

Reading for Vital Symptoms: Deleuze, Literary Theory, and the Case of David Grossman

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Abstract This article offers a Deleuzian practice of reading as a form of problematization: constructing or “mapping” an author’s lived problematics to which his or her writing responds as so many solutions. Unlike readings that treat authors as patients whose personal pathological symptoms manifest in their literary works, a Deleuzian reading sees them as physicians of their cultures responding to an intolerable mode of existence, which is indiscernibly both personal and collective. A Deleuzian reading thus explores both the symptoms of pathological social present and new possibilities of life as they receive formal expressions in the literary work and the author’s style. Such practice essentially operates by actively constructing a series of underlying problems and their corresponding formal solutions, a move that, at the same time, establishes immanent criteria for critically evaluating a particular literary response (a solution) to the entrapment of life forces in pathological modes of existence (a problematics). The author discusses how and why a Deleuzian reading is both possible and desirable and takes Israeli author David Grossman’s novel *The Book of Intimate Grammar* as its primary case. This reading studies the novel through three conceptual problems in literary theory: the author as the site of the creative process, the use of language as an expression of an author’s literary technique, and the conditions for literary enunciation. It also demonstrates the strengths and benefits of Deleuzian readings in extra-Anglophone and extra-Francophone contexts.

Keywords reading, Gilles Deleuze, David Grossman, literary theory, problem

While discussions of literary works and authors can be found in abundance throughout his oeuvre, Gilles Deleuze did not formulate a systematic theory of literature, reading, or writing. Unlike Deleuze's two volumes on cinema, which in the past fifteen years have originated fresh theoretical approaches to film theory and creative readings of films (see, e.g., Davis 2013; Pisters 2012; Rodowick 1997), only recently—with the solidification of the now fairly established interdisciplinary field of Deleuze studies—has his work on literature become the focus of thoughtful scholarly treatments, primarily, however, by Deleuze scholars. In *Deleuze's Literary Clinic*, an extensive study of Deleuze's treatment of literature, Aidan Tynan (2012: 12) suggests that the obscure place of literature in Deleuze's philosophy may have hindered the formation of a properly Deleuzian literary criticism, and indeed, for many Deleuze scholars, Deleuze's approach to literature is best understood as ultimately linked to his overall philosophical project. "Deleuze therefore writes on the arts not as a critic but as a philosopher," states Daniel W. Smith (2012: 190), and Ronald Bogue (2003: 2) insists that, despite the radically diverse contexts and objectives of Deleuze's treatment of literary works, "a singular line of conceptual development traverses all of Deleuze's writings on literature, one generated by the driving concerns of his philosophy." These prevalent interpretations of Deleuze's approach to literature, which may seem to render Deleuze's discussions of literature secondary to his properly philosophical objectives, were dubbed "ontological" by Daniel Haines (2015: 530), because they view Deleuze (and Félix Guattari) "as offering an ontological alternative to the textual focus of deconstruction." While the ontological readings of Deleuze, along with Deleuze and Guattari's many explicit denunciations of signification and interpretation, may discourage literary critics from even entertaining the possible benefits of a Deleuzian method of reading literature, Haines claims that Deleuze and Guattari's concept of style and their own use of language nonetheless make possible a theory of reading "that opens up new possibilities for textual and literary criticism" (535).¹

This article shares Haines's motivation to offer productive Deleuzian trajectories of reading for scholars of literature and thus aims to extract practical guidelines for reading from Deleuze's oeuvre. The elaboration of such guide-

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1. In addition to those mentioned thus far, notable contributions of Deleuzian scholars to the field of literary theory and criticism include, for example, Buchanan and Marks 2000; Buchanan, Matts, and Tynan 2015; Hughes 1997; Lambert 2006; and Lecercle 2010.

lines, however, is not based on an opposition between “ontological” and “textual” interests (as in Haines’s case); instead, I propose a practical-critical approach that does not so much conflate the philosophical with the literary as displace their so-called opposition in favor of a Deleuzian pragmatics of reading that affirms their difference and, at the same time, forms a strategic relation between them to articulate the particular problems and solutions that are immanent to the encounter between readers and texts. I discuss how and why a practice of “Deleuzian reading” is both possible and desirable and take Israeli author David Grossman’s 1991 novel, *The Book of Intimate Grammar* (*Sefer hadikduk hapnimi*), as my primary case. This reading also serves as a demonstration of the strengths and benefits of Deleuzian readings in extra-Anglophone and extra-Francophone contexts.

1. The Uses of Theory, or Deleuze’s Pragmatics of Reading

For Deleuze, there is nothing abstract or merely reflective about theory. As Deleuze’s (1989: 280) concluding remarks to his second volume on cinema make amply clear, theory is a practice in its own right and, as such, is indistinguishable from philosophical practice:

For theory too is something which is made, no less than its object. For many people, philosophy is something which is not “made,” but is pre-existent. . . . However, philosophical theory is itself a practice. . . . It is a practice of concepts. . . . The theory of cinema does not bear on the cinema, but on the concepts of the cinema, which are no less practical, effective or existent than cinema itself. . . . Cinema itself is a new practice of images and signs, whose theory philosophy must produce as conceptual practice.

