

NEW DIRECTIONS
IN
PHILOSOPHY AND
LITERATURE



Edited by
David Rudrum, Ridvan Askin
and Frida Beckman

New Directions in Philosophy and Literature

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and Frida Beckman

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Editors' Preface

David Rudrum, Ridvan Askin, and Frida Beckman

The relationship between literature and philosophy has always been stormy, and has taken on many different forms and inflections over the centuries. But the early years of the twenty-first century have seen it flourish in surprising new ways. The desire to conceptualise what comes 'after' postmodernity has drawn upon the resources of philosophy and literary study alike. Debates around what it is to be posthuman and nonhuman have asked probing questions of the traditional conception of human subjectivity that cannot be answered by either philosophy or literature alone. The return of speculative metaphysics to continental philosophy after an absence of about a century and a half has brought about a range of new ways to think materiality and the nature of the real, as in speculative realism and object-oriented philosophy – a tendency paralleled by developments in literary studies and other fields in the humanities with the emergence of the new materialisms and a renewed focus on objects and things. The necessity for a truly planetary consciousness has transformed the sphere of ethics as it wrestles with conceptions beyond the reach of anthropocentric humanism, epitomised in the concept of the Anthropocene, which has been no less influential on the formation of contemporary ecophilosophy. The intensification of a culture of surveillance and control has given added urgency to biopolitical philosophy, and its salience has been every bit as noteworthy in the study of literature as in that of philosophy. More traditional forms of analytic thought have been enriched as the insights of ordinary language philosophy have engaged in a dialogue with literary criticism, to the benefit of both disciplines. All in all, then, the interface between literature and philosophy has seldom been more varied, more dynamic, more exciting, and more important for our culture.

This collection accordingly surveys a different ambit from any other. Most guides to work on the intersection of philosophy and literature confine themselves to the familiar methods of analytic philosophy, while the kinds of interdisciplinarity surveyed in guides to contemporary literary theory tend to focus on cognitive theory and affect theory, on the politics of gender, sexuality, and race, on popular culture, and on narrative theory. This is the first attempt to map out the many exciting ways in which new developments in twenty-first-century philosophy are entering into dialogue with the study of literature, and the profound consequences

of this interaction for questions of ethics, politics, subjectivity, materiality, reality, and the nature of the contemporary itself.

In order to do so, we have divided the book into six sections, preceded by a general and orientational introduction written by Claire Colebrook, one of the world's foremost authorities in the field. Part of our intention in designing the volume in this way was to break down the term 'philosophy' – arguably a 'catch-all' term so broad as to risk becoming unwieldy – into more focused areas of discussion, which draw on, but do not just replicate, the traditional formations of philosophy's conventional sub-disciplines. Following Colebrook's introduction, which clears the ground by surveying the parallel but fraught development of philosophy and literature in the twentieth century from the vantage point of the twenty-first, the first section deals with the question of the aftermath of postmodernity; the second with challenges to subjectivity posed by posthuman and speculative thought, in both their continental and analytic guises; the third with reconceiving the nature of the (literary) object in the light of actor-network theory, object-oriented philosophy, and the new materialisms; the fourth with the different approach to the linguistic called for in ordinary language criticism; the fifth with the task of thinking of alternative models of ethics to the anthropocentric; and the sixth with new developments in political and biopolitical philosophy. To provide further guidance, each section is prefaced by a short editorial introduction.

Overall, the editors hope that the collection succeeds in both acknowledging and encouraging new ways of configuring the relationships between literature and philosophy, broadly conceived.

Huddersfield, Basel, and Stockholm, December 2018

General Introduction: Opposition of the Faculties, Philosophy's Literary Impossibility

Claire Colebrook

On or about 1919 something happened to the relationship between literature and philosophy. T. S. Eliot published 'Literature and the Individual Talent', and at one and the same time added to the long debate about literary value and how poetry works – a conversation going back at least as far as Aristotle's *Poetics* – and brought to the fore the theoretical problem of philosophy and literature. Eliot insisted that the value of a work lay in the extent to which it transformed 'tradition', where tradition was something like a virtual whole of all literary works, and where these literary works in turn took personal feelings and somehow rendered them impersonal, setting them apart – within time – for all time (Eliot 1930). Eliot's conception of poetry as a distinct mode of generating a dynamic, virtual, and trans-temporal whole emerged alongside a whole series of literary and philosophical endeavours that sought to establish a certain purity of thought, by distinguishing philosophical from literary formality. The year 1910 saw the publication of the first volume of Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica*, setting itself the task of providing a logical foundation for mathematics, and – however problematically – marking out a new mode of philosophy in which questions would be formal and analytic, rather than metaphysical. Edmund Husserl would also try to provide a ground for logic, shifting this foundation from a psychological to a transcendental basis in his second edition of the two-volume *Logical Investigations* published in 1913 and 1921. As analytic philosophy was being forged by steering away from grand metaphysical and speculative accounts of existence towards philosophy as a rigorous science; literary criticism was moving away from questions of taste and biography towards its own criteria of timelessness. In both cases an attention to the text itself would open out to a question of the truth that precedes and exceeds the formal system of inscription. Despite this convergence on questions of rigour, two quite different and divergent conceptions of transcendental criteria were at work. Philosophy would focus on logical purity, to the point where Gottlob Frege would refer to a 'third realm' of truth for mathematics (Dummett 1993: 24). Husserl would seek to provide a transcendental foundation for philosophy irreducible to the psyche or history, while literary ideals would require capturing the singularity of the moment. In 'Philosophy as a Rigorous Science', Husserl insists on a revolution

