! It does not matter that those would be situations in which she is “at home” or “at her best.” She will still manifest only as a caricature or transmutation and he will only love her according to circumstances. The very fact that “deep” qualities are only actualized in very specific situations and that the jealous lover must fantasize or realize even more circumstances in which to “reactivate” them, teaches him that there is no quality independent of circumstance. There is no such thing as an eidos or primary quality belonging just to the object! The jealous lover discovers that “[T]he reasons for loving never inhere in the person loved but refer to ghosts, to Third Parties, to Themes that are incarnated in himself according to complex laws.” Or in less poetic terms: “[T]he quality no longer appears as a property of the object that now possesses it, but as the sign of an altogether different object that we must try to decipher, at the cost of an effort that always risks failure.” The lover finds himself confronted with a necessary consequence of relations being external to terms: there is no universal medium through or ground upon which relations can be forged. If there would be, all relations and terms would be internal to one term: the medium or ground (its historical guises are famous: Apeiron, God, Nature, Spirit, and so on). Instead, the ground is always a contingent entity, with the ground as well as what relates on it remaining irreducible to one another. There is no medium, there are “various media.” As Deleuze says in an early seminar on the problem of grounding:

The ground is the third, because it is neither the claimant, nor what he lays claim to, but the instance which will make

23 Ibid., 31.
24 Ibid., 11.
25 Ibid., 49.
the claimed yield to the claimant. The object in itself is never subjected to the claim. The demand and the claim always come to the object from the outside. Example: in making a claim to the hand of the girl, what can one appeal to? As arbiter we use the father who is the third, the ground. But the father can say: complete a test, slay the dragon. What grounds is then the test. [He] can also say that it depends on her. There is then still a third. The love the girl experiences is not like her being itself, but the principle which makes her being yield to the claim. There is always a third and it has to be sought out […]].

Subjective compensation fails. Isolating eidetic qualities and tailoring a situation to them does not yield possession of the beloved. To his horror, the lover realizes that any sign or experience is a mere translation of his beloved’s fundamental excess over all relation, and also that the experience of his beloved’s qualities is irrevocably characterized and colored by the contingent third thing in which experience happens. We are wrong in thinking that we can be subtle or even scientific enough to accurately isolate the essence of an object and bring it into the light of day. Returning to the example of the actress, our hero discovers that her remarkable qualities manifest only in the role of Phèdre that Berma plays. They belong not just to Berma, but to Berma on stage and in character. This is why Deleuze associates Third Parties with involuntary memories “rising up,” as with Combray for the madeleine and Venice for the cobblestones: any entity whatsoever can only be experienced as tinged by some medium in which it appears. There is simply no other way. If relations are external to terms, a third thing must bring them together. Even if Combray or Venice would not rise up, the madeleine or the cobblestones would still be experienced in something else. Even after the father’s blessing and the dragon’s

27 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 37.
death, the claimant and the girl only have each other according to their love. Any qualitative experience is thus common to two things: a “present” of the object at hand and a “past” of that in which it appears. In Proust and Signs Deleuze describes the third thing in terms of “rising up.” In The Logic of Sense, it is the paradoxical entity which “runs through” any two series. In Anti-Oedipus, it is the body without organs which ‘falls back onto’ production wherever two machinic entities establish a connection. No pure appearance is possible, which is why signs of love “anticipate in some sense their alteration and their annihilation” and “love unceasingly prepares its own disappearance [and] acts out its dissolution.”

What keeps the jealous lover from grasping the beloved in her unique essence? The previous three signs are “too material.” “Material” does not mean “made of physical stuff,” but “in something else”: “[A]ll the signs we meet in life are still material signs, and their meaning, because it is always in something else, is not altogether spiritual.” The three material signs always concern the experience of something in terms of what it is not. This is to say they are relational. Worldly signs relate entities to general concepts and generic qualities which can always be the same as or like those of other entities. Signs of love relate the excessive powers or singularities of an entity to their translation into sensible experience: “[they] are inseparable from the weight of a face, from the texture of a skin, from the width and color of a cheek.” Finally, sensuous signs are inextricably mixed with the third thing, the ground or circumstance in and according to which an entity is experienced. Nevertheless, even though progressing through the first three signs teaches him a great deal about reality, the jealous lover who keeps failing to grasp the beloved’s essence considers them waste of time. In each case, her essence was “no longer master of its own incarnation, of its own

28 Ibid., 59.
29 Ibid., 19.
30 Ibid., 58.
31 Ibid., 41, emphasis added.
32 Ibid., 85.
choice, but [...] chosen according to data that remain external to it.”