This understanding of theory as an all-enveloping conceptual practice is echoed in Deleuze’s last collaboration with Guattari (1994: 9): “So long as there is a time and a place for creating concepts, the operation that undertakes this will always be called philosophy, or will be indistinguishable from philosophy, even if it is called something else.” Theory or philosophy, then, is not a set of abstractions, postulates, or inert principles that can simply be applied in the sense of being put into hermeneutic or textual practice; rather, it is itself a practice that, roughly speaking, has a rather simple function: to work. “Theory does not express, translate, or apply a practice; it is a practice—but local and regional, as you say: non-totalizing,” Foucault said to Deleuze (2004: 207) in an exchange that took place in 1972, and Deleuze confirmed: “Yes, that’s what theory is, exactly like a tool box. . . . A theory has to be used, it has to work. And not just for itself. If there is no one to use it, starting with the theorist himself who, as soon as he uses it ceases to be a

theorist, then a theory is worthless, or its time has not yet arrived. You don't go back to a theory, you make new ones, you have others to make" (208). Deleuze succinctly describes here his pragmatic approach to theory, which informs his own readings of others' work: theory is inseparable from its practical effects and consequences and therefore from the question of its own operation, or use.

A Deleuzian pragmatics of reading will be no different, regardless of the nature of the read object or text (literary, philosophical, cinematic, etc.). However, as the quote above makes clear, this does not mean that one can find a universal theory of reading in Deleuze; rather, the concepts and methods employed for reading must constantly be crafted anew, that is, rigorously reinvented by the reader, by means of the delimiting, reflexive procedure known as critique: "Criticism implies new concepts (of the thing criticized) just as much as the most positive creation," argue Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 83), for "nothing positive is done, nothing at all, in the domains of either criticism or history, when we are content to brandish ready-made old concepts like skeletons intended to intimidate any creation." For Deleuze, philosophy is a critical activity of thought that constructs concepts as solutions to transcendental problems. In fact, concepts make sense only as solutions to problems they are set to solve, and problems can become known only by the construction of their solutions: "All concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning and which can themselves only be isolated or understood as their solution emerges" (16). But concepts are not final solutions; rather, they should be seen as particular reenactments or specifications of problems, which in turn could be reenacted (or "solved") by other concepts that form their own particular solutions. Concepts, as solutions, take problems as their condition, and in this sense they do not refer to anything external to them, for they are "self-referential" (22)—they refer only to their own internal conditions determined by the problem they are set to solve.²

Succinctly, I suggest that a Deleuzian reading can be characterized as a form of problematization: a creative retracing, that is, constructing or mapping, of an author's lived problematics to which his or her writing responds as so many solutions. It is a creative—that is, affirmative and productive—immanent critique, a construction of a series of problems and solutions in an encounter between the discourse of literature, Deleuze's philosophy, and a given text or oeuvre. Reading as problematization—which I later describe as reading for vital symptoms—is offered as a practical, productive tool to open up texts, theories, and interpretations so as to enable the literary piece to work

2. For a recent excellent elaboration of Deleuze's concept of the problem, see Wasser 2017.

for the reader.³ The goal of this noninterpretative method is to produce a singular reading, one that invites others to pick up where it has left off or to take it in new directions altogether, one that cannot be repeated or applied without the whole reading and its constructed series of problems-solutions being qualitatively transformed.

2. The Problematics of Authorship

There is something almost anomalous about the privileged status of the author in Deleuze's readings. While literary reading traditions (e.g., New Criticism, reader-response theories, structuralism, and deconstruction) have long ago displaced, if not utterly undervalued, the concept of the author and its role in the process of interpretation in favor of concepts such as reader, text, and context, the author is key to Deleuze's conception of writing, creation, and literature. If one insists on using familiar labels to describe Deleuze's concept of the author, one could say that the "death of the author" in Deleuze's work means only the death of literary theory's conventional, familiar notions of authorship. As Jean-Jacques Lecerle (2010: 68) suggested, Deleuze's is a "strong reading" that "goes against the grain of received *doxa*," a practice that inevitably involves inflicting violence upon both text and reader, since "its aim is to force the reader into thinking." The form this violence takes, says Lecerle, is that of "the extraction of a problem" (68) that concurrently summons up its complementary philosophical activity, namely, "the construction of the concept that grasps it" (69). In practical terms, I would add that, in relation to the concept of the author, a Deleuzian reading moves in two directions: extracting an author's problem and approaching the author as a problematic site. To extract an author's problem, one needs to "take the author as a whole," or seize him or her "in terms of a project—implicit or explicit," as Ian Buchanan (2000: 43) offers to approach the double task of reading Deleuze and reading with Deleuze. Buchanan suggests two ways to understand "project" here: first, as a practical task to be completed by work (194), and second, as "something ongoing and essentially incomplete, something which can never be done with" (195). An author's project, I suggest, corresponds to his or her insisting problem—a barrier to be crossed, an obstacle to be overcome, a lived *problēma* (πρόβλημα) that, as the Greek origin of the word suggests, is both a barrier and a task. It matters very little if the author, either a particular individual or a regulative function (as in Foucault), is alive or dead; his or her problem nevertheless subsists as the author's

3. In this general sense of reading as opening up the text, my approach is close to that offered by Bruce Baugh (2000).

immanent condition. The task of the reader would be to arrive, by way of construction, at an adequate description of the author's problem: Given an author's text, series of texts, or oeuvre, what is the task that the author set to accomplish? To what end? By what means? What accounts for his or her project?