in philosophical thought that would nevertheless draw on centuries of the ideal of philosophy:

the highest interests of human culture demand the development of a rigorously scientific philosophy; consequently, if a philosophical revolution in our times is to be justified, it must without fail be animated by the purpose of laying a new foundation for philosophy in the sense of a strict science. (Husserl 1965: 78)

Virginia Woolf, in turn, writing on E. M. Forster, described the passage from the particular to the infinite in the following words: ‘A room is to him a room, a writing table a writing table, and a waste-paper basket a waste-paper basket. At the same time, the paraphernalia of reality have at certain moments to become the veil through which we see infinity’ (Woolf 1994a: 495). In so doing she anticipated the way Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would come to talk about art in general:

the artist turns his or her attention to the microscopic, to crystals, molecules, atoms, and particles, not for scientific conformity, but for movement, for nothing but immanent movement; the artist tells him- or herself that this world has had different aspects, will have still others, and that there are already others on other planets; finally, the artist opens up to the Cosmos in order to harness forces in a ‘work’ (without which the opening on to the Cosmos would only be a reverie incapable of enlarging the limits of the earth); this work requires very simple, pure, almost childish means, but also the forces of a people, which is what is still lacking. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 337)

While analytic philosophy strove to be purely formal, with mathematics and logic providing the ideals for proper inquiry, continental philosophy took a different path towards truth and rigour, while nevertheless insisting that logic should not simply be accepted but should have a secure foundation. Grounding not only turned attention away from systems towards their genesis, it also had a critical effect of marking out differences. As Henri Bergson, and Deleuze after him, would note: what we experience may always be a mixture – never a pure concept or a simple sensation – but we can nevertheless intuit or think about the pure forces or potentials from which systems are composed (Deleuze 1991: 112). Mathematics may always require some inscriptive and material condition, but the truths of math transcend conditions of genesis. Analytic philosophy would think of science as a stripping away of metaphysical assumptions, relying on systemic or pragmatic analysis, while continental philosophy would increasingly turn to the texts from which norms, assumptions, and structures had emerged; in either case philosophy took the form of re-grounding. Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* argued that Descartes had not been radical enough in his doubt, still allowing the assumption of the cogito to act as an unexamined presupposition, ‘rescuing a little *tag-end* of the world’ (Husserl 1973: 24). Woolf, like Husserl, had criticised the naturalism that would begin with a part of the world and not intuit the genesis of the world:

Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being ‘like this’. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. (Woolf 1994b: 160)

For Woolf, it was the ordinary and everyday that would open out to the eternal, and in different ways it was the turn back to everydayness – away from grand assumptions and speculations – that opened both philosophy and literature to a new or untimely timelessness. Husserl also insisted that if one examined the natural attitude – our simple experience of everyday ‘thereness’ – we would be compelled to acknowledge a new realm of transcendental subjectivity. In a quite different manner, Ludwig Wittgenstein would turn to everyday language practices and discover a complexity and wondrous dexterity that could not be captured by the rigid schemes of metaphysics. This trend would continue into the twentieth century with writers like Stanley Cavell noticing the ways in which the turn back to everyday simplicity was ultimately a liberation of thought, was both a liberation from the generality of concepts and an intuition of commonality:

And when Wittgenstein finds the task of philosophy to be the bringing of our words back to (everyday) life, he in effect discerns two grades of quotation, imitation, repetition. In one we imitatively declare our uniqueness (the theme of skepticism); in the other, we originally declare our commonness (the theme of acknowledgment). (Individuality, always to be found, is always at the risk of loss.) What you might call philosophy can be in service of either possibility; hence philosophy is never at peace with itself. (Cavell 1988: 132)

Not only is philosophy never at peace with itself, philosophy’s ongoing internal tension is bound up with its ongoing difference and complicity with literature. This is primarily because both literature and philosophy are bound up with a system of language that both enterprises seek to save from everyday banality for the sake of everyday richness.

