

**‘The Hunt is Always Sweeter than the Kill’:
Re-thinking Desire through a ‘Proustian’ Lens**

**by
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Abstract

The ‘problem’ of desire has permeated philosophical thought all throughout history and across cultures, with desire persistently interpreted in Western Tradition as a potential danger, both to individuals and societies as a whole—mainly due to its close association with passion and emotions and its perceived distance from reason. The real ‘danger’ with regards to human desire, is simply that we continue to face and perpetuate massive misunderstandings about it. This includes ongoing misperceptions around what desire truly is and means, as well as why it emerges and how it operates within us. We’re also lacking a relatable paradigm of desire in Western thought, that accurately explains its complex relationships with both pain and pleasure.

One of the most insightful explorations on the essence and workings of desire, can be found through a close reading of Marcel Proust’s modernist fictional novel *In Search of Lost Time*. And when combined alongside the philosophical theory of desire formulated by Gilles Deleuze, in addition to discussions on metaphysical desire and longing for the ‘Other’ argued by Emmanuel Lévinas, possibilities for a new and collaborative theory on desire emerge. A theory that can provide us with much needed understandings on how human desire actually forms and behaves, as well as our active and productive role in it.

A collective philosophical theory based on these three distinct writers rejects dominant understandings which describe desire as an inherently painful ‘lack’, perpetually in search of pleasurable ‘satisfaction’ through the pursuit and ‘acquisition’ of real ‘objects’. Desire is more accurately understood through its painfully pleasurable trajectory and as the productive activity of forming associations between various ‘objects’, either real or imagined, resulting in complex assemblages of desire. These multi-element aggregates are fuelled through the constructed connections and continued fantasies or belief in them, as well as by the ongoing distance between a desiring subject, primary ‘object’ and all the contextual elements involved. The combined work of these authors offers a more accurate and relatable explanation of the source and essential characteristics of desire, as well as the complexities of the entire desiring process.

Keywords: Proust; desire; philosophy of desire; sexual desire; love; desire theory; pleasure; pain; *In Search of Lost Time*; Deleuze; Lévinas; assemblages

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“There are two tragedies in life. One is to lose your heart's desire.
The other is to gain it.” — George Bernard Shaw

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Introduction / The 'Problem' of Desire

Profoundly affected by the writings of Marcel Proust and considered by many to be 'The Philosopher of Desire', French-born Gilles Deleuze proposes a revolutionary theory of desire, one that despite its initial praise and positive reception,¹ hasn't created the paradigm shift it first intended. Yet, with the consistent 'problematic' interpretations of desire throughout Western history and our perpetual confusions over the life-altering experiences of desiring, this particular theory warrants further consideration. Deleuze's ongoing work on the topic of desire initially began through his collaborative effort with psychotherapist, philosopher and political activist Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, the first of a two-volume set of works originally meant to identify the "dangerous" deficiencies of psychoanalysis, a practice they challenge was being strategically used to suppress human desire in the favour of 'normalization' and societal control.²

Their work was, in Deleuze's own words, "finally a fundamental reaction, hostility against the dominant [...] psychoanalytical conceptions" of desire.³ But their initial attack and Deleuze's continued dedication to the 'problem' of desire, is in no way limited only to a critique of psychoanalytic practices. In fact, Deleuze's ongoing efforts with regards to desire extend far beyond the scope of anything previously examined philosophically. And when asked to define desire, even many years after his earliest work with Guattari, Deleuze first asserts: "[it's] not what they thought it was, even back then. [All the] people who wrote before us [...] even the most charming people [...] didn't understand what desire meant."⁴

He's referring to the relative consensus in the Western Tradition to always position desire as an intrinsic, ongoing 'lack' or 'need', or as a spontaneous response to a very precise lack in a given moment—both presumed to be in perpetual search of pleasure and 'satisfaction' through the 'acquisition' of various good 'objects' determined to be in

¹ Foucault, *Anti-Oedipus* xiii

² And a practice which in their view had destroyed countless lives and actually *created* a mental health epidemic of "pulp-like hospital creatures" instead (Deleuze, "*Désir*"; Deleuze and Guattari *Anti-Oedipus* 319; Seem xxii-xxiii).

³ Deleuze, "*Désir* "

⁴ Ibid.

want.⁵ This paramount notion of lack and acquisition in combination with the concept of an alluring and perceivably satisfying desired ‘object’⁶ it's believed to concentrate on, are consistently discussed as the core focus in dominant theories of desire—and our cultural representations and common understandings in the West mirror these firmly established formal assertions. This remains true whether the primary concept of lack is understood as relating to a distinct ‘object’ that’s missing and desired in a specific moment, or when the idea of lack is believed to signify more of an innate and perpetual sense of longing we all experience. (Not a subject’s sensation of yearning for anything in particular). But more accurately, a general unsettling feeling that something crucial is ‘missing’ from our lives, combined with an understanding of the constant pursuit desire actively engages in while in search of that ineffable ‘thing’ that’s absent.

All of Deleuze's work directly confronts both the premise and the simplicity of these historically dominant theories on desire, as well as our colloquial understandings of this highly influential phenomenon which affects our lived experiences, literally every day. He challenges these popular beliefs and assertions, all of which (despite other disputes and debates within the discourse), nonetheless collectively posit ‘lack’ as responsible for generating all of our desires.⁷ And traditionally position the coveted single ‘object’ as that which consistently establishes the “parameters” of desire, always determining how it will “emerge” and flourish in a particular form, while also viewing ‘acquisition’ of this crucial wished-for ‘object’ (whether a person, ‘thing’, or experience) to be both the end goal, as well as the conclusion, of the entire desiring process.⁸

While a conceptually precise distinction between desires and drives is crucial to note at this point, with drives being understood as biological and “objective”⁹ needs, whereas desires are subjective expressions of how we freely choose to satisfy each of these needs, (such as our need for food vs our desires to consume something very particular), further discussion on this distinction isn’t central to the arguments I intend to unfold.

⁵ Dalton, “Longing”, “Vaccination” 22-23; Foucault, *Anti-Oedipus* xii; Plato 189c-193e

⁶ ‘Object’ from this point forward refers to a: person, tangible item, or experience—whereas object can be understood directly, to mean only an inanimate object.

⁷ Dalton, “Longing”, “Vaccination” 22; Deleuze, “*Désir*”; Foucault, *Anti-Oedipus*; Seem xxii-xxiii

⁸ Dalton, “Vaccination” 22-23

⁹ McCarron

Deleuze and Guattari were at once, directing very specific criticism against the psychoanalytic community, yet also challenging head-on the basic premises all of our Western conceptions on desire have been built on throughout history. What this ongoing cultural Tradition has passed down to us, clearly defines and continues to shape our cognizance of desire as being intricately connected to these feelings of lack, as well as being an inherent and responsive force which exists only and always, “in relation to some ‘object’” that’s “in want”.¹⁰ This cultural history in the West describes desire as something meant to circumvent pain and aim us towards pleasurable outcomes—yet it also informs and reinforces widespread beliefs regarding the potentially hazardous facets of desire as well, most commonly conveyed to us as dangerous due to desire’s strong connections to passion and perceived distance from reason.¹¹ These confusing contradictions, in addition to the (relatively unchallenged) historical focus on lack, are all central to desire’s paradox. And they perpetuate, as Deleuze argues, attempts at social control, as well as significant misunderstandings about what the term desire actually means, resulting in vast misconceptions over how it affects a multitude of continuous and important choices and life experiences, around all that we ‘desire’.

The Western canon is full of examples which embrace these insufficient notions that Deleuze seeks to destabilize, as well as many which highlight the potential dangers of pursuing desirous missing ‘objects’: In Plato’s famed *Symposium*, for one, Aristophanes’ legendary speech on Eros explains how from the earliest days of humanity the very essence of both love and desire has always been one of lack. In this well-known myth, Zeus of course punishes the originally two-faced/four-legged/four-armed humans for acting on their hubristic desires¹² by splitting them in two. And from this point forward in the tale, all of humanity is forever condemned to an emotionally painful existence of incessantly looking for their ‘other half’. This idea of ‘soulmates’ and of needing another human being who can fully ‘complete’ us in some way, persists in Western cultures as a credible idea, even today. Love is essentially the romantic name we’ve chosen to describe that blissful experience of finding our ‘missing half’, of being restored to our “original [...] nature”¹³ and finally becoming ‘whole’ again—and desire is traditionally

¹⁰ Plato 189c-193e

¹¹ Burton 94; Gao 406; Ridley; Seem xxiii

¹² of conspiring against the Gods and wanting to overtake Mt Olympus (Plato 190b).

¹³ Plato 189c-193e

accepted as the painful existence we're all destined to endure, eternally searching for that elusive 'wholeness'.

But Deleuze offers a very different explanation for what actually takes place within each of us when we desire. And for what has continuously been described, through revered cultural sources, artworks and sacred texts since the beginning of civilization, as simply humanity's intrinsic lack, inherent pain—and the dangerous pursuits our desires engage us in attempting to seek pleasure and satisfy these perceived voids. Whether we directly equate desire with the experience of lack itself, or we describe desire as the powerful sensation that arises within us because of all that we're 'missing', Deleuze sees our traditionally accepted universal description (of essentially 'lack' + 'object' determined 'good' + movement towards 'object' + possession of 'object' = happiness, pleasure, contentment, or 'satisfaction')—as something deeply and inherently flawed.¹⁴

Our collective failure to understand what desire truly is, what it means and how it actually functions and affects us, is in Deleuze's view, a result of our larger failure of simply not exploring the right questions—ones that can actually yield extremely valuable results in our quest to better understand the desiring process.¹⁵ The principal objective when trying to accurately comprehend desire, should instead be to ask ourselves how desire actually comes into existence: “What is the [specific] nature of relations between elements, in order for there to be desire”, essentially, “for these elements to become desirable?”¹⁶ And Deleuze himself is struck by this exact line of questioning being vividly and eloquently explored, in one of the less obvious sources traditionally examined within the philosophical discourse on desire.

The highly complex and menacing 'problem' of desire has permeated discussion since Antiquity—where philosophy, psychology, religion, myth, literary works, as well as the visual and performing arts, have all actively participated in shaping both our formal discourse and our collective every-day perceptions, on what desire is and precisely how it operate within us. But one of the most insightful examinations of desire ever composed comes from a highly praised work within the Western canon of literature—one so rich

¹⁴ Deleuze, “*Désir*”

¹⁵ Ibid.; Foucault, *Anti-Oedipus* xii

¹⁶ Deleuze, “*Désir*”

with colourful depictions and alternate possibilities for how we might better learn to interpret the source and the essential characteristics of human desire, as well as the complex mechanics of the actual desiring process, that it serves as a catalyst of inspiration for a variety of work carried out by others who follow.¹⁷ And this powerful influence extends to the rigorous theoretical assertions put forth by Gilles Deleuze, throughout his entire philosophical career:

Marcel Proust's legendary modernist novel *In Search of Lost Time* is of course a fictional work. Yet it remains to this day, such a provocative and extraordinarily deep examination of (among other things) the nature, source and complexities of desire, that it inspired Deleuze, illuminating for him certain 'truths' about desire¹⁸ that he himself later develops and articulates. Despite Proust's famously nuanced approach and the many ambiguities, contradictions even, that his writing is notorious for, within this fictional story Deleuze identified a uniquely vivid portrayal of human desire in both action and thought. Through highly developed characterization and a variety of detailed plot examples in which Proust's characters all try to navigate the ultra-complicated mix of pleasures, pains and confusions involved in the experience of desiring, this celebrated author is able to depict one of the most fascinating examinations of desire ever written. One so thorough and attentive to the inescapable paradoxes surrounding desire, that even as a fictional exploration, it's widely referenced by many a thinker through a variety of mediums—and credited by Deleuze as poetically illustrating his own concrete theoretical assertions, on the bewildering experience we refer to simply as 'desire'.

Throughout this fictional narrative, Proust actually withholds from the reader any single, precise assertion on how either love or desire should consistently be understood or even defined. As can be argued though: "We do not always proclaim loudly the most important thing we have to say".¹⁹ What Marcel Proust does instead, is skillfully offer up a sufficient wealth of material on more insightful possibilities regarding desire, than what our philosophical history has passed down to us so far, that one could in fact upon very close examination, recognize certain patterns within these fictional depictions and draw upon those to arrive at their own definitive conclusions. The author also notoriously

¹⁷ Bettman 229, 240

¹⁸ as well as other topics, such as art and literature

¹⁹ Benjamin 205

explains (through his narrator) that he sees the greatest value of literature as being that which, like any great work of art, can reveal to each individual some form of 'truth' already present or developing within themselves: "In reality, every reader is, while reading [this story], the reader of his own self".²⁰

Just as in the novel, where Marcel finally realizes that the awareness he first credits the tea and madeleine for revealing to him, are actually memories and raw 'truths' already possessed inside himself, Proust's work has the same ability to act as a catalyst of sorts, provoking a powerful level of insight in others by offering them an "an optical instrument"²¹—both for what exists all around them but also for what is in reality already accessible within themselves—and for essentially doing the powerful work of "open[ing] up the vision of another soul's universe"²². This particular literature had exactly such an effect on Deleuze, as it does on so many others who experience it. Ultimately, what Deleuze discovered within the pages of Proust's novel was much more than 'just' a fictional literary work of genius, but in fact an entire blueprint of sorts, for his own theory. What Gilles Deleuze identified inside this modernist work, was nothing less than a complete "philosophical and methodological paradigm of productive desire."²³ So indebted did he feel to the writing of this author in fact, that when interviewed on the specifics of his own renowned philosophy of desire, Deleuze instantly prefaces any explanation of it by stating, that Proust had in fact: "said it first"—and said it so much more "beautifully", than he himself ever could.²⁴

The challenges surrounding desire and our complete lack of understanding regarding these monumental experiences are apparent all throughout Proust's novel. As is this author's dedication to portraying a wide range of examples, ultimately depicting a multitude of different forms and representations of human desire. But arguably the single most famous and one of the most insightful explorations on the enigmatic characteristics of desire, is of course the notoriously dramatic love affair between Swann and Odette which begins very early on in the story. And then continues to serve as a reference point

²⁰ Proust, *TR* 322

²¹ Bettman 240

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Ricciardi 20

²⁴ Deleuze, "*Désir*"

throughout the entire work of fiction, for many an observation and query posed by Proust's perpetually inquisitive narrator, Marcel.