But how does one go about retracing the author's problem? A sign of a lived impasse, the author's problem will rise in his or her work to the level of something intolerable: "The artist, including the novelist, goes beyond the perceptual states and affective transitions of the lived. The artist is a seer, a becomer. How would he recount what happened to him, or what he imagines, since he is a shadow? He has seen something in life that is too great, too unbearable also, and the mutual embrace of life with what threatens it" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 171). "Something *in life* that is too great" should be understood in a double sense: (1) the blockage or entrapment of life under actual, historically contingent circumstances—something that makes living in this world sickly, degenerate, deflated, halted even; and (2) the impersonal, inorganic powers of life itself, a combination of life forces that can only be sensed (through their effects in the actual) but not represented.⁴ The author witnesses—in that which threatens life—the signs of a superior health, of the endless process of creation, of life enhancing itself, the result of which is the actual world in its continuous self-re-creation via self-transformation. Impossible to ever be exhausted by any of its actualizations, life in all its creative grandeur, however, is not only unrepresentable but also unlivable as such, unbearable in its overwhelming greatness; it is that which is "too much for anyone, too much for [the artists] themselves, and that has put on them the quiet mark of death" (172). The key to determining an author's problematics lies, to be sure, in his or her oeuvre, which is to say, in his or her *entire* oeuvre—everything that he or she has ever written, since "writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of life that traverses both the livable and the lived" (Deleuze 1997: 1). Writing as a passage of life into formal language does not presuppose distinctions between fact and fiction, reality and representation, ontology and textuality. In their book on Kafka, for example, Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 29, 40) present Kafka's letters, short stories, and novels as components of a single "literary machine," each of which is determined immanently by the function it fulfills rather than by a predetermined, transcendent criterion, such as genre or publishing intention. Since writing is itself a process in which

4. For a detailed discussion of Deleuze's concept of life, see Colebrook 2006; and Marrati 2011. On Deleuze's concept of life in a literary context, see Lambert 2000; and Smith 2012: 189–221.

the powers of life receive a determinate, actual form under concrete circumstances, there is no opposition between life and literature (41).

Artists and writers approach the intolerable, “the mutual embrace of life with what threatens it,” not so much as sufferers (or patients) but, rather, as physicians: “They are themselves astonishing diagnosticians or symptomatologists” (Deleuze 1990: 237). What they diagnose is their problem, their lived difficulty—not simply a personal predicament but the singular manifestation of their culture and society’s problem as it is perceived from their perspective and effectuated in their experience. They are therefore “clinicians of civilization” (237), for “the writer makes a diagnosis, but what he diagnoses is the world; he follows the illness step by step, but it is the generic illness of man; he assesses the chances of health, but it is the possible birth of a new man” (Deleuze 1997: 53). Literature thus amounts to an “enterprise of health” (3) in both the clinical and critical sense: both a symptomatology of a given society’s illnesses, that is, blocked life processes (3), and a creative fabrication of alternative ways of living or modes of existence. It is the imperceptible (hence unrepresentable) yet felt movement within the literary work between the two poles, illness and health, which is itself the sign of a superior health: “Health in this sense always involves the mobility by which an author shifts viewpoints between his or her own particular case and the condition of humankind in general. This mobility is in itself the practice of health as Deleuze imagines it” (Tynan 2012: 12).

As a first approximation to the extraction of an author’s problematics, let us now turn to the novel by David Grossman. Published in Hebrew in 1991, *The Book of Intimate Grammar* follows four years in the life of Aaron Kleinfeld, a Jewish Israeli boy on the verge of adolescence who lives in Jerusalem in the 1960s. At the beginning of the novel Aaron is an imaginative, vital young boy of ten, but then his body inexplicably ceases to grow, and he gradually recedes further and further into himself. Aaron becomes so alienated from his family and friends that at a certain point he feels like he cannot understand them anymore: “Aaron stood limply in their midst and felt that they worry over him like they would with some elderly uncle or a tourist who didn’t speak the language” (Grossman 2010: 64; 1991: 66–67).⁵ Language is a constant issue for Aaron, and critics note that the theme of language implies a differentiation between two primary languages: the adult language, which Aaron finds defiled and corrupted by vulgar social meanings and signs, and the individual language, the pure language of selfhood, which is constituted by an intimate or “internal” grammar. The most conspicuous characteristic of

5. I revised extensively the citations from the English translation of the novel. However, I provide references for both the original Hebrew publication and its translation to English.

intimate grammar is Aaron's use of the present continuous tense, which he borrows from English but which does not exist in modern Israeli Hebrew. This bizarre use of language led critics to identify the present continuous with Aaron's arrested development and to argue that it represents the frozen, dead temporality of selfhood that withdraws further and further from the world and into its lonely and falsely protective bubble.

The Book of Intimate Grammar is often regarded as a strangely modernist novel (Shiffman 2007), a metaphysical one even, in which the political is but a secondary effect of universal and existential concerns. Haya Hoffman (1992: 21) argued that the novel should "first and foremost be read as a work of art that strives toward metaphysical meanings."⁶ According to Gabriel Zoran (1991: 96–97),

The novel makes no direct political statement, and certainly no analysis of a political situation, such as the one [found] in *The Smile of the Lamb*; but the 1967 war, which is in the background, absorbs the utterances that the novel expresses at the level of the individual person. The political problem is presented as part of a complex of problems that are more universal. . . . It is given as part of an existential ensemble.