For both literature and philosophy, foundations are secured through some process of retrieval, away from sedimented and accepted systems towards things themselves, from which a genuine (rather than received) wisdom would emerge. Martin

Heidegger's 'destruction' would find truth not in the way statements matched the world but rather in the very genesis of language (Heidegger 2010: 19). It was this problem of genesis (Derrida 2011), or the coming into being of the transcendent from the immanent, that would mark modernism, modern theory, philosophy, and deconstruction. Heidegger was the most philosophical of thinkers in demanding that the question of being be renewed but without the usual language of ontology and metaphysics, at the same time as he also raised the stakes for literature by arguing that it is the emerging moment of language that unfolds a world that can then be the subject of metaphysical inquiry. It was by heightening the demands of philosophical truth that literature not only acquired its own unique domain, but also seemed to haunt philosophy as its hidden or repressed condition.

At the most extreme, one might think of late twentieth-century French thought's radical separation of philosophy and literature, either with Derrida's insistence on metaphysics' demand for presence that is haunted by the letter, or Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between philosophy's concepts and art's affects and percepts, or Alain Badiou's distinction between the event of the poem and philosophy, as the discourse that negotiates such events. It is true that there are many thinkers for whom this event of diremption either did not happen or was spectacularly disastrous. Jürgen Habermas diagnosed the current crisis of master thinkers by looking back to Nietzsche, for whom truth was more aesthetic than communicative, and saw all those who followed in his wake as missing the extent to which philosophical reflection worked alongside literature's capacity to disclose the world (Habermas 1990). Martha Nussbaum felt that philosophical strictness and rigour could be tempered by the sympathy entrepreneurs of literature (Nussbaum 2001). There are journals, university courses, and networks devoted to philosophy and literature, as though the two could be coupled without altering the integrity of either discipline. If one is not too strict with one's definitions, literature and philosophy can be paired and compared like any other two disciplines. Yet it is precisely at the moments of seemingly maximal harmony that one might also lose sight of any sense of what might be generated from discord. It is almost certainly the case when one is dealing with philosophy and literature that – to quote William Blake – 'opposition . . . is true friendship'. (Has *Huckleberry Finn* been enriched as a result of all the analytic philosophy articles using Huck's apparent 'freeing' of Jim as a moral case study? Has philosophy benefited from taking scenes in novels and treating them as exercises in character analysis?) If, for example, we take on Richard Rorty's suggestion of thinking of philosophy as a 'kind of writing' (Rorty 1982), we fail to understand why some of the most difficult and resistant philosophical and literary writing takes the form that it does, especially the writing of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. If all philosophical and literary texts do is engage in conversation, each trying to reconfigure the possibilities of conversation, then why have the conflicts regarding the border between philosophy and literature been so provocative and impassioned? I would suggest that rather than philosophy and literature being collapsed into a common domain of conversation, it is their intense, impossible, but problematic division that explains and enriches today's terrain of

literature and philosophy, and the odd hybrid that is ‘theory’, as well as today’s current state of post-theory.

What was much later to become known as ‘theory’ emerged from a conflict among faculties that it may have been possible to trace back to Plato’s dismissal of poetic simulacra, but which only came to the fore once the genealogy of literature’s distinction from philosophy enabled a new way of thinking about life and language. If philosophy and literature had been in constant tension, it was only with those anti-philosophers (such as Nietzsche) that the relation between philosophical truth and literary simulation became scandalous. Michel Foucault follows Nietzsche in seeing Plato’s ‘routing of the Sophists’ as an inaugural moment in which something like truth as such is set apart from the force of language, generating an ideal of pure formality that will exceed and transcend the force of any speech act:

The day dawned when truth moved over from the ritualised act – potent and just – of enunciation to settle on what was enunciated itself: its meaning, its form, its object and its relation to what it referred to. A division emerged between Hesiod and Plato, separating true discourse from false; it was a new division for, henceforth, true discourse was no longer considered precious and desirable, since it had ceased to be discourse linked to the exercise of power. And so the Sophists were routed. (Foucault 1972: 218)

It is Nietzsche’s and Foucault’s insistence on this historically distant separation, rather than anything in Plato as such, that becomes significant for the impossible relation between literature and philosophy in the twentieth century. It is only with claims like Nietzsche’s and Foucault’s – that truth is an army of metaphors, or that language bears its own ‘shining’ – that the relation between philosophy and literature is no longer that of two disciplines but instead a problem internal to philosophy and to the possibility of thought. This is as true of Badiou’s notion of the poem as a truth procedure (Badiou 2008: 23) as it is of Derrida’s conception of literature as the right to ‘say anything’ (Derrida 1992: 34), and of Julia Kristeva’s definition of ‘poetic language’ as that which frees thought from the logical conditions of the symbolic order (Kristeva 1984). In all these cases, what is meant by ‘poetry’ is not what is contained in the *Norton Anthology*, but a potential for thinking that resides within and alongside philosophical thought. It is this conception of the poetic – going back to Heidegger’s *poiesis* as a creation that stands apart – that is at the heart of those philosophical-literary hybrid texts of ‘theory’, which are only possible because philosophy and literature are no longer so easily coupled.