The jealous lover thus cannot stop “the Search.” First, because he loves her and not how she appears. Second, because his jealousy forces him to seek out the truth of her essence, not its translations. He remains haunted by the thought of being an observer who up to now “saw things only from without, that is to say, who saw nothing.” His jealousy is a passion for her reality. Even if he acknowledges that all ways of having her and of being had by her are only ever treacherous transmutations, and even if this is true for all lovers and beloveds, he must still find the essence of which these transmutations are translations.

In Deleuze’s words: “At the end of the Search, the interpreter understands [...] that the material meaning is nothing without an ideal essence that it incarnates. The mistake is to suppose that the hieroglyphs represent ‘only material objects.’” The lover will take one last step, going beyond the previous signs and toward her essence. And since jealousy fuels his need to know what it is he loves and wants to possess, “jealousy is deeper than love, it contains love’s truth.”

*Immaterial signs*

Materiality is operation in or according to something else. If the lover wants to discover what incarnates itself in material signs, he needs to bracket all (his) ways of putting his beloved in relations: “The beloved woman conceals a secret, even if it is known to everyone else. The lover himself conceals the beloved: a powerful jailer.” He needs to think her internal reality, her

---

33 Ibid., 64.
34 Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, 532.
35 Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 13. “Hieroglyphs” is a synonym for “signs” throughout the book. “Only material objects” paraphrases “[...] they regarded aesthetic merits as material objects which an unclouded vision could not fail to discern [...]” (Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, 207).
37 Ibid., 79.
immaterial essence external to all relation. Deleuze calls immaterial essences “signs of art”: “the world of art is the ultimate world of signs, and these signs, as though dematerialized, find their meaning in an ideal essence.”

Why art? Because art allows us to see that an entity is never what it relates to, neither its component parts nor its observers. The Mona Lisa is not reducible to the paint and canvas from which it emerges (even though it needs both to survive), to how it is experienced, to whom created it, nor to who it depicts. This is the lover’s epiphany: the beloved has an essence irreducible to all relation. Art is what can “stand up on its own”; it is the exception teaching us the truth for all cases. Yet what is this essence? It is a unity: “[A]rt gives us the true unity: unity of an immaterial sign and of an entirely spiritual meaning. The essence is precisely this unity of sign and meaning as it is revealed in the work of art.”

What is the bond between this immateriality and spirituality? “It is a difference, the absolute and ultimate Difference. Difference is what constitutes being […]” This difference is not “an empirical difference between two things or two objects, always extrinsic.” It does not concern a relation of one entity with another. Instead, it is the intrinsic difference constituting the internal reality of an entity. But what is this internal reality? Deleuze tells us that essence is an “Idea,” but also that Proust is Leibnizian in that essences are “veritable monads.” These two statements are the key to understanding signs of art, because it indicates that the essence of an entity has two aspects.

The Idea was already encountered earlier: “when we have reached the revelation of art, we learn that essence was already

---

38 Ibid., 13.
40 Deleuze, Proust and Signs, 40.
41 Ibid., 41.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
It is that of which signs of love were translations: the fundamental excess of the being of the beloved. Her Idea is her desire, her *puissance*, her singularities, her virtuality, that which she can do. Since every worldly sign is a sign of love as well, an entity’s Idea is always subsisting in how we actually experience it: “the Idea is already there in the sign, in the enveloped and involuted state, in the obscure state of what forces us to think.”

And if Deleuze famously takes up the Nietzschean challenge to invert Platonism, it is not just by making Ideas interior essences. He also makes Ideas malleable. His is not a Platonic theory in which “the Idea as the goal of reminiscence is the stable Essence,” but one in which Ideas are subject to “qualitative transition” and “mutual fusion.” Essence is neither fixed nor directly knowable. This is why the entire book puts so much emphasis on learning. Not just because the jealous lover undergoes an apprenticeship, but also because the Idea of an entity can change, depending on its encounters, best exemplified by learning in human beings.