For Rachel Feldhay Brenner (1994: 271, 290; 1999), the political aspect of the novel is secondary to and derivative of the novel's modernist form and the modernist "universal theme" of the rebellious young artist, whose physical impairment signifies society's flaws, and whose artistic self-expression conveys the truth of human existence. Michael Gluzman (2007: 237–38), however, argues that the dystopian body constitutes the main theme of the novel, and as such, it invites a political reading of the male body in a social-political context. For Gluzman, it is the politics of a male order and the Zionist image of the body that are contested in the novel.

Against the dominant paradigms of interpretation, I argue not only that the problem that underlies Grossman's writing is political through and through—in fact, I would go so far as to argue that it is the constitution of the political itself in language that defines his problem—but also that this so-called apolitical novel is Grossman's problem's most elaborated manifestation and, as such, a key to his entire project. In an interview on the publication of his third book, *Present Absentees* (translated into English as *Sleeping on a Wire*), a year after the publication of *The Book of Intimate Grammar*, Grossman himself politicizes the experience of the present continuous:

6. All translations of Hebrew source materials are mine unless a reference is given to their translation to English.

When I wrote *The Yellow Wind* and met with Palestinians in the [occupied] territories, I had this surreal sensation of an absence of the present. People there live in a sublime past and in the heroic future that lies ahead. In contrast, for the Arabs living in Israel there's only a present continuous with no future, and in this sense we [Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel] are alike. . . . It's not because the future is so complicated that one has no technical capability to prepare oneself for it, but because the future extends our surface, our vulnerability, whereas we would rather withdraw into ourselves. (London 1992: 27)

The lived experience of the present continuous, then, is not the personal expression of a supposedly universal, “modernist” definition of the individual's struggle against social conformity; rather, it is the sign of a collective problem that, for Grossman, constitutes a single mode of existence or way of life for both Israeli Jews and Israeli Palestinians.

That this existential predicament is collective and hence political Grossman makes amply clear in his essays and interviews on literature and politics, where he describes the determination of life in Israel by the inseparability of language and politics. The use of language thus becomes a problem, one with climacteric ramifications for both Israeli Jews and Palestinians' conceptions of life:

The language used by the citizens of the Conflict to describe their situation becomes increasingly superficial as the Conflict goes on, gradually evolving into a series of clichés and slogans. It starts with the language invented by the systems that handle the conflict directly—the military, the police, the bureaucracy. It then quickly spreads into the mass media which report the conflict and create an elaborate, shrewd language designed to tell their audiences the most palatable story. . . . The process eventually seeps into the private, intimate language of the citizens of the Conflict (even if they vehemently deny it). (Grossman 2008: 61; translation modified)

Grossman describes the use of language as a violent act of nationalization: how the Jewish Israeli majority imposes on language a “state grammar”—a dominating standard of usage whose sole purpose is to serve Jewish Israeli interests. Israeli state grammar functions as a logic of enmity, which could loosely be described as a variation of the mechanism of distinction between friend and enemy in Carl Schmitt's (2007: 26–27) concept of the political.⁷ In this case, such logic drastically reduces language to a binary function of identifying enemies from within and without, which adheres to a strict criterion of enmity, in which the friend is only a derivative. If one successfully passes the filter (or test) of enmity, one is defined only negatively as a friend, that is, a nonenemy. The efficiency of state grammar lies in its ability to

7. I thank Hannan Hever for pointing me in this direction.

permeate all aspects of life by entrapping it in a state of constant war that compels one to think and act by means of clear-cut disjunctions: either you are with us or against us, an aggressor or a victim, an ally or a foe. Confronted with the reduction of life to such restrictive choices, we are no longer living, says Grossman, but surviving: the goal is “survival at all costs. The cost can even be lack of living. The less you live, the more you survive. This is the paradox of people who spent their entire lives surviving in order to live, and ended up living in order to survive and nothing more” (Besser 1991: 24). But does the constitution of the political in language indeed rise to the level of a lived problem, an intolerability, for Grossman? And if so, what would be Grossman’s solution?

3. The Procedure as Formal Solution

It is through language, by way of pushing language to its limit, that the author moves from what is intolerable in actuality to the virtual powers of life that subsist within the actual, and reaches what Deleuze (1997: 5) calls the outside of language, which “consists of Visions and Auditions that no longer belong to any language.” This “outside” is the locus of problems, or ideas,⁸ as they are dubbed here: “These visions are not fantasies, but veritable Ideas that the writer sees and hears in the interstices of language, in its intervals. . . . They are not outside language, but the outside of language” (5). Ideas or problems are not transcendent in relation to language (outside language) but, rather, immanent to it in the form of language’s potential for variation and transformation (and in this sense they are the outside of language) (see also Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 92–100). A Deleuzian reading depends not on interpreting representations of these visions and auditions—for these are not linguistic signs in the Saussurean sense, that is, substitutes for real objects to which they supposedly refer—but on deducing how they are formed in language, through language. This means that a Deleuzian reading operates by problematizing the author’s use of language—not what language communicates or represents but, rather, how it works. Put differently, a Deleuzian reading approaches the author’s work by tending to his or her literary technique of formal renewal, or what Deleuze calls “the procedure” (the deterritorialization of language in Deleuze and Guattari’s *Kafka*). Very much like Aaron’s linguistic rituals, the procedure “begins as a kind of coping device, a form of incantatory repetition of familiar phrases, words, or rhetorical figures estranged, as it were, from their immediate semiotic environment” (Tynan 2012: 65). The procedure is the author’s means of coping with his or her

8. “Not only is sense ideal, but problems are Ideas themselves” (Deleuze 1994: 162).

problem by way of purging or freeing linguistic formed expressions from their pathological formed contents, thereby elevating the problem from the personal to the impersonal, and thus to the aesthetic domain where it becomes a full-fledged literary device (Buchanan 2000: 100–102).