One might chart a quick, provisional, and largely heuristic genealogy: literature as a discipline begins in the early twentieth century (Baldick 1983), differing from both the literary criticism that had been found in magazine culture going back to the eighteenth century, and the uses and references to literature that philosophers had made when discussing poetry, rhetoric, the imagination, or the sublime. If Joseph Addison and Richard Steele had discussed John Milton in *The Spectator*, and claimed that his sublimity was comparable to the ancients, they did not yet

establish criticism, judgement, and taste as a distinct discipline. Discussing the value of literature was not yet something distinct from philosophy; it was either an occasional strand of conversation in the emerging modern public sphere, or took the form of an occasional aside within the discourses of philosophy. Like Plato and Cicero before him, Immanuel Kant would mention the poets, but merely as one of philosophy's many sources of examples. If Kant also, like Plato and the philosophical tradition before him, had reason to distrust the simulacra of the poets, he still presented philosophy as the necessary arbiter of the proper place or function of the imagination. Despite Kant's typically eighteenth-century assumption that the works of the imagination were philosophy's objects of study, rather than equal or competing partners, he nevertheless established a mode of philosophy – a uniquely modern mode – that would make something like literature as such possible. When Kant writes his *Critique of Pure Reason*, he at one and the same time establishes the rigour and foundation of philosophy and also reins in philosophy's possible objects of knowledge. Being critical of pure reason was possible and necessary to the task of enlightenment and rigour: while reason in its pure mode is capable of thinking of the infinite, of God, and of freedom, no such 'objects' could ever be experienced or known:

Here I content myself with defining theoretical cognition as that through which I cognize **what exists**, and practical cognition as that through which I represent **what ought to exist**. According to this, the theoretical use of reason is that through which I cognize *a priori* (as necessary) that something is; but the practical use is that through which it is cognized *a priori* what ought to happen. (Kant 1998:A633/B661)

Kant marks a distinction between theoretical and practical tasks of reason: theoretical uses of reason concern what we know, or what can be given to us through experience. One could not, therefore, have a legitimate dispute regarding the nature of God, or the reality of human freedom; these ideas can be thought but not known. (At around the same time Blake is making a similar argument: God is not an object of knowledge, and what can be imagined is not reducible to a variant of what can be known (Blake 1988: 33).) For many writers of the Enlightenment, philosophy needs to be marked off from poetic or mystical flights of imagination that would claim to intuit God or the absolute. For Kant, what is important is not simply limiting theoretical knowledge to that which can be known and experienced through concepts, but also then allowing reason's other capacities of desire and reflection to operate practically. The ideas of freedom, God, and the infinite to which pure reason is naturally drawn cannot be the objects of theoretical knowledge. Theory, in this Kantian moment of delimiting and elevating philosophical reason, has explicitly to do with what we can legitimately claim about the world that we experience. The world can only be known insofar as it is given; what can be thought, however, has practical but not theoretical legitimacy. Theoretical knowledge is achieved when we are able

to conceptualise the world; without the content that experience offers, the forms of thought on their own cannot offer knowledge. Once we recognise this limit of theoretical knowledge – and it is philosophy’s task to do so – this opens up the possibility of practical reason. Even if we cannot have knowledge of God, the infinite, or freedom, the possibility to think and act as if we were free members of the kingdom of ends generates an elevated subjectivity. Once philosophy is no longer – as it had been prior to the eighteenth century – a broad domain that would include what today we think of as the natural sciences, poetics, theology, mysticism, and history, it becomes feasible to form a conception of humanity in which quite distinct modes of thought become possible, and necessary. *Theoretical* knowledge is confined to what we can experience. *Practically* we can act as if we were not bound by the natural laws that govern the causal order. *Reflectively*, both in our considerations of how science is possible and in terms of how we think about art, we can concede that we never experience anything like the causal order of nature, or the progress of morality, or anything objectively beautiful, but we can (and must) perceive nature *as if* it were in accord with laws that others would also be able to discern, just as we must view art objects and the beauty of nature as if they were also perceivable as harmonious for any subject whatsoever.