The first volume of Proust's novel which had such a deep and everlasting effect on Deleuze, concludes with an intriguing paradox. And it is precisely this provocative excerpt, as well as the detail and mystery so eloquently identified in Marcel Proust's literary exploration, combined with his illustrations of the complex interplay between passion and reason, which initially led to my interest in examining this particular work of literature on a much deeper level. It's an examination that in fact, I originally perceived as being focused on gaining a better understanding on the nature and characteristics of love. But one which I quickly realized demanded a total shift of focus to even farther back, concentrating instead on the powerful phenomenon which precedes all forms of love—the ineffable force we know by the name of desire. The impassioned, exasperated declaration delivered by Proust's vital character Charles Swann, is intended to speak directly to the magnitude of influence desire is capable of yielding on our lives, as well as to its paradoxical nature and totally mystifying qualities:

To think that I've wasted years of my life, that I've longed to die, that I've experienced my greatest love, for a woman who didn't even appeal to me, who wasn't even my type!²⁵

These are the heartfelt words Proust intentionally has uttered, through a man afflicted by the intensely powerful emotion of love. A character portrayed as an intelligent, well-bred gentleman of *La Belle Époque*'s high society, who experiences a passionate, life-altering love affair with the Parisian courtesan Odette de Crécy. But Proust's carefully selected utterance for Swann's description of this torrid romance, seems to go against everything that we're customarily led to believe love should be. Despite the inevitable moments of heartache we know it entails, typically, romantic love is still understood to be a very pleasurable and valuable experience overall. And definitely a feeling reserved for people we're deeply attracted to in some significant way, whether it be physically, emotionally, intellectually, creatively, ethically or spiritually—or 'in a perfect world', all the above.

But the perplexing thing about Odette, is how Proust makes it very clear that she represents *none* of those things for the character Swann. He doesn't find her beautiful, or sexually appealing. In fact, the author reminds us several times that Swann is

²⁵ Proust, *SW* 543

somewhat repulsed by Odette's physical appearance initially. She isn't shown to be cultured, refined and 'worldly' like the character Swann is, or knowledgeable about art, his greatest passion. Nor is she portrayed as being even remotely capable of the provocative, intellectual conversations he adores. These two central figures of the novel aren't in any way depicted as sharing a deep connection based on religion or spirituality, nor is there any mention from the author of some kind of ineffable bond or unique emotional intrigue Swann instantly feels, when first becoming acquainted with Madame de Cr cy. The author goes to great lengths in fact, to ensure each reader is fully aware that Swann's initial impression of Odette is actually one of disinterest and complete indifference, viewing her as "not [even] the type which our senses demand".²⁶

While purely fictitious—and despite the "diaphanousness"²⁷ of all Proust's literary depictions on desire, this illustrious author is nonetheless intentionally showing us a vast range of examples throughout his story, all of which we're meant to be able to identify with on various levels and gain some form of valuable insight on desire from. His novel is deeply philosophical, on a wide range of important topics, from class relations and world affairs to art, time and memory, through to romantic and sexual desires. And Marcel Proust's intense examination of love and desire isn't in any way intended only to depict fictional scenarios that are enjoyable to read, yet completely removed from our own life experiences. This is one of the great gifts of Proust's intensive literary treatment of desire, that through all of the in-depth characterizations and detailed examples of the desiring process, he at once uncovers both the uniqueness of each individual's highly personal desires—yet at the same time reveals how collectively, everyone's desires also share certain characteristics and process. And this fact becomes particularly clear, when examining his literary work in combination with a choice few philosophical theorists, who also explore the complex process of human desiring with equal devotion.

Despite the exploratory and delicate nature of Proust's unveiling literary work, in comparison to more assertive theoretical stances, what does become evident even through the many ambiguities in this story, is the sheer level of complexity innate to the enigmatic desiring process. What also becomes obvious is the fact that desire has a monumental impact on us all, albeit in many different ways. And that despite its unique

²⁶ Proust, *SW* 276

²⁷ Colby

form or personal effects on each individual (whether fictional or real), desire clearly shares some kind of distinct process that leads to 'objects' becoming desirable. But rather than taking a bold and direct stance on any of this, Marcel Proust's meticulously thought-out writing is instead meant to provoke questions about our widespread beliefs on desire. And to offer cleverly portrayed desirous examples, relatable to us on some level, as well as depicted in such a way that throughout the journey of this story, we can attempt on our own to unfold the mysteries and paradoxes of desire. Both in the novel and within our own lives. And that we as readers are able to at the very least, recognize and relate to the sheer power, complexity and universality involved in the real-life activity of desiring.

So the puzzling question raised within the first volume of his literary work—and one which Proust's fictional narrative meticulously explores and Deleuze's formal theory promises valuable and much needed insight into, is this: How is it even meant to be possible, for (the fictional character) M Charles Swann to later experience such a profoundly intense and all-consuming relationship, his life's most deeply valued and extraordinary love affair in fact, with someone he isn't even attracted to or connected with initially, on any level? How does Marcel Proust illustrate this important figure as being able to transition from being completely indifferent to this woman, Odette, into madly, passionately, intoxicated by his love for her, experiencing both the intense heights of ecstasy and the utter depths of total despair—and then (eventually), back again to finding her completely unappealing? And why does the author purposely have Swann recognize a self-proclaimed 'lost-cause' relationship, one so painful it literally made him long for death at times, to nevertheless still be the "greatest" love experience of his life?²⁸

To fully understand Proust's intentions or how any of this could possibly happen, either in a fictional world or in a real-life setting, we require a clearer understanding both of what desire is—and of how and why we form the powerful desires that each of us do. We're also in need of a much better comprehension regarding the highly complicated relationships between desire, pleasure/pain, happiness/suffering, as well as a firmer grasp on how it is that desires previously capable of taking hold of our lives with such intensity, can later change, evolve into something else, or disappear altogether. If we

²⁸ Proust, *SW* 543

already had an adequate paradigm of desire to rely on in Western Tradition, there'd be absolutely nothing absurd about Swann's declaration, nor anything perplexing about the course of other relationships throughout Proust's novel. Or those in our own lives for that matter. Through an analysis of Marcel Proust's writing in relation to specific aspects of post-modern thought, it is precisely these mysteries, contradictions and paradoxes surrounding desire, which I intend to further explore.

My principal aim concerns the question: If we approach Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time* not only as an intriguing 'story' and a legendary work of modernist fiction, but also as an intentionally thoughtful and meticulous exploration on love and human desire, what enlightening possibilities about desire might this fictional work reveal?²⁹ More specifically, what can a review of this literary work in combination with philosophical theory, especially work that was so profoundly affected by Proust's writing, possibly teach us about the essence and the inner 'workings' of desire—and how can the reciprocal exchange between Proust's fiction and formal theory, collaboratively illuminate the discourse on desire in a way that philosophy and psychology alone, have not fully been able to do?

Inspired by Proust's narrative and by the profound influence he had on subsequent philosophical, psychological and literary discussions of desire,³⁰ I am approaching *In Search of Lost Time* as a philosophical (and sociological) novel—a creative piece of literature which also contains within it a variety of deeply explored observations made by Marcel Proust, perhaps even some cleverly veiled beliefs. Insightful thoughts, ideas and alternate possibilities regarding desire, that were accumulated with the intention of fictional storytelling, but done so through intense study, remarkably careful thought and (perhaps most importantly), were written, contemplated and revised over an extensive period of time. In doing so, I propose a collaborative theory of desire based on Proust's writing and the work of others who have also reflected on this particular topic with great dedication. My specific focus, which also references and integrates the work of others as well,³¹ largely involves the philosophy of desire argued by Gilles Deleuze, originally formulated with his co-author Félix Guattari. My exploration also incorporates some of

²⁹ (both about amorous and sexual desires and of desire in general)

³⁰ Deleuze, Girard, Ricciardi 20

³¹ Walter Benjamin, Drew Dalton, Sigmund Freud, René Girard, William Irvine, Jacques Lacan, Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer, Irving Singer and Slavoj Žižek

the original concepts from writings of Emmanuel Lévinas, which independently supports and expands on certain complexities raised both within Deleuze's ongoing work as well as in Proust's novel, all of which I assert reinforces the legitimacy of these shared ideas in an enlightening and interesting way.

Through a comparison of their theories, alongside excerpts and specific events in this author's acclaimed novel, I aim to both illuminate Marcel Proust's explorations on desire with concrete theoretical support—and to further illustrate these independent theoretical assertions on human desire, through use of his highly revealing prose. Ultimately, by exploring these connections between fictional literature and philosophy and between Proust and Deleuze specifically, this in-depth examination aims for a much deeper insight into the desiring process and the origins of our intense longings, in addition to a more accurate appreciation of the complex relationships between desire, pleasure, suffering and happiness, as well as to respond to a paradox not yet adequately addressed: How can we be so powerfully drawn to people, 'things' and experiences, that we know may lead to intense suffering, not just pleasure and happiness—and in fact, why do we often have even stronger desires for these particular 'objects', especially the human ones, once the pain they cause us has already been experienced?

Chapter 1.

Alternatives to 'Lack', 'Object', 'Acquisition' and 'Satisfaction'

Gilles Deleuze + Marcel Proust / Desire 'Assemblages'

Fully acknowledging his significant 'debt' to the literary work of Proust that inspired him so deeply, Deleuze originally joins forces with Guattari to present a theory of desire which ultimately "preserve[s] Freud's discovery of the unconscious"³², yet challenges the theatrical nature of the subconscious, something deemed representational of repressed desires and fantasies which are then reflected and expressed through dreams,³³ Oedipal and Electra complexes, or 'Freudian slips' of the tongue.

Their disruptive theory rebels against classic views in the Western Philosophical Tradition and necessitates first ridding ourselves of all historical notions that define desire as a 'lack' within us, forever searching for 'objects' to possess in order to achieve 'satisfaction' through their 'acquisition' and fill an inherent emptiness, or longing, we presumably carry at all times. Deleuze further explains the problem with traditionally dominant theories and popular understandings, as well as the goal of his and Guattari's "enormous ambition" in more specific terms: "We wanted to say: up until now you speak abstractly about desire, because you extract an 'object' that's presumed to be the 'object' of your desire".³⁴ This entire approach is inherently inadequate from the view of these two thinkers, who identified a huge void within the discourse and demanded a more robust account of desire's 'place' within a larger philosophical, political and sociological context, as well as a more specific explanation of both the source and the entire process involved in the experience of desiring.

Initially, what this co-authored theory stresses is how any perceived experiences of lack need to be understood as something deliberately "created, planned and organized in and through social production" (as a function of market economy), a reality seen by

³² Kerslake 52-55

³³ Deleuze, "*Désir*"; Kerslake 52-55

³⁴ Deleuze, "*Désir*"

these two authors as the deceptive “art of a dominant class”, who purposely establish and organize various wants and needs “amid an abundance of production”, which in turn results in most individuals “fall[ing] victim” to a perpetual “fear” of not being able to have their needs met.³⁵ Deleuze however, continues his work on desire in a way that also speaks directly to the complex personal relationships, both sexual and romantic desires, expressed so consistently through Proust’s novel.

Because this notion of a reflective subconscious posited by psychoanalysis and the consistent centrality of lack and ‘object’ in relation to desire theory, are all completely flawed in Deleuze’s view, he and Guattari respond to these detrimental misconceptions as well as to the massive void they perceive within the discourse on desire. And they do so by re-framing the entire line of inquiry they believe we should actually be pursuing. Namely, by asking: What is the “nature of relation between [various] elements”,³⁶ which in fact allows for the emergence of desire? In other words, what actually ‘makes’ certain things, people and/or experiences become desirable to each of us? This major paradigm shift they propose, replicates the literary exploration on desire Deleuze himself identified as being clearly present, throughout all of Proust’s fictional narrative.

Ultimately, Proust intended his work to be something much ‘greater’ than simply a thoughtful and enjoyable literary ‘escape’. His treatment of desire and the significant prominence of this subject matter throughout his seven-volume novel, is a purposeful attempt to explore and discover more about the ‘essence’ and inner workings of desire. And to assist each reader with engaging in a line of questioning which aims towards unfolding a far better understanding, not only of the life-altering desires of his fictional characters, but also of the bewildering desire experienced in our own lives. Proust’s authorial goals behind the desirous portrayals in this novel clearly extend far beyond any wish of ‘only’ fictional storytelling. Just like his own narrator Marcel, penetrating the essential characteristics of many important topics covered within the pages of this novel, is obviously an important quest for this writer. But of the vast array of subjects touched on—and even in comparison to other prominent themes surveyed in this book—desire consistently maintains an obvious thread throughout the entire story.

³⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 28

³⁶ Deleuze, “*Désir*”

Presumably this is because of not only desire's central importance to the lived experience of all individuals, but also due to the fact that desire was a facet of life that Marcel Proust himself struggled with. Not only as an esoteric 'problem', but also on a deeply personal level, during his whole lifetime in fact. And at some point throughout this extended creative journey of fictional writing, philosophical enlightenment and profound self-discovery, Proust obviously arrived at a similar conclusion to what Gilles Deleuze later articulates: that only by shifting our principal objective in the investigation on 'desire' to responding to crucial questions regarding the relationship between elements, which in fact allows for the emergence of desire, can any of us ever possibly gain meaningful insight into this ongoing and overwhelming 'problem' that humanity continuously wrestles with. And it's certainly true that without doing so, we can never even begin to address the paradox deliberately introduced early on in Proust's novel, one which we may partially identify with, yet still don't fully understand: How could the fictional character Charles Swann, (a literary example meant of course to assist our understandings on what happens within ourselves in real life, with regards to desire), come to have such passionate desires for Odette specifically? And why does Proust intentionally portray this uninhibited amorous and sexual desire, as one which not only sustains, but increases dramatically in fact, after it results in incredible suffering on Swann's part?

A combined reading of both Gilles Deleuze and Marcel Proust can help us unfold these mysteries surrounding human desire, as well as assess the connections between both thinkers and their works. Emphatically disagreeing with all previous accounts of desire, philosophical, psychological or otherwise, Deleuze destabilizes all historically dominant concepts essentially by encompassing and stressing these central points, all of which this philosopher sees vivid evidence of throughout Proust's influential novel, *In Search of Lost Time*:

- (1) It's completely wrong to ever equate or connect desire with the predominant concept of intrinsic lack or a spontaneous response to lack.³⁷
- (2) Desire is always about active "production", never about "acquisition," as it's typically been portrayed.³⁸

³⁷ Deleuze, "Desire and Pleasure"; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 25-28

³⁸ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.* 25; Deleuze, "Désir"

- (3) Desire is never movement towards a single 'object', but instead is only and always focused around a collective set of objects, or as Deleuze states, a constructed "assemblage" of 'objects'.³⁹
- (4) We always produce desire from "within" the "flow" of this "aggregate", which is an "assemblage" that still includes the primary 'object' other theories focus on, but each time also involves an overlooked but equally important contextual "landscape", that envelops this 'object'.⁴⁰
- (5) Imagination and repetition are both central and crucial to the human experience of constructing desire.⁴¹

Re-imagining desire as self-production, as well as an imaginative and repetitive flow of associated ideas involving an entire contextual assemblage, rather than as an innate force which simply 'happens' to us in response to a missing 'object', (either in an ongoing manner or spontaneously), is the vital key to comprehending Deleuze's and Guattari's theory. And these concepts of desiring-production are, as well, the solution to removing all our attachments to prior understandings on desire, which clearly haven't served us well or yielded very helpful insights we can actually relate to.

In an effort to greatly enhance our comprehension on this important subject matter, their theory insists not only that desire doesn't ever emerge from or have any relation at all to lack,⁴² but also that we "never desire someone or something" by itself, or long for them in the abstract sense: we only and always desire a collective "assemblage" of elements, rather than a singular 'object', as philosophers of desire have postulated historically.⁴³ As Deleuze explains, whenever an individual expresses their desire for "(some) thing", what they're hungering for in fact isn't simply that primary 'object', but in reality they're desiring this particular person, item, or experience "in an entire context, a context of [their] own life that [they intend] to organize".⁴⁴ Their intense longing is for an

³⁹ Deleuze, "*Désir*"

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Deleuze, "Desire and Pleasure", "*Désir*"; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 25-28; Kerslake 52-56

⁴³ Deleuze, "*Désir*"

⁴⁴ Ibid.

experience far more complex than we ever acknowledge, either in theory or in casual conversation. And one definitely beyond the realm of acquiring a 'good', single, concrete 'object'. All of which makes their ideas associated with this wanting, often difficult to summarize or succinctly express. This of course adds to the paradoxical nature and difficulties surrounding desire—we often discuss our desires (and may even experience them in such a way) that they're perceived as being far simpler than they truly are.

Especially when combined with Proust's prose, Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical framework indicates how the traditional beliefs about desire in no way describe the complicated reality of how it actually operates, or the active constructivism that the process of desiring is. Despite their confrontation directed against psychoanalytic theory, institutions and practices, they nonetheless endorse a modified conception of the subconscious, arguing that we need to re-imagine the unconscious for what it really is: a productive "factory", incessantly "producing" all of our desires and creating 'needs' out of the assemblages it constructs, rather than as a "theatre" merely reflecting repressed wants, 'needs', fantasies and desires, as psychoanalysts would have us believe.⁴⁵ For these two philosophers, the subconscious is in fact "the very opposite of the [accepted] psychoanalytic vision" of it.⁴⁶ And they argue that ultimately, a more accurate view would be to define the subconscious as an active, productive, desire-creating "machine."⁴⁷

Overall, Deleuze insists that we dispel with the "frightening" and "enormous curse" on desire and stop speaking about it as "worse than original sin".⁴⁸ What he and Guattari want us to understand about it, instead, is its self-productive nature, the "constructive" aspect of the desiring process, the "multiplicities of the subconscious", as well as the "very closely linked" conceptions between desire and delirium, since the very act of desiring is always "to become delirious to some extent".⁴⁹ The obvious flaws to Deleuze and Guattari (in relation to governing foundations and conceptions) being that we actually "'*délire*' about" a world far more expansive than just the "familial".⁵⁰ And desire

⁴⁵ Deleuze, "*Désir*"; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 24-28, 49, 54-55, 86, 271, 305, 307, 334, 381; Seem xvii

⁴⁶ Deleuze, "*Désir*"

⁴⁷ Ibid.; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 1-3, 5, 7-8

⁴⁸ Deleuze, "*Désir*"

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

consistently “establishes itself in an assemblage, always putting several factors into play”, whereas other disciplines and assertions indicate a fundamental failure by always “reduc[ing] it to a single factor, always the same [one]”, each and every time “completely ignorant of what the multiple is”, in other words, previous explanations fail by fully lacking an accurate understanding “of constructivism, [...] of assemblages” and of the crucial roles that the productive, imaginative subconscious plays, as well as the always vital importance of context in relation to forming each of our complex desires.⁵¹

For all of these reasons, re-thinking our established premises regarding desire, for these philosophers ultimately means re-framing the discourse in a way that recognizes how desire is always an act of “production, not acquisition”.⁵² Because human desire isn’t ever born from lack focused on individual ‘objects’, (living ones or otherwise), but is instead the creative and productive activity of forming collective associations between multiple elements, which we then find incredibly alluring.

The elaborate assemblages of amorous and erotic desire explored all throughout *In Search of Lost Time* illustrate these ‘truths’ in Deleuze’s argument—and are some of the most captivating and revealing aspects of the literature itself. Just as in real life, each of the desires Proust shows his characters having for a loving romance or a life-partner, as well as the longings they’re depicted as constructing around purely sensual or lustful experiences, are usually such complex assemblages that the role of their primary human ‘object’ can’t ever be filled by ‘just anyone’. Nor could these liaisons ever bring any kind of true enjoyment to the desiring subject, if all the right details of the aggregate aren’t involved.

We see this complicated aspect play out repeatedly in the story, through Proust’s portrayals of situations such as Marcel’s anxieties and crushing disappointments related to his various attempts at love and lustful relations, based on very specific aggregates he forms. He has very particular assemblages and ideas around what it will mean to ‘possess’ Albertine, or to become close friends with his first love, the mysterious young girl Gilberte Swann. But his desires don’t come together in reality in the precise way that he envisions, so these huge discrepancies between what he wants and what actually

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 25

happens, rather than relieving the sufferings he thought they would, instead cause Marcel profoundly intense, newfound anguishes and torment.

The same is shown to happen with his platonic desires, when he's utterly shattered that idolized figures such as the famous actress Berma and the esteemed author Bergotte, also don't live up to the exact fantasies he imagines and builds around their images. Similar difficulties can be said about many a figure in this dramatic tale, including assemblages which I will later discuss in fuller detail such as those of the Baron de Charlus, specifically his anger, hurt and frustrations over his own love-life as well as failed attempts to satisfy very specific carnal desires at the brothel for instance. In each case, crucial details of these desire aggregates not being realized, or turning out to be something very different than what the desiring subject initially fantasizes or imagines, all pose disastrous difficulties for the stability of these ongoing desire assemblages that the longing subjects are portrayed as clinging to so fiercely, in addition to gravely affecting the pleasure and 'satisfaction' they anticipated.

The pages of Proust's story are full of examples of just how complex and important this notion of multi-'object' assemblages is to understanding desire. It's a feature this author reveals, without specifically asserting theoretical details on the actual desiring process in motion. Yet it's a consistent pattern that Gilles Deleuze identifies and expands on in his formal philosophical theory. The delusional, yet intensely powerful obsession that Proust's narrator Marcel is illustrated to construct around the Duchess, for instance, requires an extremely intricate mix of relationships between several different elements (both real and imagined), in order for this overpowering desire to arise within him.

This obsessive 'want' for her, forms specifically because of the ideas Proust's narrator is shown to associate in connection with this 'divine' creature. Ideas centred around her sumptuous and elegant aristocratic 'world', in combination with the noble, mythical Guermantes name, all of which Marcel connects not only to the profound exquisiteness of current-day Parisian high society, which enthralls him on its own, but which also invoke for the fictional narrator luxurious and fascinating imagery and moments in history that he reads about growing up, as well as impressions of art and the exquisite fashion *la Duchesse* is so notoriously famous for.⁵³ Overall, his constructed assemblage of the

⁵³ Proust, *TGW* 29, 47

Duchess de Guermantes is described by Proust in a way that it's obviously built around portraits of a life of made up of pure decadence, beauty, mystery and class privilege.⁵⁴ And with the goddess-like, imaginary "halo"⁵⁵ that Marcel adorns her with, as well as the Duchess' very real and established position as the most admired and respected woman in all of the Faubourg St-Germain,⁵⁶ it's clear from Proust's exploration that absolutely no one other than this seemingly immortal creature could possibly conjure up the same alluring images and associations for Marcel, or ignite these specific delusional yet desirous scenarios he produces around the mysterious Duchesse, as he envisions the enchanting 'world' she inhabits and is so powerfully drawn to it that the author has him create an imaginary connection between himself and her. One he engages with on a repetitive, daily basis and keeps alive, by literally stalking her every movement.⁵⁷

In this particular example of wanting, Proust makes it clear how this desire was creatively and repetitively constructed, not born from simply a void of sorts in Marcel's life. The author also makes it evident that nobody else could possibly fill that particular role of desirous human 'object' for Marcel. *La Duchesse's* crucial place in Marcel's heart and imagination as a person worthy of such obsessive admiration, is only possible, as the author cleverly demonstrates and as Deleuze so clearly theorizes, because of the entire context surrounding her. As an individual 'object' on her own, Marcel is actually quite disappointed by the reality of her persona, just as Swann is initially unimpressed by Odette. But through engaging the powers of active imagination and repetition which Deleuze stresses are so essential to constructing desire, Marcel is able to produce an aggregate of desire which powerfully surges through him and literally overtakes his entire life. So what we can see from this particular depiction, (as well as through many other examples in the novel), is that the human 'object' is in reality, only a living person that we fixate our desires on. But as Deleuze states, it's their relationship to the "landscape" which "envelops" them, that in fact makes all of these overwhelming desires possible.⁵⁸ This complicated interplay between multiple elements is absolutely crucial in all of our productions of desirous longings. And contrary to all the presiding theories of

⁵⁴ Ibid. 28-39, 47, 76

⁵⁵ Ibid. 9

⁵⁶ Ibid. 28

⁵⁷ Ibid. 69-75, 83-85, 189

⁵⁸ Deleuze, "*Désir*"

desire traditionally employed, which would simply explain this phenomenon within Marcel as either arising somehow from an innately dormant lack or as some kind of a spontaneous response to a particular lack, as well as proposing a direct trajectory from the narrator towards the Duchess, with no adequate explanation of why it is specifically her, who creates these sensations within Marcel, what we can see clearly through combining the work of Proust and Deleuze, is that our desires for 'another' are highly specific and much more complex. And they're always fuelled through the surge of a constructive, repetitive and extraordinarily imaginative process.