But an essence is not just an Idea. Essence is a unity of an Idea with what Deleuze calls “the hidden thing,” “the concealed thing,” found to “dwell in dark regions.” In terms of his other works: each plastic Idea is wedded to its problem, singularities are always tied to a body in a depth, and wherever there is desire there is a body without organs. This is why essences are veritable monads. The Leibnizian monad in itself is a bond between the absolute simple spiritual substance and its real qualities. It is also why essences are “viewpoints.” Each entity, after all, can only experience a world based on what its powers enable it to

44 Ibid., 89.
46 Ibid., 109.
47 Ibid., 47, 100.
experience and do. Of course this seems strange: is Deleuze not the thinker of free-floating intensities, flows of desire, rhizomes, and a chaos of infinite speeds? The point is nevertheless that while entities are always already enmeshed in complex networks and fluid intersections with countless others, nothing can take away the fact that every entity is irreducible, even though its essence may change over the course of its existence. Deleuze is first and foremost a thinker of individual entities, even if he always thinks them in their becomings. And indeed, a hidden “realm” of permeating intensities or throbbing desire is not at all what the jealous lover finds. The lover and the beloved are not just “physically” separated while “really” being together as free flows somewhere else. Because what does the jealous lover find once he has reached the essence? By discovering the essence of the beloved, he discovers any given entity is essentially a sealed or closed vessel, one closed by definition, a point Deleuze keeps repeating.\(^50\) The essence of an entity is thus the tension between its monadic simplicity as a closed vessel and its malleable Idea determining what it can do. This is the meaning of “difference in itself” and “internal difference,” because it constitutes absolute heterogeneity within a single entity. As Deleuze insists in Proust and Signs, essences are “imprisoned” in a state of “complication, which envelops the many in the One and affirms the unity of the multiple.”\(^51\) Finally, then, the jealous lover has reached the Real, and “this ideal reality, this virtuality, is essence [...].”\(^52\) He at last discovers the root cause of things, an essence irreducible to a psychological state, a transcendental subjectivity, or any derivative thereof: “[T]he final quality at the heart of a subject; but this quality is deeper than the subject, of a different order. [...] Essence is not only individual, it individualizes.”\(^53\) Now, it is easy to see why essence individualizes. The individual beloved and all her individual qualities and actions are mere actualizations of

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 117, 125, 127, 162, 175. 
\(^{51}\) Ibid., 45. 
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 61. 
\(^{53}\) Ibid., 43.
her virtual essence as translated in terms of both circumstance (remember the sensuous signs) and the Idea or capacities of the lover. Any actual experienced individual is always a translated blend of the object perceived and that in which the object is perceived, based on the capacities of the perceiver. At the same time that essence is incarnated in a substance, “the ultimate quality constituting it is therefore expressed as the quality common to two different objects, kneaded in this luminous substance, plunged into this refracting medium.”54 Hence any actual event is grounded in essences, the latter being the veritable causes of all previous signs:

It is only on the level of art that the essences are revealed. But once they are manifested in the work of art […], we learn that they already incarnated, that they were already there in all these kinds of signs […].55

Schizoid universe

The jealous lover does not find a solution, but a reason. He learns why it is impossible to truly possess the beloved. The beloved, like each entity, is the immaterial unity of a closed vessel wedded to a malleable Idea, only appearing in relation by being translated or transmuted, by being co-constituted by the essences of other entities. Essences can only be thought, never made present: “in the case of the signs of art, pure thought as the faculty of essences becomes the interpreter.”56 Or put differently: “The intelligence dreams of objective content, of explicit objective significations that it is able, of its own accord, to discover or to receive or to communicate.”57 Note that this is not ontotheology. The jealous lover knows that entities are sealed vessels wedded to shifting desire, but precisely because such essences cannot ap-

54 Ibid., 47.
55 Ibid., 38.
56 Ibid., 86.
57 Ibid., 29, cf. “only intelligence extracts truth” (ibid., 23).
pear in relations without being transmuted, he can never know precisely what exists and what something can do. Hence “there is no intersubjectivity except an artistic one,”\(^58\) because every relation will always already be the result of a styling of experience. Deleuze’s famous mantra states that we know not what a body can do, and the jealous lover discovers why: “jealousy is […] the discovery of the unknowable world that represents the beloved’s own viewpoint […]”\(^59\)

The Search culminates in the grand thesis that reality is “a schizoid universe of closed vessels, of cellular regions, where contiguity itself is a distance […]”\(^60\) Not just for us, but as such. Being is not ontologically split into subjects and objects; rather, both of them are equals in being sealed vessels or bodies: “neither things nor minds exist, there are only bodies.”\(^61\) The world itself “has become crumbs and chaos.”\(^62\) It is a world in which each “part is valid for itself, [and] there is no other part that corresponds to it, no totality into which it can enter, no unity from which it is torn and to which it can be restored.”\(^63\)