This demarcation of various modes of reason, with theoretical knowledge being confined to what can be experienced, is – though Kantian – not confined to Kant’s thought alone. Instead, we might think of Kant as articulating a problem of theory, philosophy, and the imagination that is broadly explored in the eighteenth century and that allows for the convergence and radical separation of literature and philosophy.

Historians of philosophy have often lamented the extent to which this supposedly modern distinction between what we can experience (or the way the world is) and what we can desire (or what ought to be the case) has created a legitimisation crisis, or an impossibility for ethical thought. Alasdair MacIntyre blames the Enlightenment for separating moral judgements from the lived world, insisting that the world we live in and our own personhood come into being through imagining ourselves in terms of an ongoing narrative (MacIntyre 1981). Rorty also sees the elevation of philosophy and its distinction from the arts of narration as a catastrophe that lingered well into the late twentieth century (Rorty 1979). Habermas, who decades ago lamented the fact that master thinkers had fallen on hard times, traces today’s paralysing state of philosophy to the fact that claims for reason were separated from the domain of lived practice, allowing reason to be emptied of its grounding in the lifeworld (Habermas 1976). Nussbaum, aiming to repair the divide, asks that philosophers look to literature to recognise the sympathy entrepreneurs who enable the exploration of affect in our moral reasoning (Nussbaum 2001: 314). Bruno Latour does not so much lament the separation of reason from the lifeworld as deny that such a divorce ever took place; the most detached, objective, and pure modes of thinking were the outcomes of complex compositions among people, things, and forces (Latour 1993).

This separation of reason from desire, of philosophy from the imagination, or pure thought and abstraction from the domain of narrative and poetics, though most apparent in Kant, marks an entire field of what increasingly comes to be known as literature. When Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* his task as an epic poet sat alongside his writings on government, history, censorship, and divorce. Even a writer as late as Jean-Jacques Rousseau produced novels, philosophy, and an opera. But it is not long after Rousseau that poets start to claim a special place for the imagination that will heal the poverty of reason, while philosophers will increasingly seek to set philosophy on a rigorous or scientific footing. The separation of reason from the imagination can be at one and the same time lamented, demanded, deemed to be impossible yet desirable, and impossible but necessary. It is this last imperative – that the separation of reason is necessary but impossible – that characterises what comes to be known as theory, and which emerges from the modern non-relation between philosophy and literature. To make sense of this, it is perhaps best to think of the two thinkers in the twentieth century who were philosophers while also shifting the domain of philosophy towards ‘theory’.

Both Derrida and Deleuze, despite claims from anti-theory theorists that they had killed truth and rigour, actually heightened the stakes for philosophy. In his debate with John Searle, Derrida had insisted that one cannot reduce the meaning of concepts to their contextual use (Derrida 1977), just as in his earlier work he had insisted that inscriptive systems such as geometry and mathematics cannot be explained away by referring to their cultural or historical emergence (Derrida 1978b). It is by insisting on the idea of pure truth – that we cannot will away the demand for a truth that insists and persists across contexts – that Derrida forges deconstruction:

pure truth is missed in its meaning as soon as one attempts . . . to account for it from within a determined historical totality, that is, from within a factual totality, a finite totality all of whose manifestations and cultural productions are structurally solidary and coherent, and are all regulated by the same function, by the same finite unity of a total subjectivity. This meaning of truth, or of the pretension to truth, is the requirement of an absolute, infinite omni-temporality and universality, without limits of any kind. (Derrida 1978b: 200)

It is only by taking the philosophical requirement for pure reason so seriously that deconstruction also generates the impossibility of anything that might reach the purity and abstraction of metaphysics. In a quite different manner Deleuze will devote his corpus to the difference between philosophical and literary modes of thought, where the philosopher creates concepts that reorient the plane of possible problems, while the great writers forge a minor literature that is no longer at home in the communicative ease of language. In so doing, the coupling of philosophy and literature is no longer the encounter between two disciplines – in the way that one might have a philosophy of sport, food, race, or climate change, or in the way one