The quest for ultimate 'possession' of any desirous human 'objects' intentionally overtakes many a character in Proust's colourful story,⁵⁹ all of whom appear to view "[t]he possession of what we love [as being] an even greater joy than the love itself".⁶⁰ Swann is of course obsessed with the idea of completely 'possessing' Odette—and she initially feels a similar 'need' for him as well. Marcel is portrayed as overcome by intense desires to 'acquire' the living 'object' Gilberte (and her entire family in fact), in addition to the enchanting Duchess at a later time in life, as well as of course his eventual 'captive' Albertine. Robert Saint-Loup is defeated by a tortuous need to 'have' his cruel "twenty francs"⁶¹ mistress Rachel, after first seeing her on stage in an entirely different light than other men do. And the Baron de Charlus of course, becomes intent on the idea of "owning" the longed-for 'object' of his affection and desire, the savagely degenerate violinist and bi-sexual 'rent-boy', Charlie Morel.⁶² But what this author illuminates through such portrayals of these romantic and sexual pursuits, is that not even the successful 'acquisition' of their intensely desired person, is ever able to ensure all of the anticipated sensations these desiring subjects desperately hope for.⁶³ We learn this early on in the story, through Swann's legendary sexual and romantic saga with Odette, which is essentially replicated later by Marcel's equally tortuous love affair with his elusive 'captive', Albertine. All of which is, in a sense foreshadowed, through the prequel scene relating to the impossibility of 'possessing' another person, illustrated early in the novel

⁵⁹ Proust, *SW* 39-40, 322-331, *WBG* 188, 284, 503-511, *TGW* 82, 209-211, *SG* 563, *TC* 58-60, *TF* 637, 672, 676-679

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, *TC* 58

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, *TGW* 209

⁶² *Ibid.*, *TC* 58

⁶³ Proust, *SW* 51-58, 119, 486-495, 502, *WBG* 188, 284, *TGW* 205-244, *SG* 180-181

by young Marcel's dramatic 'need' and bittersweet attempts at the exclusive 'possession' of his mother, on the fateful night Swann visits.

The pain, failure and unanticipated dissatisfaction over attempted 'possession' of living 'objects' in this story, happens not only because physical 'control' of another human being doesn't equate to 'possessing' them completely, in any way. As we see clearly through Proust's exploration of desire, 'capturing' another person into some form of a relationship (as he portrays so many of his desperate characters trying to do), doesn't automatically take hold of the desired 'object's' heart, soul and mind as well. This type of 'acquisition' has no correlation to accessing or changing any of the thoughts and feelings inside another human being—as these are all things which can never truly be 'owned' by another person. Nor can this kind of 'possession' of anyone ever guarantee the reciprocal emotional feelings or the intense physical attraction in the desired 'object', that the desiring subject's assemblage usually includes. As Proust's narrator Marcel realizes: "The bonds that unite us to someone exist only in our minds".⁶⁴

What complicates the desire assemblages we form around other people, is that part of the sheer mystery of others is how they 'exist' and develop inside us in a sense, but of course in reality, evolve independently and externally from all of our own feelings and perceptions of them as well.⁶⁵ Unanticipated challenges and intense dissatisfaction are shown by Proust to occur repeatedly in this story, for all of these reasons, highlighting the real impossibilities of ever truly 'possessing' another human being. But massive struggles and discontent portrayed within the figures of the novel also ensue for the simple fact that each of the subjects' desires are always built around such intricately complicated multi-element assemblages and context, that in reality can never be fully 'satisfied' by simple 'object possession', in the lasting kind of way they all expect. Proust's depictions show us how every one of these characters build intensely elaborate aggregates of life-altering, deeply passionate longing, so complex in nature that the mere 'acquisition' of any desired primary 'object' could never even begin to fully address their true wants.

⁶⁴ Proust, *TF* 607

⁶⁵ Duguid

'Proustian Desire' exemplifies the complex and productive nature of desire that Deleuze theorizes, as well as the crucial importance that context, imagination and repetition all play, in the process of human desiring. Proust's colourful portrayals of desire also vividly demonstrate the fine line between desire and delusion, that Deleuze makes a point of stressing, as it's an aspect we see played out in the story repeatedly through a multitude of characters, such as Marcel, Charlus and Saint-Loup, as well as even via less developed figures such as M Legrandin. While the concept of lack doesn't play a role in Proust's overall presentation of the experience of human desire, there are however rare moments where his language might be interpreted to suggest otherwise. For example, when (through his narrator) he speaks of the anguish involved with amorous desire as something that must "drift, awaiting love's coming, vague and free" with no "precise attachment", all-the-while "at the disposal of one sentiment today" and "of another tomorrow [...]."66

Yet, these few instances where the author does seem for a moment to privilege the idea of lack or absence as responsible for generating desires, are mainly found in the earliest pages of the story. And often spoken by a young Marcel, who then continues his discovery process throughout the novel, attempting to better grasp the inner workings, 'essence' and true meanings of desire. Overall, these passages appear to serve more as an occasional reminder, of what the dominant concepts of desire insist on. And in this particular example, perhaps are intended to reinforce the notion that we first learn about all the complicated pains and pleasures of romantic and erotic desires, through similar experiences in our non-romantic/non-sexual longings. As Proust's novel progresses, he consistently displays desire in a way that more clearly corresponds with Deleuze's notion of it as productive, rather than originating from lack. So through these other inclusions, Proust seems to be exploring the contradictory and paradoxical nature of desire, as well as highlighting how well-established our perceptions that equate desire to absence or lack, truly are. Ultimately, his progressive treatment of desirous portrayals parallels in fact, the evolution of desire theory.

Deleuze and Guattari's work concurs with as well as formally theorizes the important philosophical notions alluded to, if not fully laid out, in this novel. A combined review of Proust's prose in relation to these assertions Deleuze and Guattari make, outlines for us

⁶⁶ Proust, *SW* 40

how a much more accurate way of viewing desire involves completely re-thinking it, seeing it: not as “a psychic existence, [...] not [as] ‘lack’, but [as] an active and positive reality, an affirmative vital force”, one which Deleuze describes as being “like labour in essence: productive and actualizable only through practice.”⁶⁷

Although desire often seems, both in this story and in our own personal experiences, to take on ‘a life of its own’, what Deleuze wants us to understand is that the energy of desire isn’t in fact an independent or detached entity in any way. It’s not something we have absolutely no control over. Regardless of how it appears or even feels and irrespective of the sheer power it’s clearly capable of forcing onto someone’s life, desire is nonetheless always produced by a desiring subject. Each time we experience it, desire is something we’ve actively created. So it’s imperative to dispel with these notions of desire as something forever resting within us, just waiting for the right ‘objects’ worthy of attaching itself onto. As Deleuze and Guattari make emphatically clear, within the discourse on desire the term ‘lack’ is an extremely misleading concept, one which initiates a whole host of other misunderstandings. “Desire never lacks [its] ‘object’”,⁶⁸ because desire doesn’t even exist until we actively assemble it. And this assembling takes place as we form elaborate associations between very particular ‘objects’, more specifically, the contextual relationships we either perceive between these elements, or can ourselves imagine existing. This intricate and constructive activity is what’s actually going on, when we refer to the incredibly complex process known simply as ‘desiring’.

When it comes to the intoxicating romantic, sensual or even platonic desires we form for other human beings, the contentious issue of ‘primacy’ (in relation to what is ‘absent’ from us) which philosophers have traditionally debated over, isn’t even an impeding factor to our understandings, once we appreciate our productive role in desire’s essence and characteristics: Often our powerful longings for another person are sparked by some form of a relationship we envision between that particular individual and other elements or ‘objects’ that also hold great importance to us. Proust illustrates clearly this reciprocal sequence of events, as we witness how the intense obsession that his character Charles Swann eventually develops for Odette de Crécy, ignites specifically because of very particular associations he forges between her and his greatest passion, the world of art.

⁶⁷ Gao 406-407

⁶⁸ Deleuze, “*Désir*”

In this particular relationship, it is exclusively Odette (rather than any other person), who acts as the primary human source of Swann's desire. She is never depicted as being desired independently though, separate from an elaborately assembled context. But Odette is described essentially as a muse for this devoted aesthete—one who prompts a powerful combination of longings within him based on uniquely striking connections to the artistic realm. And the described desire aggregate formed around her is so incredibly specific, that no other woman could possibly take her place.

But there are other instances in life, where we begin to progressively construct highly complex amorous, erotic or even non-romantic/non-sexual desires, without necessarily knowing or finalizing who the human 'object' in these assemblages will be. As these unique desires develop, evolve and become much more refined, this paramount human 'object' is later chosen by us as being a worthy and important piece of the longings we're assembling. We select them specifically for how ideally suited they are in relation to all the other elements of our desire aggregate that we're wishing for, connect with them, or can favourably imagine existing together.

Proust's narrator Marcel for example, always combines his "dreams of travel" with his reveries on romance, or even platonic relationships, imagining any potential lover or friend as one who can 'lead the way' for him into enchanting "unknown world[s]" and exotic destinations he has yet to fully discover.⁶⁹ The portrait of desires in Marcel's endless personal assemblages aren't always shown as being sparked by a particular individual. But rather, they're illustrated in such a way that they usually begin to develop primarily around an important landscape he wishes to experience, with someone else as well. In fact, his ultimate love affair, which in a sense dominates Proust's seven-volume narrative, involves of course the young woman Albertine who is (eventually) chosen out of an entire 'assemblage' of girls who catch Marcel's eye, while he's vacationing on the Normandy coast. Adolescent Marcel literally flitters his adoration first on one and then on another, of these mysteriously alluring young women, even questioning later in life whether he had in fact chosen 'the right one' from this enchanting 'little band' of girls.

Whereas Odette de Crécy is shown by Proust as absolutely crucial to prompting once-in-a-lifetime desire in Charles Swann, the portrayal of Proust's narrator is that he

⁶⁹ Proust, *SW* 119

often forms his intense longings for a love interest in essentially the reverse manner. The depicted characterization of Marcel shows that he regularly fantasizes about travel and historically compelling distant places, seeking instead an undetermined human 'object' to merge into these important desire assemblages. As he himself attests: “[...] there was always lurking in my mind the dream of a woman who would enrich me with her love”.⁷⁰ And as all the other elements of his adventurous desire aggregates begin to combine with each other and unfold, the author shows us how Marcel eventually chooses a female 'object' to then step into them—one who he finally deems worthy of involving in these incredibly intense, highly personalized fantasies, which are always built around other interests, pastimes and worldly adventures described as being so valuable to him.

What matters isn't whether it's a primary human 'object' or the other elements in our desire assemblages which are first to spark our interest. What's crucial to understanding the mechanics of desire is simply appreciating how both aspects are equally required in some form, (even if only in our imagination), in order for desires to emerge and take hold of us with the kind of intensity they so often do. And in truth, it's not so much a sequence of events where either a primary living 'object' or a 'landscape' dictates predominantly. More accurately, desire forms through our concurrent awareness of every one of these distinct elements they both envelop. Longings develop, as reciprocal exchanges and associations emerge in our mind through an interplay between these 'objects' which takes place, whether real or imagined. The very process of imaginatively and repetitively creating and envisioning this sought-after contextual relationship between ourselves, a primary 'object' and the other very particular elements so valuable to us, is exactly what the act of desiring is. So, as Deleuze asserts, the only thing ever lacking in relation to desire is “a fixed subject”.⁷¹ Because every single one of us desires. But we produce these various 'wants', rather than contend with them intrinsically. Lack doesn't generate human desire—context, imagination and repetition do.

Deleuze and Guattari's specific views on delirium and its close connection to desire aggregates are also quite relevant, specifically in relation to what Proust's work reveals. Even many years after *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze maintains that psychoanalysts “never understood anything at all about the phenomenon of delirium”, arguing instead

⁷⁰ Ibid. 118

⁷¹ Deleuze, “*Désir*”; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 26

that it's "exactly the contrary of what psychoanalysis" has always claimed.⁷² Deleuze insists that "the world of delirium" isn't something that should be attached to "familial determinants".⁷³ He further clarifies: "We don't go into delirium" about these factors; when someone becomes delirious, "one 'délires'" about something completely different than what is known.⁷⁴ The state of deliriousness, this philosopher resolves, is unfailingly about something "cosmic".⁷⁵ And this, he argues, is "the great secret of delirium: [that] we 'délires' about the whole world"—or perhaps more accurately, especially in relation to Proust's vivid characterizations, "about the [possible] ends of the world".⁷⁶

As Marcel Proust so carefully illustrates, desire, "revolutionary in its essence," equates on many levels to the act of becoming delirious.⁷⁷ The delirious obsessions central characters in this novel are painted to exhibit, are completely in line with and exemplify these particular arguments put forth by Deleuze: Charles Swann literally becomes 'another self', due to his obsessive desires for Odette and the entire world he creates around her. And it's exactly when he envisions this world slipping away from him, that he enters into an unprecedented, suspicious, deeply tormented and delirious state. The story's narrator and protagonist Marcel, repeatedly forms totally far-fetched ideas and delusions as well, exhibiting absolutely bizarre behaviour during each of his own intense love affairs throughout the novel. And as we recall, even as a child he does the same, whenever he's anxiously overcome by a tortuous 'need' and overwhelming desire for comfort, that only the soothing, exclusive 'possession' of his mother can perceptibly appease.⁷⁸

The delirious effect of desire isn't by any means limited only to the assemblages constructed by these two individuals though, indicating just how crucial a characteristic of desire aggregates Proust suggests it to be. Saint-Loup, an otherwise level-headed and rational character, completely loses all touch with reality during his increasingly volatile, jealousy-filled and all-consuming relationship with his aspirational yet rather

⁷² Deleuze, "*Désir*"

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid."

⁷⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 116.