It follows that entities must be thought as contingent alliances between heterogeneous, irreducible parts, with each part consisting of further such parts, each with a body and desire of its own:

We can form a complex group, but we never form it without its splitting in its turn, this time as though into a thousand sealed vessels. […] [A]nd in each vessel is a self that lives, perceives, desires, and remembers, that wakes or sleeps, that dies, commits suicide, and revives in abrupt jolts.\(^64\)

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 42.
\(^{59}\) Ibid., 139.
\(^{60}\) Ibid., 175.
\(^{61}\) Ibid., 92.
\(^{62}\) Ibid., 111.
\(^{63}\) Ibid., 112.
\(^{64}\) Ibid., 124.
This is why the relation of parts to a whole is never one of exhaustion, totalization, or “natural place,” but instead “the coexistence of asymmetric and noncommunicating parts.”65 This is no less the case for the hydrogen and oxygen in water than it is for two lovers in love. Nothing can truly lock anything in place: “Even [a] painting by Vermeer is not valid as a Whole because of the patch of yellow wall planted there as a fragment of still another world.”66 The essence of an entity cannot be reduced to that in which it appears: “a content [is] incommensurable with the container.”67 For example, when drinking tea “the true container is not the cup, but the sensuous quality, the flavor.”68 The content is the tea qua tea, and the flavor is the container into which it is translated, the tea being destined to subsist in it without ever appearing as it is itself. An essence is always implicated in how it is explicated, but that which is explicated cannot become the explication itself. In being experienced by another entity, a “sealed vessel” is treated as an “open box,” but this never happens without a fundamental distortion.69

The jealous lover has thus discovered a “galactic structure” as the truth of jealousy.70 It turns out that objectivism is not wrong because objects would not exist, but because it misunderstands what objects are: “objectivity can no longer exist except in the work of art, […] solely in the formal structure of the work, in its style,” style being “a matter of essence.”71 So wherever there is a whole, it is not a totality which exhausts or naturalizes its parts. Instead, parts are always only “violently stuck together despite their unmatching edges,”72 whether they are parts of a perception, Venice, a memory of Combray, a Madeleine, the beloved, or even the beloved and the lover as parts of a love. Complete

65 Ibid., 117.
66 Ibid., 114.
67 Ibid., 117.
68 Ibid., 119.
69 Ibid., 140.
70 Ibid., 175.
71 Ibid., 167.
72 Ibid., 123.
totalities do not exist and “this is what the closed vessels signify: there is no totality except a statistical one that lacks any profound meaning.”73 Nothing is ever locked in place, everything in any relation can in principle escape and deterritorialize: there are only “aberrant communications between the noncommunicating vessels, transversal unities between the boxes that resist any totalization [...]”74

The world thus discovered revolves around “force.”75 Everything, ranging from simple perception, to forging an amorous relation, to keeping one’s parts in place, is a matter of struggle between parts that have no natural place, no reason as such to be anywhere as anything. This is the necessary consequence of the “astonishing pluralism” Deleuze finds in Proust.76 If nothing has a natural place, if nothing can be related to as such, then relating to anything at all requires work, force, effort, translation, deceit, maintenance, strategy, and luck. Moreover, learning becomes the highest task:

To learn is first of all to consider a substance, an object, a being as if it emitted signs to be deciphered, interpreted. There is no apprentice who is not “the Egyptologist” of something. One becomes a carpenter only by becoming sensitive to the signs of wood, a physician by becoming sensitive to the signs of disease. [...] Everything that teaches us something emits signs; every act of learning is an interpretation of signs or hieroglyphs.77

We can never learn what something is in and of itself. This fails in principle. Instead, we must learn how, where, when, and why something works, which is to become sensitive to the signs something emits. Such is the final meaning of jealousy as the passion proper to the apprenticeship of signs. And just as jeal-

73 Ibid., 125–26.
74 Ibid., 143.
75 Ibid., 152.
76 Ibid., 4.
77 Ibid.
ousy makes the Proustian lover stumble upon an unexpected universe of closed vessels, so could Deleuze’s treatment of jealousy introduce us to an unexpected Deleuze, both in terms of where his affinities lie and of what his axioms are.