might look at literature's engagement with history, medicine, and oceanography. Rather, philosophy harbours within its very possibility something like the expulsion or internal difference of literature. Literature, in turn, can never be reduced to the simply fictive: it cannot be reduced to an expression of ideas or even a thought experiment that might then be available for philosophical reflection. For Deleuze and Guattari, there is a 'becoming' that only literature and art bring to the fore, but that is a virtual potential of all life. There are only the stable beings that texts and persons can know and describe because there has already been a composition, inscription, and tracing out of relatively stable forms: 'A matter-content having only degrees of intensity, resistance, conductivity, heating, stretching, speed, or tardiness; and a function-expression having only "tensors", as in a system of mathematical, or musical, writing. Writing now functions on the same level as the real, and the real materially writes' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 141). As with Derrida, but in different ways, the tracings and inscriptive processes that we tend to consign to literature alone are, for Deleuze and Guattari, conditions for life as such. What literary texts do is take that inscriptive process beyond the closed forms it has enabled, freeing inscription from the human, such that all writing is a 'becoming-animal'. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari will describe the ways in which stable bodies emerge through the repetition and variation of traits, as though life itself were theme and variation, with life becoming ever more complex through the taking up of traits that are not of one's own kind. Philosophy, for Deleuze, takes a quite different path in its creation of problems and concepts; but in both art and philosophy, an inscription that is embedded in all life achieves a distinction that allows for the detachment of affects and perceptions from the lived (Deleuze and Guattari 1994). For Derrida, the inscription of voices within the literary text allows for meaning to be articulated without attribution, such that literature is the right to say anything; the literary text is not an allegory or double of philosophical sense but something like a scene of writing, a confrontation with the tracings, markings, and figures that make sense possible. Rather than collapsing literature into philosophy or vice versa, Derrida insists that both possibilities haunt each other.

The literary text at its height – in modernist writers like James Joyce and Stéphane Mallarmé – seeks to capture writing as such, as though it might be freed from the empty abstractions of philosophy and be the pure materiality of the word; but this very attempt to be text as such relies upon some general concept or idea of inscription, such that the great modernist work would encompass all the voices of the world. Deleuze and Guattari express this thought in their take on what one might call modernism's idea of unity regained:

The abortionists of unity are indeed angel makers, *doctores angelici*, because they affirm a properly angelic and superior unity. Joyce's words, accurately described as having 'multiple roots', shatter the linear unity of the word, even of language, only to posit a cyclic unity of the sentence, text, or knowledge. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 6)

Derrida, in turn, captures it in terms of relativity:

Husserl's project, as the transcendental 'parallel' to Joyce's, knows the same relativity. Joyce's project, which also proceeded from a certain anti-historicism and a will 'to awake' from the 'nightmare' of 'history', a will to master that nightmare in a total and present resumption, could only succeed by allotting its share to univocity, whether it might draw from a given univocity or try to produce another. Otherwise, the very text of its repetition would have been unintelligible; at least it would have remained so forever and for everyone. Likewise, Husserl had to admit an irreducible, enriching, and always renascent equivocality into pure historicity. (Derrida 1978a: 103)

Derrida's philosophy is a philosophy of impossibility: it insists that we cannot abandon the philosophical ideals and ideas of justice, truth, democracy, friendship, and forgiveness, but also notes that any articulation of those concepts is bound up with a singular inoperative dimension that precludes any true purity or universality. But reducing the world to so many texts or voices has its own unavoidably transcendental dimensions; meaning and truth emerge from inscription but cannot be reduced to inscription. There is no such thing as pure reason, for philosophy cannot reduce the inoperative, figural, and material means through which it expresses itself. Nor is there such a thing as pure text: whatever is inscribed can be read as the sign of an intention, event, or sense.

What is left, then, is the predicament of *theory*: on the one hand concepts have a force that allows them to operate beyond any particular intention, context, or text; on the other hand, concepts are never articulated in general, but are always given in singular texts. Philosophy and literature are two sides of the predicament of theory. When Kant aimed to ground philosophy by insisting on the rigours of theoretical knowledge – that we can only have legitimate disputes about what we experience and conceptualise – he precluded flights into mysticism, theological dogmatism, and the tyranny of any single individual claiming moral privilege or expertise, but he also exemplified the modern condition of what has come to be known as 'theory' or what Paul de Man referred to as the problem of aesthetic ideology (de Man 1996). A text is, ultimately, a series of material traces, and yet is nevertheless read as a sign of a meaning or sense. A purely literary reading would be radically material, but also impossible: there is no such thing as a pure text, for even our encounter with a handwritten manuscript prompts us to see the marks as repetitions of letters, words, and concepts. There is no such thing as pure sense, for even the texts of logic rely on inoperative systems – despite constituting a sense and truth that would remain in the imagined absence of inscription. This theoretical predicament is confined neither to Derrida's post-Kantianism, nor to twentieth-century French thought.