⁷⁸ Proust, *SW* 39

cruel mistress, Rachel. And depictions of the Baron de Charlus by Proust, insightfully show how he transitions over time into a deliriously paranoid and vindictive partner to his cherished love-interest, Morel. Each of these fictional characters are shown by the author to assemble the elements of their passionate desires in such a way, that their entire personality and behaviour shifts, into what can only be interpreted by the reader as a delirious, life-consuming, utterly obsessive quest.

They're all shown to imagine real love being reciprocated, when clearly it's not. Or they're plagued by misunderstandings and perceive threats to the relationship with their coveted human 'object', that don't by any stretch of the imagination, even exist. On the other hand, Proust makes it quite obvious how they also ignore very evident, concrete warning signs related to their beloved, such as when they catch them in lies or other extremely suspicious behaviour. The characters in Proust's tale spend a great deal of their time trying to find out and prove that the love interest in their assemblage is being unfaithful or untrustworthy. Yet, once it becomes blatantly apparent they are, or they're confronted with any kind of truth that should register as a genuine concern and serious obstacle to a pleasurable, content relationship with this person, the desiring subjects often refuse to face it. They make up outlandish excuses for their special 'object' of affection, ignoring or reconciling these events through a completely delusional approach to their longed-for connection. And they're depicted as doing all of this, in an effort to keep their complicated journey of pleasure mixed with pain, very much alive—as they continue to breathe life into all these futile, yet highly addictive, desirous pursuits.

In each example of delirious longing that Proust carefully examines, what becomes obvious is not only that lack is in no way an adequate explanation for desire, but also that Deleuze's other theoretical claims are entirely correct as well. Witnessing the force of desire in action through Proust's in-depth characterizations, allows us to see how the subconscious truly behaves like a productive "factory" in each of these individuals, clearly showing how their desires are something assembled through their own efforts, rather than anything reflected.⁷⁹ This novel also exemplifies Deleuze's accuracy in terms of the importance of imagination and repetition when it comes to the creation of desires, as well as the expansive scope of elements that are involved, when everyone forms desirous thoughts. Proust explores the varied seeds of deliriousness that desire sows

⁷⁹ Deleuze, "*Désir*"

within every one of these characters, in addition to showing us how in each and every case, the formation of the subjects' delusional thoughts always extend far beyond the scope of just the individual their impassioned desires focus on.

By exposing these aspects and characteristics of desire, Proust carefully reveals a difficult truth which Deleuze gives thorough philosophical attention to: Our desires, especially those for coveted living 'objects', are far more intricate both in design and process than we realize or ever give them credit for. And when it comes to other people, we can never really 'know' these desire-worthy human 'objects' in the way that many of us strive to, or often believe that we already do. It's impossible to ever have completely full knowledge of the true motives and dispositions of other individuals, no matter how close we believe them to be. Our intimate experiences with others are, by their very nature, highly subjective and assumptive—as well as tainted both by our fantasies and our own fears, to the point that as Proust observes: “It is the tragedy of other people that they are merely showcases for the very perishable collections of one’s own mind.”⁸⁰

Deliriously possessed by passionate desires which are continuously assembled and propelled through active imagination and repetition, a number of the central figures in Proust’s novel are shown to regularly employ elaborate 'games' and strategies, all meant to deceive others, as well as ensure they experience their desired assemblages to the fullest degree possible, as they engage in these strategical attempts to completely win over the very special 'object' of their romantic or sexual interest.⁸¹ Throughout this story, the author illustrates how each fictional character constructs their entire existence really, around these pleasurable, yet also tortuous and invariably complicated, amorous and erotic desires. Extreme, highly intimate longings that take hold of them with such totality and ferocity, that just the mere thought of their powerful desires possibly never being realized, is depicted as feeling to Proust's desiring subjects like nothing less than, 'the end of the world'.

⁸⁰ Proust, *TF* 751

⁸¹ Proust, *SW* 318-319

Emmanuel Lévinas + Marcel Proust / Longing for 'The Other'

The profound longing we experience for another person and the intense obsessions so elaborately illustrated through the characteristics of 'Proustian' romantic and erotic desire, can also be theorized and explained in even greater detail by turning our attention to another highly original thinker. And rather surprisingly, to this philosopher's examination on how desire for 'another', in fact parallels on many important levels, similarly overwhelming confusions and longings for the divine. This particular aspect of his work compliments the theoretical claims asserted by Gilles Deleuze, as well as the fictional ideas related to desire so deeply explored by Marcel Proust. Integrating this additional independent source also further legitimizes the fact that a combined reading of Deleuze's work and the explorations of desire in Proust's fiction, share and reveal many interesting connections to each other. And this collective approach of three thoughtful yet very different examinations brings us another step closer to a deeper comprehension of Proust's narrative, as well as further enhances the overall goal of arriving at a more accurate, collaborative theory on desiring.

Emmanuel Lévinas speaks from within an ethical and religious framework when he seeks to differentiate the desire human beings have that moves or "[tends] toward something else entirely, toward the absolutely 'Other' [...] outside or beyond the realm of [a] finite being."⁸² But an aspect of his work can also be used to recognize important resemblances between these particular longings he's most concerned with and those formed around the people we find ourselves most powerfully drawn to. The point from Lévinas, is that we shouldn't equate our most intense and ineffable metaphysical desires for 'another', with our basic concepts related to 'need'. A deeply profound longing for a "superlative, elevated 'Other'" mustn't be understood as or treated identically as the types of drives-based desires constructed around hunger and thirst for instance.⁸³ They're not the same thing. But nor should this longing or "metaphysical desire" he refers to, ever be interpreted as something "situated beyond the pale of our everyday experiences".⁸⁴

⁸² Dalton, "Vaccination" 23; Lévinas, *Totality* 33

⁸³ Dalton, "Vaccination" 23-24

⁸⁴ Ibid. 24

The obsessive love affairs and intense sexual desires explored all through Proust's novel, while independent from the moral and religious arguments Lévinas was pursuing, nonetheless illustrate the relevance of similar assertions in vivid detail: The desires of Swann and Odette that Proust depicts throughout the story (as well as those of all the other desiring figures portrayed) are by definition metaphysical, in that they're innermost, conceptual desires. But they also parallel Lévinas' explanation of a metaphysical desire, which "expresses a transcendence [...] a move towards the transcendent."⁸⁵ What Swann, Odette and other key figures in this novel are portrayed as trying to do after all, is transcend to a new experience by way of the 'objects' of their desires—an experience which exceeds the satisfaction of their current realities. Swann is unknowingly reaching towards a more active and involved relationship to the art world, specifically through connections he forges between it and Odette. She in turn is trying to transcend into a more glamorous and respectable way of life, via the 'object' Swann and his guaranteed access to status and high society living. And Marcel is always aiming towards a realm of beauty, creativity, as well as of course literary and philosophical 'truths', through each of the amorous, sexual or even the platonic 'Others' that he fixates on. Every single other desiring subject in Proust's novel is too seeking a form of 'transcendence', through those they build potent longings for, because this wish for entry into an entirely other 'world' or state of being, is in essence exactly what each of us do, whenever we desire.

Whether referring to the desire for a spiritual relationship with the divine, or to a close relationship with a very much finite being, this movement and intense longing is not to be related to in terms of the desiring subject Lévinas asserts, but instead, "in terms of the trajectory of that desire, in terms of its movement towards the superlative and elevated 'Other'".⁸⁶ And this distinction is something which can actually be applied to all of our quests towards 'elevated' living 'Others', whether we're referring to a desire for a love relationship with them, or even to a carnal experience with no element of love either yet formed, or ever to follow.

Metaphysical desire is therefore distinguished, in that it moves "towards something else entirely, toward the absolutely 'Other'".⁸⁷ But as Lévinas clarifies for us: This

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.; Lévinas, *Totality* 33

“approach towards the human ‘Other’ [...] is [always] marked by the same absolute separation, height and distance”⁸⁸ as any yearning felt for a divine ‘Other’. The desires that Swann, Odette and numerous characters throughout this novel are illustrated to be plagued by, are just as mysterious and all-consuming as any spiritual or religious desire. In the case of Swann's intoxicating longing for Odette, the entire experience of being so powerfully drawn to her, both confuses him as well as alters his entire personality, as he constantly seeks to minimize the separation he continuously feels between himself and this longed-for courtesan.

Proust shows us how the same is true for all other figures in his novel as well: Charlus' in his deliriously powerful 'addiction' to the idea of her and Morel, for example, also is repeatedly aware of this agitating, unbridgeable distance from his love-interest whom he so persistently tries to 'conquer' and fully 'own'. And it's a feeling which totally baffles him, consumes his life and results in various schemes and 'wicked' plots trying to reduce the divide, by absolutely any way possible. In Marcel's anxiety-ridden chase to 'possess' Albertine, the narrator is illustrated to be persistently aware of a similar sense of 'height, distance' and an overall separation from her, while he's shown as constantly distressed not only over vivid ideas of where she is and who's she's been with intimately, but also due to his overall inability to access her thoughts and valuable 'essence'. The same can be said about Proust's character Saint-Loup, whose tortured, jealousy-filled attempts to truly 'have' Rachel controls every aspect of his life, with her consistently seeming intimately close to him in some ways, yet always still so 'out-of-reach'. These confused desiring subjects are all depicted as being constantly, painfully aware, of an ongoing and agitating separation between themselves and their longed-for special 'Other'. And clearly Proust intends for us to understand how, just as Lévinas' theoretical claims state, this alterity and provocative separation is in no way a sensation limited only to desires aimed towards any perceivably divine 'Other'. It's clear through the literary descriptions of these movements, that the coveted human 'objects' of Proust's desiring characters, feel to all of them equally unreachable and nearly as elusive.⁸⁹

Marcel Proust's characterized examples of amorous and erotic desire for these special 'Others' and particularly everyone's inability to 'reach', know or 'possess' the

⁸⁸ Ibid.; Lévinas, *Totality* 34-35

⁸⁹ Dalton, "Vaccination" 25; Proust, *SW* 137-139

'objects' of their longing, is a major theme throughout the entire novel—and one which he uses to highlight the many anguishing pains as well as the exquisite pleasures, involved in the profound act of 'desiring'. Proust's treatment of desire shares many central characteristics with Lévinas' theory on longing/metaphysical desire, particularly by providing the reader with repetitive examples of how: "We can never [quite] close the gap with this 'Other' towards whom our [desirous] longings are directed. The human 'Other' [consistently] remains just as absolutely [unreachable and unknowable] as any presum[ably] divine 'Other'".⁹⁰

But this separation between ourselves and the desired assemblage of 'objects' we yearn for, shouldn't ever be viewed as an obstacle to our desires, as it is traditionally. Cleverly conveyed throughout the novel, especially by way of the obsessive and agonizing longings experienced by his central characters, as well as theorized by Lévinas, we learn this crucial detail which confronts all favoured understandings. A deeper appreciation of the entire desiring process necessitates a reversal of popular conceptions and a firm realization that in fact, it is this provocative and always present "distance" in the "pursuit of the metaphysical", that actually intensifies, expands and propels all of our wants and longings further.⁹¹

In order to fully understand the assertions made by Lévinas, as well as for our overall goal of a more accurate appreciation of desirous longing, it's also important to note that this intensely profound desire for 'another' isn't ever to be confused with concepts such as "nostalgia" or "a longing for return" of any kind.⁹² Whereas those particular sorts of desires only and always strive to re-attain "what has been lost," Lévinas is instead speaking of the kind of wanting related to the forever unbridgeable 'Other', but also perfectly illustrated through Charles Swann's desire for Odette de Crécy: metaphysical desire itself, which is, in Lévinas' words, "a desire for a land not of our birth," a desire for "the always still 'Other'" and "a movement which is always directed away from the familiar."⁹³

⁹⁰ Dalton, "Vaccination" 25

⁹¹ Dalton, "Longing"; Lévinas, *Totality* 99

⁹² Dalton, *Longing* 20-22, "Vaccination" 25

⁹³ Dalton, "Vaccination" 25-26; Lévinas, *Totality* 33-34

The constant mix of agonizing and pleasurable experiences involved in the act of desiring, these “exquisitely painful”⁹⁴ sensations that Proust so often speaks of, as well as the repeated disappointments that eventually set in once the subject has presumably 'acquired' who or what they so passionately desire, are all aspects repeatedly depicted throughout the author's fictional story, via his elaborate characterizations and the vast array of relationships he so thoroughly explores. Proust illuminates all of these concepts related to the 'distant Other' that Lévinas clearly theorizes, most remarkably through the extravagant attempts M Swann repeatedly goes through trying to 'know' and 'possess' his precious longed-for Odette. And also through the narrator's similar efforts regarding all three of his unique romantic loves, which Proust paints as being perpetually situated beyond his grasp: Marcel's first amorous attempts for his version of an elevated 'Other' of course being for the mysteriously “inaccessible”⁹⁵ Mlle Gilberte Swann, followed by a youthful Marcel's delirious infatuation and fascination with the 'other-worldly' Duchess de Guermantes, both of which depict Lévinas' concepts of reaching towards someone and something unfamiliar, 'othered'—and clearly separated from Marcel. And of course these aspects fully apply to the narrator's final and similar excessive attempts, to capture the devoted affection of his elusive 'prisoner of love', Albertine Simonet.