The signs of the author's problem—both a lived impasse and unlivable power of life, an intolerable impossibility—emanate from the author's style: "To write, it may perhaps be necessary for the maternal language to be odious, but only so that a syntactic creation can open up a kind of foreign language in it, and language as a whole can reveal its outside, beyond all syntax" (Deleuze 1997: 5–6). The style of an author, however, is not simply his or her idiosyncratic poetic language, or the mark of their artistic talent, but "a question of freeing life wherever it is imprisoned, or of tempting it into an uncertain combat" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 171). In some writers, style "is always a style of life too, not anything at all personal, but inventing a possibility of life, a way of existing" (Deleuze 1995: 100). Deleuze repeatedly insists on this point: writing has nothing to do with the writer's memories, fantasies, or neuroses. This is precisely what psychoanalytic interpretations of literature sorely miss when they treat artists as if they were patients and are determined to decipher the signs of the artists' pathologies that are supposedly hidden in their work.

Writing enables Grossman to escape the lived as a constant state of war and the livable as the edict of survival and to create a possibility of life: "Writing forces me to live rather than survive. To undo all the knots, to travel paths unbeknown to me . . . writing is my way to empower this life" (Besser 1991: 27). Grossman's strategy of resistance to the oppressive use of language is to invent a style, "a syntactic creation" (Deleuze 1997: 5)—intimate grammar or, what amounts to the same thing, writing the *I*: "I write. I purge myself of the dubious but typical talents that arise in a state of war—the talent for being an enemy, nothing but an enemy" (Grossman 2008: 65–66). Despite these overtly humanistic tones, I argue that in *The Book of Intimate Grammar* Grossman indeed becomes, as Deleuze (1997: 113) says, a foreigner within his own language, a creator of an original language within language by straining it, pushing it to its limit, making the structure of language itself "tremble" or "stutter":

When a language is so strained that it starts to stutter, or to murmur or stammer . . . then language in its entirety reaches the limit that marks its outside and makes it confront silence. [. . .] Style—the foreign language within language is made up of these two operations; [. . .] style is the economy of language. To make one's language

stutter, face to face, or face to back, and at the same time to push language as a whole to its limit, to its outside, to its silence.⁹

As such a style, the invention of intimate grammar works not only to undo state grammar, but also the *I* itself as its subject of enunciation. Grossman does not revive some lost or primal *I* that has supposedly been corrupted by state grammar, but reinvents the *I* as radically different from itself yet strangely meaningful. Essentially, Grossman re-creates the *I* as a vision of a life, a singularity. Intimate grammar is thus not so much an individual language as it is an individuating language, whereby the *I* becomes a sign that refers solely to itself and is endowed with its own proper name.

Intimate grammar is paradoxically a form of agrammatical Hebrew; its tensors are the strange composite words that Aaron makes up by adding the English suffix *-ing* to Hebrew nouns, adjectives, and verbs, and its syntax is a form of overabundance: Grossman uses lengthy, entangled sentences, which add up to enormous paragraphs.¹⁰ He distinctively favors commas over periods, and the conjunctions *and* and *but* over any other conjunction. This overabundance also characterizes the new temporality that is born out of language: the agrammatical present continuous that Hebrew expresses but that nonetheless remains essentially alien to it—its outside. When Aaron first encounters the present continuous in English class, he rejoices at the promise for individuality it embodies: “It’s as if you enclosed yourself with a sealed glass bubble . . . but inside, in the sealed bubble, much is happening, so much is happening during that time, and every second lasts an hour, and you alone learn the secrets that reveal themselves to someone who senses time like you do . . . and everything that happens to you there is personal” (Grossman 2010: 36–37; 1991: 41). Aaron is made anxious by the thought of losing this ability to experience time in the present continuous, and it is at this point that we encounter for the first time his aberrant use of the agrammatical present continuous in Hebrew and the inauguration of a linguistic ritual (one in a series of many): “And when Aaron will become [fully grown] like them, sturdy like them, he will whisper to himself, at least once a day, *ai em go—eeng* [I am going]; *ai em play—eeng* [I am playing]; *ai em Aron—eeng* [I am

9. Suspension points in the original. To distinguish between suspension and ellipsis points, the latter were bracketed. On the style of the author, see also Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 26; and Deleuze 1995: 41; 143. On Deleuze’s concept of style, see Hughes 1997; Lecercle 2010; and Meiner 1998.

10. “The atypical expression constitutes a cutting edge of deterritorialization of language, it plays the role of *tensor*; in other words, it causes language to tend toward the limit of its elements, forms, or notions, toward a near side or beyond of language. The tensor effects a kind of transitivity of the phrase, causing the last term to react upon the preceding term, back through the entire chain. It assures an intensive and chromatic treatment of language” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 99).