One unremarkable way of thinking about romanticism in general is to see it as a similarly dynamic oscillation between the problem of the purity and ideality of universals and the claim of what Blake referred to as 'minute particulars' – the same

Blake who insisted on seeing eternity in a grain of sand. Modernism also recognises that the only escape from the same dull round of an increasingly mechanised existence is the claim of the universal, and yet universality is only given when one breaks through the rigidity of conceptual thinking. One might think here of Woolf's attempt to capture the moment, to saturate every atom, to liberate language from communication in order to follow the flow of consciousness, and yet at the same time find something like the purity of colour as such, light as such, or line as such. Indeed, it is perhaps not surprising that literature after Kant becomes ever more theoretical – hovering between breaking through conceptual formations to capture singularity and rejecting the banality of day-to-day particulars to forge a universal. This is perhaps why Deleuze and Guattari trace their account of modern art in just these terms. In one of the later plateaus of *A Thousand Plateaus*, '1837: Of the Refrain', they do not chart a straight line from the intensive difference of chaos, where one might intuit ever smaller and more acute distinctions, to the grasp of universals in modern art. Rather, all life follows the problem that reaches its clearest articulation in modernism. All life is formed through the creation of refrains, where qualities form repeatable and variable patterns. The ongoing repetition, with variation, is what allows the difference of intensities to be felt, along with the universality of forms. Deleuze and Guattari see in the refrains of life the capacity at one and the same time to be utterly singular and yet – in that very singularity – to reach a cosmic level such that one might hear the forces from which the cosmos is composed:

At infinity, these refrains must rejoin the songs of the Molecules, the newborn wailing of the fundamental Elements, as Millikan put it. They cease to be terrestrial, becoming cosmic: when the religious Nome blooms and dissolves in a molecular pantheist Cosmos, when the singing of the birds is replaced by combinations of water, wind, clouds, and fog. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 327)

The history of life as it is recounted in *A Thousand Plateaus* might be thought of as a universal history written from the threshold point or problem of modern theory. The problem articulated in Kant (and in classicism and romanticism) comes to the fore in the relation between philosophy's striving for concepts and modern literature's striving for what Foucault will refer to as language's own shining (Foucault 1970). But this problem, once recognised and intensified in a high modernism that will try to capture something like colour as such, light as such, line as such – and thereby open up to the cosmos – is a problem not of art, but of life. How does each aspect of life at one and the same time have some grasp of the infinite, while also remaining the minute particular that it is? Deleuze describes this in terms of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's monadology: every aspect of the world expresses the infinite, and therefore is nothing more than its point of view on the whole; and the whole is nothing more than all the perspectives that express the infinite in their own way (Deleuze 1993). The history of art in modernity is therefore the history of the problem of theory, of the universality of philosophy, and the grasp of singularities in art.

We do not have to confine ourselves to Kant to recognise that pure reason, or a reason that is not subject to the vagaries of affect, becomes increasingly problematic in the history of philosophy, literature, and politics. How else might one read Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, in which modernism is not simply another movement in art but the result of a history of philosophy where the demand for conceptual rigour sits alongside the silencing of the world's complexity and suffering? The modern artwork is not an object that can be explained in terms of aesthetic delight, authorial intention, or historical context, but requires theory. Artworks are attempts to capture the universal that has been covered over by day-to-day banality, while also articulating the singular differences that have been negated in the conceptual formalisation of the world. Adorno's work is typical of the broader problem of theory that marks the twentieth century. Either one confines philosophy to purely formal problems of logic, or one starts to negotiate the relation between the formality of concepts and the differential intensity of existence. Well before Derrida's deconstruction, Luce Irigaray's 'sensible transcendental', and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatics, philosophers like Bergson defined the problem of philosophy's relation to the world not as a disciplinary problem but as a problem of life and art. To live is to negotiate some ongoing sameness, some sense of the form of the world that allows for day-to-day recognition, but that same enabling power of sameness is also an ongoing deadening of life. Formalism is anything but a purely academic problem, and might be thought of more broadly as the relation between the forms we possess to make sense of the world, and then life's and experience's ongoing challenge to those forms. In stark disciplinary terms one might think of this in two ways, either through philosophy's attempt to capture form as such – the truth of form – or through literature's ongoing deformation or estrangement of forms. It is in the early twentieth century that the modern rift between literature and philosophy reaches its zenith and is also placed under maximum duress. Part philosophy, part universal history, part literary analysis, Max Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* paves the way for a series of works that will insist that modern philosophy's claim of rational purity is utopian in its demand for something more than the demands of life, and yet violent in its occlusion of the singular differences of existence. In very different and incompatible ways one might think of Derrida's deconstruction, Irigaray's sensible transcendental, Deleuze and Guattari's claim for expressive matters, or Frantz Fanon's dialectic of recognition as insisting upon the force of that which transcends the contingency of particulars, while nevertheless recognising the blindness and violence of conceptual generality. The problem of philosophy as the task of the universal cannot repress the force of the literary, or the inscriptive condition for the emergence of any concept.