These realities and challenges of desiring a special out-of-reach human 'Other' are interestingly explored in great depth as well, through Proust's revealing treatment of M de Charlus. Both the author's examination of life-altering desirous longings the Baron forms for his solitary love interest Charlie Morel, as well as those he creates around other male 'objects' central to his purely carnal desires, individuals who consistently represent a very specific 'lower' social standing than the classes and 'world' the Baron represents and regularly moves in. The same can be said of figures such as Marcel's close friend Saint-Loup, who forms absolutely debilitating longings for his manipulative and untrustworthy sex worker mistress, Rachel,⁹⁶ resulting in his constant suffering due to her repeated lies, outrageously flirtatious behaviour and in general, her “sadistic cruelty”⁹⁷ towards Robert. Saint-Loup faces incredible disappointments and in reality,

⁹⁴ Proust, *SW* 199

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 200

⁹⁶ Proust, *TGW* 157-161

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 239

ongoing torment, over this obsessive love, lust and total devotion to the “crafty”⁹⁸ and manipulative 'actress' Rachel, someone he desperately wants to live up to the fantasy assemblage he imaginatively constructs around her. But the author also explores these ideas, characteristics and corresponding possibilities that Lévinas speaks to in his own framework, by examining desires produced around strictly non-romantic or non-erotic exalted 'Others' too, such as Marcel's ongoing obsessions over various artists, authors and philosophers, especially the respected stage actress Berma and esteemed writer Bergotte. Both of whom the narrator so desperately idolizes—and both desires being eventually shown to result in momentarily bitter disappointment, once Marcel's longings to see and meet these revered and inaccessible 'Others', are finally realized.⁹⁹

These metaphysical desires explored by Proust always represent this same vital idea of 'transcendence' towards something alluring and entirely new. As Lévinas explains and as Deleuze and Proust's writing concurs with, the desiring subjects' focus isn't just about a living 'object', no matter how it seems, even to them. Their desires are, in reality, for some kind of intensely wished for experience, specifically in connection to the intricate and constantly revised assemblages created around these out-of-reach 'Others' and for a realm not yet fully realized or experienced, through the relationships these characters pursue. Proust's depictions of these details within the novel emphasize the crucial role of a sense of distance, similar to what Lévinas consistently refers to, as well as vividly illustrate Lévinas' assertion that metaphysical desire needs to be re-understood, as “a desire that [fundamentally can never] be satisfied.”¹⁰⁰

A distinctive aspect of his theory is that (not unlike Deleuze), Lévinas too rejects the traditional philosophical arguments of desire arising from a general lack and moving towards a solitary 'object' in its aim to be satisfied.¹⁰¹ This philosopher argues that this type of aching longing or "metaphysical desire", isn't meant to be “subsumed under the genus of desire as it has traditionally been understood”, meaning desire as something that is always defined as “a movement which seeks to re-stabilize itself by returning to a

⁹⁸ Ibid. 383

⁹⁹ Proust, *SW* 131-132, 136-138, *WBG* 15, 22, 165 *TGW* 39, 51-61

¹⁰⁰ Lévinas, *Totality* 34

¹⁰¹ Dalton, “Longing”

satiated state lost through exertion”.¹⁰² For Lévinas, desire arises in fact from a “fullness”, not due to a void or lack, but from a “super abundance”.¹⁰³ And it doesn’t aim towards “a particular ‘object’”, but instead “strives toward an indeterminacy, a kind of ‘otherness’, something which is always further afield than any [one] particular thing”.¹⁰⁴

This explanation of longing offered by Emmanuel Lévinas of course reconciles with the notion that dominant lack-based/‘object’-focused theories and popular/common understandings, both represent a massive failure in our collective attempts to accurately comprehend the true essence and complex mechanics of desiring. But even more importantly, his arguments are also highly compatible with better possibilities, with the far more accurate idea of complex multi-‘object’ desire assemblages, as well as desire acting as a ‘bridge’ into other ‘worlds’—all concepts formally theorized by Deleuze and evocatively illuminated by Proust.

A key detail to understand about Emmanuel Lévinas’ assessment of longing, is that desiring is an ongoing process with no end, or “terminus” to it—an argument which also compliments Deleuze’s description of the continuous and multi-directional “flow” of desire that in fact takes place.¹⁰⁵ And (unlike traditionally popular theories on desire), another crucial distinction for Lévinas, which also happens to correspond with Proust’s exploratory portrayals as well as Deleuze’s defined theory, is that metaphysical desire “doesn’t [...] promise any sort of satisfaction”.¹⁰⁶ These are both sentiments never fully understood by any of Proust’s imaginary characters, but continuously illustrated and echoed all throughout this fictional, yet deeply philosophical exploration of the puzzling paradox, ‘desire’.

The important difference here, is that Lévinas isn’t theorizing longing as a desire “which remains unsatisfied, [...] perpetually striving towards some satisfaction which it is [repeatedly] denied or delayed from attaining.”¹⁰⁷ Metaphysical desire is, instead, “by [its

¹⁰² Dalton, “Vaccination” 25

¹⁰³ Dalton, “Longing”, “Vaccination” 27

¹⁰⁴ Dalton, “Longing”

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.; Deleuze, “*Désir*”

¹⁰⁶ Dalton, “Longing”, “Vaccination” 27

¹⁰⁷ Dalton, “Vaccination” 26

very] nature insatiable”.¹⁰⁸ When it comes to our longings for ‘another’, with metaphysical desire: “There is no eventual unity between the desiring subject and any presumed desired ‘object’. [...]. Instead, [this particular kind of desire always] operates to maintain an insurmountable distance between the subject and its aim”.¹⁰⁹ In fact, the relationship exists in such a way that although the desire is a collective assemblage whose primary focus involves a specific ‘Other’, by Lévinas’ account (as well as asserted in Deleuze’s own theory), this ‘Other’ “keeps its distance and remains forever ‘too other’ to be reduced or defined as simply an object of desire”, in the way that traditional and favoured theories continue to argue.¹¹⁰

If the subject were to somehow fully reach this revered ‘Other’ whom their longing revolves around, in the way that their assemblages wish for, their desires couldn’t (and wouldn’t) be placated in any way, because metaphysical desire is “in its very essence incomplete”—and “not merely accidentally or because of the subject’s finitude.”¹¹¹ Metaphysical desire/longing doesn’t correspond with other expressions of desire in the sense that it’s not something which can be described simply as an unsatisfied need, in search of satiation. Lévinas argues instead, that these powerful forms of wanting need to be re-defined as existing outside of the binary of satisfaction and non-satisfaction.¹¹² Therefore, the desired ‘Other’ and the related trajectory doesn’t ever fulfill the ‘need’ or want a desiring subject has, but in reality, always “deepens it.”¹¹³ Through “its pursuit of the metaphysical this [kind of] desire [always] finds itself even more desirous, even more restless.”¹¹⁴

This is exactly the kind of insurmountable, all-consuming, progressively intensifying desire that we witness entirely throughout the pages of *In Search of Lost Time*. These arguments put forth by Lévinas concur with the explorations of both Proust and Deleuze, who illustrate through prose and philosophical theory (respectively), how in reality we all

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Dalton, “Vaccination” 26; Lévinas, *Totality* 99

¹¹¹ Ibid.; Ibid. 63

¹¹² Ibid. 25-26; Ibid. 23

¹¹³ Lévinas, *Totality* 34

¹¹⁴ Dalton, “Vaccination” 26; Lévinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers* 121

construct our desires in such a way that the experience of desire itself never has an aimed-for end to it—nor does it ultimately strive towards satiation. Certain desires (those involving our longings for special ‘Others’), simply can never be fully satisfied, nor are they meant to be. One presumably ‘fulfilled’ aspect of this kind of desire simply creates a deep ‘need’ for and often propels, the construction of yet another. As Proust shares in his novel: "There can be no peace of mind in love, since the advantage one has secured is never anything but a fresh starting-point for further desires."¹¹⁵

All of this brings to light this crucial realization, that what desire strives for in fact isn’t pleasurable satisfaction. Desire doesn’t aspire to conclude itself, by being fully satiated, in the way that drives do. It aims towards existence and continuation. Ultimately, human desire endeavors to “reproduce itself”.¹¹⁶ Thus, contrary to all dominant Western notions, satisfaction shouldn’t ever be understood as either the ultimate goal, or the ‘promise’, of desire. Longing, or metaphysical desire, is better understood through this flow, trajectory and never-ending path, as a collective assemblage of related, overlapping desires and as an ongoing productive activity, rather than as a single or even a series of attempts, at successful and satisfying ‘acquisitions’.

What we see clearly throughout the fictional and often dramatic, yet nonetheless relatable depictions in Proust’s novel, as well as the philosophical theories proposed by Deleuze and Lévinas, is that it’s impossible to ‘possess’ another human being, (or even a desired experience), in the same way that we take hold of tangible objects or fulfill our basic biological drives. This poses a requirement for the desiring subject to continuously strive towards further narrowing the divide between themselves and the unobtainable living ‘Other’, often forming completely new desires in the process, or simply refining the complex assemblages of their original ones all throughout this continuous journey. Moments of pleasure or satisfaction achieved along the way, are frequently short-lived. The subject’s metaphysical desires continuously evolve and get further clarified, as they attempt to bridge the gap between themselves and the assemblage produced around their desired ‘Other’, constantly endeavouring towards something which is in reality,

¹¹⁵ Proust, *WBG* 213

¹¹⁶ Žižek, “Desire”, “Suffer”

beyond the realm of any one specific person or thing—and striving towards something which is, in essence, never even fully attainable.¹¹⁷

The point for Lévinas being, that this constant longing, which as Proust shows us is punctuated by interludes of intense satisfaction as well as by moments of remarkable pain and disappointment—is something very different than a biological need or desire to satisfy our thirst or hunger for instance. For all of these reasons discussed, Lévinas urges us to make a very clear distinction and understand metaphysical desire for a longed-for 'Other' entirely "on its own ground," completely independent from innate drives and such movements aimed only at satiation.¹¹⁸ And absolutely separate from dominant theoretical assertions traditionally associated with the deceptively complicated experience that we refer to simply as, 'desire'.

Yearning for an alluring out-of-reach 'Other' is essentially an ongoing experience of pleasure mixed with pain. A crucially important shift in our thinking related to desire then, would be to perceive it as Lévinas does, as Deleuze's theory also supports and as Proust's fictional examples indicate, by recognizing our desires for the coveted 'Other' and these profound and life-altering longings for them, all as something better described outside of the typically perceived binary of pleasure and pain—and as an experience situated far "beyond [the dichotomous realm of] satisfaction and dissatisfaction".¹¹⁹

Just as Deleuze and Guattari identified very specific hazards with the "dangerous" deficiencies of presiding approaches to desire, Lévinas too takes these failures of dominant conceptions quite seriously.¹²⁰ The main problem Lévinas identifies with all the other theoretical approaches, is that when conceptualizing desire as something which: emerges from a 'lack'; aims at the possession of an 'object'; and anticipates 'satisfaction' as the end goal, there will always be a tendency to inaccurately interpret desire as having a satisfying and "determinate end" to it.¹²¹ This results in a constant quest for various 'objects' that we believe can appease all of our continuous longings. These are the significant perils that come from talking about desire as emerging in this manner as

¹¹⁷ Dalton, "Vaccination" 23; Lévinas, *Totality* 33

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 26; Ibid. 33-34

¹¹⁹ Dalton, *Longing*, "Vaccination" 27

¹²⁰ Dalton, "Vaccination" 27-28; Deleuze, "*Désir*"

¹²¹ Dalton, *Longing*

well as fixating on single entities, which we believe can provide us with some kind of ongoing pleasure, or final contentment. The danger of living this way, in Lévinas' view, is that the obsessive activity of constantly seeking out all of these 'objects', combined with an expectation of the pleasurable and lasting satiation they'll each provide, simply leaves no room in any of our lives for 'Otherness'. What he means by this is that when we fail to grasp the truly infinite nature of desire, our overwhelmingly consistent expectations of fulfillment take over our lives—and just don't allow us the time and space needed for an elevated relationship with any kind of 'Other', human or divine.

Deleuze, Lévinas and Proust all illustrate for us, each in their own way, how the trajectory involved with longing and our desire assemblages themselves, are both deceptively complex. So the hazard of such grave misunderstandings, Lévinas argues, is that perceiving desire not as "infinite" but instead as something which can be satisfied, inevitably "breeds a kind of reckless" mentality, as most individuals constantly try to find, achieve, or possess whatever it is that's 'missing' from their lives, without ever really knowing precisely what that is.¹²² If we can't identify the exact 'objects' towards which our desire is supposedly pursuing, (which we usually can't, due to the collective nature of these aggregates and the complicated trajectories always involved), then we repeatedly run the risk of trying to acquire and consume an infinite number of 'objects' in all our attempts to fill "what [we] presume to be "a hole" within us, persistently needing to be satisfied.¹²³

Most of us can relate to this experience personally, as well as repeatedly witnessing it in the lives of many others. And we also see this exact phenomenon occur all throughout the desirous depictions in Proust's novel through an endless array of different scenarios, where the author continuously unveils all the ways in which his characters are constantly distressed (many essentially destroyed), by an intense and perpetual need they have for someone, or some 'thing'. Proust's comprehensive treatment of desire allows us to see not only the intense pleasures involved with the activity of wanting, but he also seems intent on emphasizing (perhaps even more so it initially appears) the pains so central to desire as well, essentially calling attention to the huge 'price' we all pay—not because of

¹²² Dalton, "Longing", "Vaccination" 27

¹²³ Dalton, "Longing"

any inherently painful essence to human desire though, I would argue, but for not fully understanding the real nature and mechanics of it.