Table 1 Grossman's procedure

Hebrew word	Meaning	Intimate grammar ^a	Pronunciation	Form
נעלם <i>Ne'elam</i>	Disappear (v.)	נעלמינג	Ne-e-lam-ing	<i>Ne'elam</i> + ing
חולם <i>Holem</i>	Dream (v.)	חולמינג	Ho-lem-ing	<i>Holem</i> + ing
חושב <i>Hoshev</i>	Think (v.)	חושבינג	Ho-shev-ing	<i>Hoshev</i> + ing
טהור <i>Tahor</i>	Pure (adj.)	טהורינג	Ta-hor-ing	<i>Tahor</i> + ing
אהרן <i>Aaron</i>	Aaron (n.)	אהרונינג	Aaron-ing	<i>Aaron</i> + ing

^aPresent participle suffix *-ing* is transliterated to, ג,י,נ, shown in boldface.

Aaroning]; this way he'll remind himself that he's also somewhat of a personal Aaron beneath all these generalities" (Grossman 2010: 37; 1991: 42). In Grossman's writing, English's present participle suffix *-ing* acquires an intensive power that confers on Hebrew an exceptional form of expression: it is phonetically transliterated into a meaningless compound of the Hebrew letters *yod*, *nun*, and *gimel*, thereby expressing a form of time that is nonexistent in Hebrew (table 1). Intimate grammar, however, appears in the novel only in compound form, thereby creating new auditions that are meaningless in English, and yet English renders them possible: *hosheving* (thinking), *holeming* (dreaming). These words refer to nothing but themselves because they have no distinct sense in Hebrew or in English; they express pure virtuality, or the power of time itself. These compounds transform nouns, adjectives, and verbs into processes or events that occur in an imperceptible time; they form a series of purely virtual movements that traverse the text. In this sense, Grossman's intensive syntax can be said to be reaching beyond language through language, toward the outside, or time itself: the more these anomalies appear and transform the language of the novel, the less Hebrew can be said to be representing anything; rather, it expresses singularities that refer to nothing but themselves.

Contrary to interpreters' prevalent view, then, the use of present continuous neither represents nor indicates selfhood's dead or arrested temporality, that is, the form of time to which Aaron desperately clings in his sickened repudiation of adulthood and that will inevitably lead to his demise. Aaron's degenerate body is both a symptom of the degenerate Israeli way of life and the site where a becoming—a movement of change—makes a life possible. From a clinical perspective, Aaron's body is a manifestation of the real sickness of adult life in Israel: survival in a state of war that knows no becoming or processes, only fixed modes of existence in the present simple tense, which is the only present tense Hebrew is capable of expressing. Much to Aaron's horror, it seems that his peers have not undergone a transformation stage but, rather, abruptly appeared one day in the form of fully matured adults who

are now comfortably fluent in state grammar. Adulthood here does not signal some humanistic notion of a universal mode of existence but is, rather, the syndrome of a sickly life, which requires one to conform uncritically to the dictum of survival that compels one to make immediate adjustments and to change instantly. There is literally no time for minute transformations, nuances, or critical evaluations, as if one should not become (or age) but, rather, must *be*—adult or child, with us or against us. Hebrew’s inability to express the present continuous corresponds perfectly to the crude, clear-cut dichotomies set by the logic of enmity. This alone already makes the novel one of Grossman’s most political and critical treatments of life in Israel.

From a critical perspective, Aaron’s body—as a site where a life becomes possible—marks, on the one hand, the disintegration of the individual both as a speaking subject (Aaron) and as state grammar’s subject of enunciation ($I = \text{Aaron}$) and, on the other hand, the site where the individuation of a singular mode of existence takes place in a process of becoming (Aaroning), that is, an imperceptible transformation of his constitutive relations that undermines his identity and sense of selfhood. Aaron’s predicament is not how to freeze time and protect his inner self but, rather, how to contain or endure the monumental force of life gashing through him and spreading all over: “Recently it has become harder to LEHEALEMING [disappearing]. . . . The trouble is he no longer has where to; his inside is full and utterly stuffed” (Grossman 2010: 218; 1991: 210). Aaron grows a bizarre set of organs such as a “cyclops eye” and a “mysterious gland” that is chirring in his head, telling him “in its screeching scratching voice, through the pursed lips of the gland . . . everything in the world is I. And there’s nothing in the world that is not me. I am things and I am the people using them. I am steel and rubber and wood and glass and flesh. I am cogwheels and levers and springs and muscles and straps” (Grossman 2010: 219; 1991: 210). Aaron undergoes what Deleuze and Guattari call becoming-imperceptible, becoming-everybody/everything (*tout le monde*), “one that brings into play the cosmos with its molecular components” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 280). The cosmos is brought into play in this becoming because one undergoes an absolute dissolution of one’s organic form, but this process is affirmed (rather than conceived as pure negation) since it is inseparable from a concurrent process of creation: “Becoming everybody/everything is to world, to make a world . . . that can overlay the first one, like a transparency” (280). Aaron’s becoming-imperceptible marks both the dissolution of the individual, and the creation of a world—an *I* abundant with life, an *I* who is everything and everyone yet strictly singular: nothing but Aaroning. This becoming-imperceptible is enacted not by the intimate grammar of the subject but, rather, by a form of agrammaticality that intimates life and is immanent to life, a form of

expressing pure time that seeps through the cracks of state grammar. Despite the novel's ambiguous closure, Aaron's catastrophe is not, as interpreters believe, the sign of intimate grammar's failure; rather, it is a sign of Grossman's literary enterprise of health, for it expresses a way of life, an experience of time, that state grammar renders impossible and inconceivable.