The twentieth century increasingly becomes the century of theory, which will grant poetry a power to express the eternal but only by giving force to what begins as the singularity of affect. Where romanticism had already worked through the problem of the sublime, or the infinite's withdrawal given through the experience of finitude, modernism would add to this an even stronger sense

of the inscriptive, archival, and material condition in which this impossibility is played out. Thus, alongside Eliot's work in literature we get Husserl's call to take philosophy back to the 'things themselves' of experience, to chart the genesis of truth and universality. Not surprisingly, those later texts of high theory – Derrida's deconstruction, and Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between philosophy's creation of concepts and art's creation of affects – will be a reprise of these early twentieth-century literary-philosophical problems. Like Husserl, but in a more radical manner, Derrida recognised that truth could not be reduced to historical or cultural contexts, even if truth necessarily has its genesis and maintenance in some inscriptive system. Like T. S. Eliot and European modernists, Deleuze saw every artwork as capturing a fragment of the eternal, within time, but for all time. The problem of theory that for Kant had required the strict partition of reason into its distinct faculties, allowing for a theoretical knowledge of the world, and a practical imperative to act as if one's reason could legislate for all, becomes the twentieth century's defining problem. Philosophy either takes the form it does in continental philosophy, constantly negotiating its relation to inscription, or it pares itself down – as in analytic philosophy – focusing less on meaning and more on the formal problems of logic.

Twentieth-century philosophy in the Kantian tradition forms what comes to be known as theory, a part-philosophical, part-literary enterprise that takes seriously Kant's distinction between pure and practical reason. For Kant, what we can think about but not know allows us to act as if we were members of the kingdom of ends, as if we were not bound up with the causality and mechanism of the world. Here it is desire or what can be imagined as brought into being that is essential for morality, allowing our practical world – or status as human subjects rather than objects – to be tied directly to the power to imagine what is not actual. It is the negation of the world as it is, or desire's capacity to imagine oneself as other than the same dull round of the world, that at once ties Kant's thought to modern liberalism's conception of literature as the creative sphere of imaginative exploration, to Derrida's notion that literature is the right to say anything, to Rorty's ideal of philosophy as a kind of writing, and to Badiou's insistence on the subject, not as a part of the world but as a break with the world. Literature, in this tradition, is not the reflection of the world, but a positive capacity to generate something other than the world. The desire of the literary text is not a wish fulfilment, but a marking out of a space, voice, or figure that is not of this world.

From Kant to the present, in different and divergent ways, philosophy and literature become inextricably intertwined precisely through their radical separation. If philosophy concerns itself with the formal conditions for thought, literature becomes a medium not simply – as it was for Kant – for a reflective judgement that allows us to feel the harmony of our forming powers, but for a more radical power to deform and recreate the world. For Kant, the very means through which we know the world – the ways in which we experience a causal and coherent world – allow us to imagine first causes, or objects without a cause, such as God or freedom. The ordering, communicative, and theoretical power of reason can (and, for Kant,

must) extend beyond this world. For Kant, the power to think but not know ideas of freedom and the infinite allowed for morality, with art forming merely the means through which we recognise our capacity as subjects. For Kant one could solve the problem of theory by creating strict tasks for reason – separating what we can know from a moral world that we can imagine. But this separation ultimately generated an ongoing series of crossings, contaminations, traversals, and cross-fertilisations. As Derrida's debate with Searle would prove, the more insistent one is about the rigours and heights of philosophy, the more one is forced to confront the problem of literature. Searle had argued that one can use concepts and be confident of their meaning because of the context in which they are used. Derrida replied that a concept only works if it can be employed across contexts. Derrida's strict sense of the concept is therefore more stringently philosophical than Searle's reliance on day-to-day usage. This commitment to concepts places ever more inscriptive pressure on the limits of philosophy, its purity and universality always disturbed by the singularity of its articulations. As I have already noted, Deleuze and Guattari also mark out the in-principle difference between philosophy (as creation of concepts) and art (as the creation of affects and percepts). A concept is not what is given through opinion or day-to-day communication, but is an orientation formed in relation to other concepts, allowing for new formations of thought to emerge. The affects and percepts of art are not the effects of the reception of artworks (not feelings or how the artwork is lived) but rather what can be felt or can be seen by any subject whatever. One might think of concepts, then, as having a quite different temporality, so that all the philosophical texts written about justice, democracy, or virtue occur in time but nevertheless discuss something irreducible to any one time. Each philosopher who creates a genuine concept recreates the entire plane of possible philosophical events. Similarly, the affects and percepts of art occur when 'expressive matters' appear as if for all time, as though one could see the red on the canvas, the melancholy captured by the tone of the cello, or the claustrophobia marked out by the description of an office space, as taking a fragment in time in order to open to a cosmos from which all these singularities entered into composition to generate the whole. For both Derrida and Deleuze, in very different ways, it is the difference between philosophy and literature that demands their constant encounter. One cannot avoid the universal strivings of thought, but any attempt to articulate universals requires some specific and singular inscription. Philosophy is inevitably caught up with the force of literature.

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