This is especially apparent in the novel through the toll that we witness unrestrained and misunderstood desire take on Proust's central figure Charles Swann, as well as the obvious demise throughout the story of the equally important character the Baron de Charlus, both men who of course suffer tremendous losses due to their desirous thoughts, choices and actions. They experience huge erosions not only of their own dignity and personal self-control, but also of their valued social standing in high society. And of course, much attention is given to the entire dramatic tale of the many ongoing desires related to Proust's determined narrator Marcel, whose life overall is depicted as one long thread throughout the novel of painfully-pleasurable anguish, as he pursues various loves, carnal relations and even platonic companionships, in addition to other valuable life experiences. All with seemingly blind abandon to what it is he's actually chasing—as well as with no real understanding whatsoever as to why his innumerable covetous quests aren't achieving the satisfaction for him that he so passionately expects. This remains true throughout all of his pursuits, even those in relation to the worship-like assemblages he constructs around his various idols, such as Berma, Bergotte and even M and Mme Swann themselves. And it's glaringly apparent from his earliest childhood desire for a goodnight kiss and the exclusive 'possession' of his mother, through to his passionate pursuits for the mysteriously privileged girl Gilberte, the other-worldly Duchess and of course, his most life-altering desire, for Albertine.

These persistent desires illuminated in the novel are always displayed by Proust as completely overtaking the desiring subjects involved, without the fictional characters ever gaining any real understanding for how the primary 'object' they're fixated on is in truth, only one important part of the equation in these incredibly complex assemblages they've constructed around them. It's also very clear from Proust's scrupulous exploration on the subject, that just like most of us, these fictional figures fail to comprehend the perpetually insatiable nature of desire itself. Or the fact that in reality, it is this 'separation, height and distance' from their 'elevated' desired 'Other', which actually gives intense life to their desires and fuels such a profound and formidable 'need' for each of them.

All of the characters throughout *In Search of Lost Time* desperately chase 'objects', especially living ones. And they're described by the author as doing so with a genuine

belief that suffering will cease and pleasure and happiness will eventually result, from their longed-for 'possession'. Marcel envisions all of his anguish disappearing if he can simply hide Albertine away in Paris, cut off from all the tempting vices he fears will 'ruin' her. Just as he pictures a certain kind of ongoing contentment unfolding, in a bizarre reverie of he and Gilberte living together, sharing a life where Mlle Swann acts as his 'little helper'.¹²⁴ And perhaps his most outlandish fantasies over 'possession' and the relief and security he believes it can induce, (a vision so detailed that it actually prompts the seeds within him for a novel), involves Marcel's delusional portrait of a blissful life 'saving' the Duchess. With his imagination in full gear and his desire clearly crossing that fine line between desiring and utter delusion that Deleuze speaks of, Marcel of course entertains a fantasy where he wishes for the Duchess "every imaginable calamity" and for her to fall "upon [grave] misfortune", so that "ruined, despised [and] stripped from all the privileges that separated her" from him and with "no longer any home of her own or people" to speak to, she would be forced to seek out the now "rich and powerful" Marcel, for much needed "asylum".¹²⁵

Much less dramatic than this imaginative daydream, which invokes "the greatest happiness" within Marcel, yet no less delusional, his close friend Robert Saint-Loup of course also anticipates bliss and a reprise from suffering, if he can only 'possess' Rachel in the way that his particular constructed assemblage outlines. And Charles Swann too, in the beginning, anticipates a beautiful and idyllic life with his cherished and believed to be 'rare' Odette. Even Charlus, fantasizes about an existence in which 'owning' Morel and everyone associated to him, brings him an intense amount of anticipated pleasure and satisfaction.¹²⁶ Proust even takes the time and space needed, to include the many expectations and the extent that desire has on characters we don't even come to know firsthand. Figures such as Odette's first husband who are mentioned only briefly, yet deliberately in a way that the reader becomes aware this man literally lost 'everything', over his desirous pursuit to 'possess' a pleasurable life with this coquette.

Undoubtably, Proust puts a great deal of emphasis on the role that 'possession' fills within each of the characters elaborate desire assemblages. Yet this celebrated author

¹²⁴ Proust, *SW* 582

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, *TGW* 82-83

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, *TC* 58

also narrates each of these figures in the novel as never truly content, even once the supposed acquisition of their primary 'object' takes place in some way. This is because, like all of us in real life, these characters can never really 'have' their desirous human 'object' in the exact way their fantasies imagined. Or even 'know' them on the level they presumed possible. And as we learn from both Proust's portrayals, as well as the two philosophical theories examined, all of these highly detailed contextual elements of the characters' desire assemblages, prove to be equally as important as the 'possession' of any person they become fixated on. Technically these individuals all achieve 'acquisition' in some way. But never being fully aware of the elaborate 'landscape' involved in their desire aggregates, means this version of 'possession' doesn't ever look or feel anything like how they always fantasized it would.

Proust's novel is full of descriptions of such pursuits. But these passionate desires for the human 'Other' are never depicted as arising simply from a 'lack'. Each and every time, we're shown by the author how they're produced from imaginative, highly complex longings for a "distant [...] elevated"¹²⁷ 'Other', within a fully comprehensive contextual arrangement, one which the desiring subject often isn't even truly cognizant of, until they experience the painful dissatisfaction of all the elements of their desire assemblage not coming together. Or the equally disappointing sensation of a desire being 'satisfied'—but then subsequently facing extinction and fading away.

Another extremely relevant detail with regards to Lévinas' work in relation to Proust's narrative, is that for Lévinas, metaphysical desire always represents "a certain kind of vulnerability and passivity" involved in the human experience of longing, because "it indicates the weakness of the subject to even satisfy [their] own wants and needs", thereby of course committing them to things "not within [their] autonomous grasp".¹²⁸ Certainly this particular kind of struggle is evident all throughout *La Recherche*, as the desire-related vulnerability of all characters, as well as their inability to "grasp" what is so profoundly desired yet not within their "autonomous" reach, is vividly highlighted and explored in unprecedented detail.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Dalton, "Longing"

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Both Lévinas and Deleuze raise issue with the fact that desires and biological drives haven't been thoroughly distinguished in the West's historically prominent theories and common understandings. Lévinas finds it reductive that our experiences of longing for an elevated 'Other', (human or divine), have traditionally been treated no differently than our most base desires, such as those for basic nourishment.¹³⁰ Ultimately he's responding to classic assertions in Western literature, philosophy and spirituality¹³¹ and the idea that there's some kind of a terminus to desire, that it can be 'satisfied' in some lasting way, is a position Lévinas finds totally inaccurate and deeply troubling.

Fundamentally, Lévinas is arguing from an ethical and spiritual framework, one where he views our longings for an elevated 'Other' and our perpetual feelings of restlessness and ill-content that we're all so familiar with, to all be evidence of something 'greater' than us at work.¹³² But his arguments regarding metaphysical desire have significant value for our examinations of Proust's prose and the mysterious 'essence' of desire, completely independent of any religious context. He himself stresses that this exact experience of "separation" and longing, this same "height" and "distance", is too felt by the desiring subject who craves for a living, breathing, finite 'Other'.¹³³ Although of course he associates these longings for a human 'Other' and their alterity, to ultimately be connected to a spiritual search for something 'greater'. We can clearly see evidence of metaphysical desire all throughout the history of human culture, as a central theme in many of our artworks, poetry, drama, literature and music, as well deeply engrained in the philosophical and religious doctrines passed down all throughout Western history. We're aware that there's something "fundamentally human to this experience" of longing and that desire in some form, has always existed.¹³⁴ But what we still lack, without examining thinkers such as Proust, Deleuze and Lévinas in the way that their work demands, is an adequate explanation of why those desirous longings form, or an accurate idea on how exactly the process of desiring happens.

¹³⁰ Dalton, "Longing"; Deleuze, "*Désir*"; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 25-27

¹³¹ Augustine, *Confessions* Book I 354; Dalton, "Longing"

¹³² Dalton, "Longing"

¹³³ Lévinas *Totality*, 34-35, 200, 297

¹³⁴ Dalton, "Longing"

What has also been consistently present in addition to desire itself, however, are the incredibly 'problematic' qualities Western cultures have always attached to it—as well as a continued absence of real understanding on how these huge misperceptions affect not only what we believe, but also how we behave. These significant failures have enormous consequences, not solely because of the grave misunderstandings we continue to pass down, but also for how we (not unlike Proust's characters) live our lives and make critical decisions, with all things concerning our never-ending desires.

For Emmanuel Lévinas, the only solution to the persistent philosophical 'problem' of desire—and one which aligns with Deleuze's arguments as well as Proust's explorations, is that we first “paradigmatically change” the way we look at it, understanding desire instead “not as emergent out of a kind a 'lack', nor moving towards any determinate 'object'” with 'acquisition' in mind, nor as something which can ever be satisfied.¹³⁵ It's only by us conceiving metaphysical desire as something “infinite”, that we can then realize how there's nothing that needs to be acquired or “consumed, nor nothing that can be” possessed or “consumed”, that's ever going to truly satisfy it.¹³⁶

The “proper outlet” for desire in Lévinas' view, is instead “an ethical relationship to the 'Other', both human and divine”.¹³⁷ And from his own philosophical standpoint, there's only a very thin line of separation between these two types of 'Others'. Proust's fictional saga of dramatic, all-encompassing, lust-filled romantic and sexual desires doesn't of course appear to be arguing for the same level of highly principled relationships that Lévinas' work ultimately contends. And yet, what's interesting about this stance even, in relation to Proust's work, is the how this novel's author does nonetheless put a great deal of attention on fictional depictions where the desiring subjects just can't seem to resist the idea of treating their wished-for 'Others' truly as 'objects', as well as the many 'unsatisfying' difficulties that arise from doing so.

Swann's intense infatuation with Odette, is born from the idea of her role as a conduit to the artistic realm that Charles holds so near and dear, rather than it actually being 'about' her directly. Even Morel, while strategically portrayed to all of society by Charlus

¹³⁵ Dalton, “Longing”, “Vaccination” 27-28

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

as something other than his sexually-desired partner and the one person he legitimately loves, is overall still perceived as an attractive prop of sorts and as an 'object' in Charlus' mind. One meant to satisfy all of his own personal desires, ideally in both public as well as private. With regards to the story's narrator, Marcel, Albertine is selected by him as just one of the many 'objects' he could in fact choose from, in the 'band' of young girls he encounters. And subsequently, she's thought of by Marcel not only as potentially 'interchangeable' for one of the others, when he finds himself unhappy with the reality of her, but also treats her as a captive 'pet' he tries to control, or hide away, more than as the mysteriously independent person he claims to want to know deeply. Gilberte Swann and the Duchess are also truly regarded as 'objects' by Marcel—ones both chosen specifically for their particular access into certain important 'worlds' Proust's narrator wishes to inhabit. Virtually everyone Marcel comes in contact with and all his desire aggregates, exemplify this kind of treatment of 'Others'. Even his assemblages involving platonic relationships are always produced in a strategic manner, consistently focused around what 'other worlds' these characters such as Odette, Swann, Saint-Loup, Elstir, Berma and even Charlus and Legrandin, can each bring him closer to.

The compelling parallels between the theory proposed by Emmanuel Lévinas, in relation to both Proust's novel and Deleuze's arguments, are many. And ultimately, Lévinas believes that only through this proposed paradigmatic change and by altering how we each approach and understand our interactions and expectations with special 'Others', can desire ever be "satisfied without being satisfied".¹³⁸ He argues that desire won't ever find its "end" there, but what it will find instead is a way of "resting within this restlessness".¹³⁹ It's only by way of such adjustments to all of our relationships that Lévinas believes any of us can ever find "repose" from our "constant striving and hungering after 'objects'", so he sees accepting these truths about metaphysical desire as the best option, one that will "protect" us from our own "drives and desires", as well as presumably, safeguarding us from the related pains of constant longing and inescapable dissatisfaction.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Dalton, "Longing"

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Dalton, "Longing", "Vaccination" 28-29

Towards a Collaborative Theory of Desire

What we can learn from combining a close reading of Proust's novel with the work of Lévinas, Deleuze and Guattari, is that the act of longing or desiring is "not to desire an 'object'" in response to lack as traditional theories insist, "but to be drawn into another world expressed by that 'object'."¹⁴¹ The primary 'object' in question isn't ever "desirable in itself, [or] because it substitutes for a lost former object, or [...] enfolds a void" as other dominant theorists assert.¹⁴² It is desirable specifically because of its quality of distant 'otherness'—and the highly detailed contextual assemblage we imaginatively and repetitively construct around this coveted 'object' we subsequently anguish over being separated from.