Aaron's becoming marks Grossman's literary experimentation as that which "discovers beneath apparent persons the power of an impersonal—which is not a generality but a singularity at the highest point" (Deleuze 1997: 3). In Grossman's novel, Aaron as character is nothing but this impersonal force of individuation, which constitutes a response to a political problem: the subjection of Hebrew to a logic of enmity by state grammar. And the more state grammar reduces the function of language to a vulgar enemy/friend binarism, the more it makes Hebrew strangely spacious, for state grammar generates enormous voids in order to replace infinite ways of relating to others with one monotonous movement between two opposing poles. Grossman's style responds precisely to this problem: it fills these voids with overflowing life and recovers Hebrew's sense of dynamism by exposing life in a state of war to be a coercive construction of state grammar. However, if the *I*—as both a speaking subject and the subject of enunciation—comes undone yet its form nevertheless persists, what exactly is its function? The solution offered by Grossman's procedure, then, opens up a new problem: who is the one saying *I*? Whose voice says *I*? Is it the third-person narrator? Is it the character? Is it the author? Can these maintain their differences in such a case?

4. Problematizing Narration, Voice, and the Literary Enunciation

Problematizing the status of the author inevitably introduces new problems to the fundamental literary concept of the narrator and the conditions for the literary enunciation itself. While narratologists traditionally employ (and contest) distinctions between restricted first-person narration and omniscient third-person narration—or variations thereof, such as the distinction between authorial and figural narration (Stanzel 1984)—Deleuze (1997: 3) seems to collapse these distinctions when he argues, "It is not the first two persons that function as the condition for literary enunciation; literature begins only when a third person is born in us that strips us of the power to say 'I.'" In a Deleuzian reading, the distinction between first- and third-person narrators—as well as between author (implied or otherwise) and narrator, narrator and narrated characters—is a secondary effect of a more fundamental language function that commands and orders, or what Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 76) call the "order-word" (*mot d'ordre*), since

“language is not made to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience.” Language does not primarily communicate, nor does it convey information; rather, it transmits order-words, an operation that is necessarily enacted by the third person, or indirect discourse: “We believe that narrative consists not in communicating what one has seen but in transmitting what one has heard, what someone else said to you. Hearsay,” Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 76–77) argue, and therefore “the first determination of language is not the trope or metaphor but *indirect discourse*.” Order-words are the links between acts and linguistic statements in the form of a social bond (79), which is why the study of language is inseparable from pragmatics (77), “the politics of language” (82)—for “pragmatics becomes the presupposition behind all of the other dimensions [of language] and insinuates itself into everything” (78). Order-words form the link between statements and acts, the significance of which is always contingent upon established relations of power in a given social field. For this reason, they argue, “there is no individual enunciation” in language (79); speaking always involves other voices speaking through one’s speech, a collectivity:

it then becomes clear that the statement is individuated, and the enunciation subjectified, only to the extent that an impersonal collective assemblage requires it and determines it to be so. It is for this reason that indirect discourse, especially “*free*” *indirect discourse*, is of exemplary value: there are no clear distinctions. . . . Indirect discourse is not explained by the distinction between subjects; rather, it is the assemblage, as it freely appears in this discourse, that explains the voices present within a single voice. (80)

This is the first explanation for Deleuze’s claim that literature begins with the third person: all statements emanate from a collective assemblage of enunciation; in all statements, the voices of others are necessarily present in one’s voice (following Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony), and thus “language in its entirety is indirect discourse” (84). In a Deleuzian reading, then, literary criticism’s concept(s) of the narrator and its derivative distinctions become a problem, which undermines both their established predeterminations and their function as the critic’s presuppositions.¹¹

The second, interrelated explanation is that since literary utterance, like language itself, is essentially political, then at its best literature is not only an “enterprise of health” (Deleuze 1997: 3)—both a clinical symptomatology of a given society’s sickly existence and a critical creation of a new possibility for life—but also, potentially, a revolutionary endeavor:

11. For an elaborate treatment of the relations between indirect discourse and the literary enunciation in Deleuze’s theory of language, see Marks 1997.

Health as literature, as writing, consists in inventing a people who are missing. It is the task of the fabulating function to invent a people. . . . This is not exactly a people called upon to dominate the world. It is a minor people, eternally minor, taken up in a becoming-revolutionary. Perhaps it exists only in the atoms of the writer, a bastard people, inferior, dominated, always incomplete. . . . Though it always refers to singular agents, literature is a collective assemblage of enunciation.

(4)

One should not mistake Deleuze's qualifications of the minor for a negative (or derogatory) evaluation; on the contrary, a people not yet in existence (hence "missing"), a people in a minor state—not to be confused with a minority—is that which drives and transforms great literature, since "the minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions of every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 18). The minor is immanent to the standard of living imposed by the major, and as such, it holds the major's potential of transformation (its becoming-other). In relation to language in general and literature in particular, *major* and *minor* designate the standard usage of language and the immanent potential to deviate from (or render perverse) the standard in order to place language in its entirety in variation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 104–6). Narration thus becomes a special form of storytelling—a fabulation, the creation of fictitious tales, myths, or legends, which paradoxically defies any criterion for distinguishing the true from the false, reality from fiction or representation (Rodowick 1997: 157), and whose function is inherently political: to imagine, to image, and to conjure a future people in response to everything that makes present life intolerable.¹² Literature, then, is an enterprise both clinical and critical, a movement between sickness and health that is itself the sign of a superior health (Tynan 2012: 119–20).

When Grossman claims that "literature reminds us that we are allowed to reclaim the right to individuality" (quoted in Yudilevitch 2007) and that the writers' craft "fundamentally, entails dismantling personalities" (Grossman 2008: 68), he does not contradict himself; rather, he insists that the political undoing of individuality corresponds with the individuation of life in one and the same process. But for Grossman to be able to fabulate, not only Aaron but also he himself must enter a becoming that will make him, in a Deleuzian reading, a minor author—a foreigner in his own language. Grossman's is a becoming-child, the correlate of Aaron's becoming-imperceptible: a child that, like Aaron, is still in the process of learning from adults the "proper" use of language; a child whose language is playful and occasionally even obscure,

12. For an elaborate study of the concept of fabulation in Deleuze, see Bogue 2010.

who misuses or invents words, who speaks out of place, who is oblivious to the semiotic clues that grownups plant in language to speak in his presence without him understanding a word. By becoming-child, Grossman does not imitate a child but is being seized by a form of linguistic temporality, which is lost to the Israeli adult who has already internalized the standard usage of Hebrew yet is still open to a child who resists its exclusion. The novel is suffused with strained temporal segments that any attempt to quantify them as adults do is doomed to fail; for example, how much time can be said to pass when one “is waiting in HOLEMING [dreaming]” (Grossman 2010: 92; 1991: 95)?

The *I* in *The Book of Intimate Grammar* belongs not to the author (however defined), or to the narrator (however defined), or to the characters but to all of them at once in a single temporality. Put differently, it is a life, an impersonal life, that says *I* by appropriating all of these voices. It is unsurprising, then, that indirect discourse, especially free indirect discourse, dominates the novel; it strains even the dialogues, the most direct form of discourse, racing them into its temporal black holes, its tensors — the vocabulary of agrammatical Hebrew in the present continuous. This movement of straining is intensely felt in Grossman’s style, an overabundant, overflowing syntax that brings to life a bizarre immanent land that grows in all directions from within Aaron’s body, a land populated with so many doubles, a land that is a double of the novel’s 1960s Israel, itself a double of Grossman’s 1990s Israel. There,

inside him burned an amber with a little girl dancer and a greened-eyed boy whose ears were pointed with seriousness and responsibility, and Aaron was with them too, three friends, three who are one, quietly planning how to salvage the one, and meanwhile, the misty courier crosses the white plain, the ossified reticulation in the forehead, and works his way upward, over a scaffolding of bones and pipes and cords, and suddenly stops in fear: before him, all alone in a red-black sea of cool clotting blood, floated a large marble egg, or was it a pale-yellow coral, forsaken, full of fissures, covered in frosty film. Aaron to Aaron, how will I cross the sea, over; Aaron to Aaron, an anonymous paper boat is waiting at the dock to take, over. (Grossman 2010: 291; 1991: 306)

This is not a modernist formulation of a “stream of consciousness”; eradicating both speaking subjects and subjects of enunciation by emptying their pathological contents, Grossman’s minor use of language, which makes the personal immediately political in the enunciation, is fabulation at play, an act of populating a world, a “worlding” that speaks in a collective voice, and that in its act of fabrication redoubles this sickly world and affirms the power of life

that made both worlds possible. But how are we to evaluate this solution? Is this horrifying unlivable double world not itself an impasse, a new problem?

5. Conclusion: Opening Up . . .

In a Deleuzian pragmatics of reading, Grossman's novel invites us not only to rethink the practice of writing the *I* as a strategy of resistance but also to rethink our practices of reading. In particular, reading Grossman with Deleuze evokes the question of what a Deleuzian practice of reading Israeli Hebrew literature will amount to. It is only by reading as problematization, or reading for the work's vital symptoms—that is, mapping the passage of life in writing between sickness and health—that a certain detail obtains a new political significance: the 1967 war. Grossman had been often criticized for his complicity in the constitution of a false, mythical image of a just and democratic Israel that had supposedly existed before the 1967 Israeli occupations. While many believed that his 1987 essay collection *The Yellow Wind* anticipated how the 1967 occupation would lead to the events of the first intifada, others consider this book a founding text of Israel's false pre-1967 mythical image (Shenhav 2010: 17). A Deleuzian reading, however, suggests that in *The Book of Intimate Grammar* life in Israel before 1967 was already perceived as life in a state of war, that the logic of enmity and its restrictive vision of life had already been firmly in place long before the war. This does not so much undermine the critiques of the mythical pre-1967 image of Israel as enable a Jewish Israeli reader to ask, What does it mean to create in 1991 a symptomatology of life in 1960s Israel? Could it be that through the cracks of Israel's mythical image the political unconscious of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict returns in the form of life's impersonal power? At the hands of such a reader, a Deleuzian reading becomes not only a powerful tool of critique but also a gateway to a civic position of responsibility. This means approaching Israeli literature as both a clinical symptomatology of life within the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a critical fabrication of alternative visions of life. Deleuze's immanent method requires that evaluative criteria of the literary response be engendered by the problematics set by the work itself rather than by transcendent values or presuppositions that remain safely beyond the reach of critique. Such an approach therefore also invites an evaluation of the work's response in terms of responsibility.

At this point, a Deleuzian pragmatics of reading can be picked up by another reader in a new gesture of opening up the text, posing new problems and constructing conceptual solutions that in turn lead to new problems and their solutions. Are the Deleuzian readers themselves not an instance of problematization of authors, texts, and contexts? Are they all not seized by

the passage of life into writing, Deleuze's own conceptual solution to the problem of reading?

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