Traditionally, the primary human 'object' has of course always been central to our understandings of how and why intoxicating longings emerge within us. But we need to re-think this approach, comprehending that in reality, we don't actually desire them, per se. We long for a complete idea envisioned around them. The powerful appeal of the 'Other' is always intricately connected to the fact that they are the ones who consistently "open the gates", to whatever alluring "unknown world" we find ourselves profoundly drawn to.¹⁴³

These writers help us to identify the specific flaws in our long-established common understandings and theoretical assertions on desire. They show or explain how desire can't ignite just from lack, because desiring thoughts don't even materialize until we've assembled certain associations between an enticing, primary, out-of-reach 'object' and the entire setting or contextual relationship we wish to experience it in. And all this results not in longing for a solitary 'object' per se, human or otherwise, but a much more complex trajectory built around our wants than we ever seem to acknowledge, as well as a profound desire for an entire distant realm, that we find highly intoxicating in some magnetic way.

We're all very aware of the powerful longings that can overtake us and affect our lives, in such a profound and mysterious sense. But what these readings help us

¹⁴¹ Kerlake 51-52

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Proust, *SW* 119

understand, is that by producing desires, we actually create these feelings of needing, wanting, or 'lacking' something. Impressions that we've been told to understand as just an innately painful and pleasurable aspect of the human experience. What's imperative for us to grasp and what a close review of Proust, Deleuze and Lévinas makes clear, is that first we begin constructing desire—then and only then, do we fully experience the agitating sensations of what is separated from us.

Even more valuable than explaining the failures of dominant perceptions on desire, what a combined reading of Marcel Proust, Gilles Deleuze and Emmanuel Lévinas offer us are much better explanations and possibilities to explore, with regards to the source, process and characteristics of human desire. They provide observations and theories that actually respond to the confusing contradictions we face around the ongoing 'problem' of desire—ones that can address pertinent questions which ultimately yield far more insightful understandings about its 'essence'. Collaboratively, their work can help us unfold many of the mysteries surrounding the profound human experience of desiring, illuminating insights for us such as how and why we each experience intense desire for some 'objects', yet nothing at all for others. Or how it is we actually come to form such overwhelming longings for certain individuals, 'things' and experiences, which perhaps initially had no draw for us at all.

They also aid us in unfolding the mystery of why our romantic, erotic or even platonic desires for some people manage to sustain, indefinitely, while the prior intense longings for others fade away, or transform into something new entirely. Their work can even help us address the perplexing question of how it's possible for previously extinguished desires to sometimes return. And perhaps most interestingly and an important aspect I aim to explore later in the more in-depth detail that it deserves, a collaborative theory of desire built from these thinkers can finally address for us the crucial but largely ignored question, of how our desires can endure even for 'objects' that result in our pain and suffering. And why they in fact often intensify after experiencing not only pleasure, but also pain from them.

Proust's literary work *In Search of Lost Time* brings the theoretical framework of these philosophical arguments to life, in vibrant detail. Applying this exploration of desire to named characters, while fictional, still dramatizes these concepts and ideas for us in a relatable way, ultimately, allowing us to connect to them on a much more intimate level.

Overall, this author demonstrates how these combined arguments by Deleuze and Lévinas might actually 'look' in real life desiring scenarios, as well as illustrating how their theoretical assertions offer a vastly more accurate and satisfying way of understanding the utterly complex experience known to us as 'desire'. And the elucidating exchange between Proust's fiction and formal theory is indeed reciprocal. The work of Deleuze and Lévinas in turn, uncovers thinly veiled patterns and concepts more ambiguously approached throughout the novel. Their theories lay out for us the most vital and complex ideas explored so thoroughly, yet also somewhat elusively by Proust, in his novel *In Search of Lost Time*. Through it all, we're able to arrive at a much more precise appreciation of the true essence of desire, as well as the complex journey that it takes us on.

'Proustian Desire' is a commanding force, replicating real-life experiences where the desiring human subject becomes utterly consumed by their intense longings and the idea of penetrating the distant, mysterious 'worlds' of their wished-for 'Other'. Each of the characters in this story are depicted by Proust as experiencing the intense pains, but also the welcome pleasures, of wanting, producing intricate desires based not only on the coveted 'objects' of their affection, but also built around everything they as a desiring subject personally value most in life. Only by comprehending the full desire process and characteristics, as a collaborative review allows us to, as well as appreciating just how many different elements are actually 'wrapped up' in each one of our desires, reveals exactly why desiring can be such a powerfully intense, life-altering experience.

The longing for a distant and elevated 'Other' that Lévinas describes as existing beyond the realm of any one specific thing, is (also) in Deleuze's words, always for a "landscape" that we "can feel—one that envelops" that person.¹⁴⁴ Ultimately desires form because of what a subject believes to be possible, even if only remotely so. As Deleuze reminds us, desiring is simply "belief in an aggregate with two terms", for example "woman and landscape".¹⁴⁵ So a more precise description of sexual or amorous desire is instead a particular belief in an assemblage always involving both the person as well as other vital contextual elements, which together form a relationship that allows for the emergence of our powerful desires for an 'Other'. Our highly desired realms always

¹⁴⁴ Deleuze, "*Désir*"; Kerslake 51

¹⁴⁵ Deleuze, "*Désir*"

include both these factors, as Deleuze explains, a primary “object” and a “landscape” that the subject’s desires regarding their select human ‘object’ have been elaborately constructed around.¹⁴⁶

So desire is always for a larger realm. A domain where the desiring subject yearns to join these 'objects', physically, emotionally or metaphorically. As we see from Proust's work as well as that of Deleuze and Lévinas, this longed-for realm can be something in existence already, that the subject wishes for access to. Or it can be an entirely new 'world' constructed by the subject, through a combined effort of their passion and reason, but ultimately through repetitive acts of imagination. These desired 'universes' that each of us regularly construct are by no means a reflection of intrinsic or repressed desires however, but are instead, always imaginatively and newly created assemblages that the ongoing, productive activity of desiring generates.

Philosophically we isolate these ideas for purpose of clear discussion. But in reality, the characteristics of a living, breathing 'object' and their associated 'landscape' are so deeply interconnected, that we shouldn't ever see or think of them as truly distinct from one another. Regardless of the perceived focus on 'object' whenever we discuss desire, the coveted 'Other' in Proust's literature is never isolated or separated from their contextual landscape, just as Deleuze and Lévinas theorize. Desire is always for this collective association. Neither element is ever specifically desired independently from one another—because when it comes to the act of desiring, context is ‘everything’.

Desire emerges in relation to a powerful and profound wish to transcend into a 'world', where an elevated primary 'object' does or could exist in some way, but only and always in connection with other very specific elements seen as valuable by the desiring subject. As Proust's narrator Marcel states, he “always imagined the woman [he] loved in the setting [that he] most longed at the time to visit”.¹⁴⁷ It's this creative and imaginative interplay between a vibrant context and our mysterious, distant 'Other', that collectively generates and fuels all of our burning desires. Longings which intensify, through the repetitive flow of making and refining these complex associations.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Proust, *SW* 119

Profound desire for this revered 'Other' that both Lévinas and Deleuze speak of and that Proust's story so vividly exemplifies, is always heightened or intensified as well, by the overwhelming sensation of distance and separation between (1) the subject, (2) the primary 'object' they've become focused on and (3) all the other elements involved in the assembled context they're so desirous for. It is this experience of an acutely present space between the desiring subject and the longed for other 'world', as well as the complex and ascending "trajectory", the productive, continuous "flow" between themselves and all the wished-for elements—that truly represents the active, creative force commonly known as 'desire'.¹⁴⁸

These explanations offered by Deleuze and Lévinas seem especially accurate with regards to romantic and erotic desires, as the novel unfolds for us one extreme example after another of the required 'separation, height and distance' that Lévinas' refers to, as well as Deleuze's succinct assertion that "the desire for a woman is not so much a desire for the woman" herself, as it is for a "landscape", for an environment "that is enveloped in this woman."¹⁴⁹

This intense metaphysical and/or physical longing for 'another' and for the magnetic, ineffable 'world' we associate with them, involves a complex mix of distressful yet also pleasurable sensations of separation. Experiencing this ever-present divide, from not only the elevated person but also everything valuable to us that they envelop, is exactly what supports the creation of powerful romantic and/or sexual fantasies, as evident all throughout Proust's work. Propelled by both passion and intellect, our imaginations are able to construct whatever vision each of us determines appropriate with regards to both the coveted individual and the associated landscapes that we hunger for—and this continued production of fantasy is part of what keeps desires 'alive' and having such an immense effect on our lives.

The characters within his novel all find themselves desperately reaching for strong connections with, as well as 'possession' of, the desirous human 'objects' each of them crave. As 'tortured' desiring subjects, their assemblages involve complex attachments not only between self and their primary 'object' of desire, but also with the exact contexts

¹⁴⁸ Dalton, *Longing* 327, "Vaccination" 24, 27; Deleuze, "*Désir*"

¹⁴⁹ Deleuze, "*Désir*"; Kerslake 51

they imagine experiencing a pleasurable life with this individual in—and the related provocative separation they feel, between themselves and the specific ‘world’ they desperately desire to merge with that alluring person in.

Throughout the entire novel, we see that ‘Proustian Desire’ depicts an overwhelming number of relationships intently focused on the idea of ‘possession’, or more accurately, obsessive attempts to wholly ‘possess’ the desired, revered ‘Other’:

Among the modes by which love is brought into being, [...] there are few so efficacious as this gust of feverish agitation that sweeps over us from time to time [...] the [...] anxious, torturing need, [...] an absurd, irrational need [...] the insensate, agonizing need to possess [someone] exclusively.¹⁵⁰

But an extremely revealing aspect of Proust's work is that true ‘possession’ of a living human ‘object’ in every sense, is never depicted in this story as something that’s actually possible. Nor is physical ‘possession’ of them ever displayed as a satisfying conclusion, or as a resolution, to any of the characters’ desires. This fact is thoroughly depicted, highlighted through Swann's intense desire for Odette of course, in addition to Charlus and Morel, Saint-Loup and Rachel, as well as via the agonizing relationship Marcel embarks on, with his mysterious but deceptive ‘captive’, Albertine.

Proust cleverly illustrates and very carefully elucidates, how the goal of desire isn’t ever really to ‘attain’ the (human) ‘object’ as dominant theories argue, however, but is instead to experience everything associated with that ‘object’. To be transported into a desired ‘universe’ by virtue of this living, breathing, primary ‘object’. Although at first glance the prime focus of desire in this narrative may appear to be oriented towards ‘possession’, Proust skillfully reveals that ‘acquisition’ isn’t in fact desire’s ultimate intent. Nor does it yield lasting satisfaction for any of the desirous figures in this novel. In truth, desire strives for nothing more than to actively exist—so ‘possession’, or ‘acquisition’, should never be understood as a positive fulfillment of desire, but instead as the primary activity which “interrupts”, or puts an end to most of our desires.¹⁵¹

Desiring is more accurately defined not as ‘lack’ or a response to ‘lack’, perpetually focused on ‘acquisition’ and ‘satisfaction’ through single ‘objects’, but as a constructed,

¹⁵⁰ Proust, *SW* 326-327

¹⁵¹ Žižek, “Desire”

repetitive, progressively intensified longing to enter a distant, seductive 'world'. And as we see vividly through Proust's narrative, this goal of transcendence is often attempted by the subject and made possible, only by penetrating the enigmatic life of another human being. As we repeatedly witness throughout this novel, the close association with other individuals is regularly seen by the desiring subjects as a viable path towards their deepest, most heartfelt wants. This is the case for a wide range of relationships depicted through the pages of Proust's story, as characters 'use' each other to achieve their own personal goals and desires, especially those involving a sexual, amorous, or even a platonic relationship that they become fixated on. So it becomes clear that desire isn't ever truly aimed at 'possession' of the person they long for and constantly obsess over, but more accurately, the primary 'object' of their longing is a conduit to whatever 'place' or 'otherness' they themselves desperately wish to penetrate and experience.

Through a combined review of the literary work of Marcel Proust and the philosophical theories put forth by Gilles Deleuze and Emmanuel Lévinas, we can now understand how desire for someone or something is always a complicated assemblage we construct, imagined and built around experiences far too complex to be reduced to the idea of simply pursuing any kind of absent 'object'. Collaboratively, their work reveals that whatever we desire metaphysically, needs to be perpetually situated beyond our reach in some way, for desire to arise and remain active. We also learn that no-one is ever desired in the abstract sense. Rather, human 'objects' represent a 'world' separated from us by a certain amount of space and desired within an elaborate context involving multiple other 'objects', as well as very specific associations. All of these elements combined, form our complicated and elaborate 'aggregates' of desire. And while a certain 'distance' between us and the realm involving this coveted 'object' absolutely fuels our desires, it's crucial not to confuse this idea of 'distance', with 'absence'.

Proust's narrative is theorized through these philosophical lenses and concepts regarding desire assemblages, as well as metaphysical longing for a distanced, elevated 'Other'. And his prose illuminates these theoretical arguments in a way otherwise not possible, solely on their own. Collectively, they clearly show how it's never only a person as a single isolated 'object' who are so desirable to us. More precisely, it's that special coveted human being, but specifically, how we perceive or imagine this individual in combination with a multitude of connections they have, to all the other things, people and experiences we find incredibly valuable, meaningful or pleasurable. Our desires take

shape because of how we envision these individuals existing—not independently, but in association with other elements we also value, as well as within certain environments, situations and moments in time. As much as our love and desire always appears to be focused on this single human ‘object’ themselves, it’s never really just them we have desire for. The ideal partner for any one of us is always a sum of these parts. And when it comes to love and sexuality, or even friendships, whether we’re aware of it at the time or not, who we desire is always someone who (in our view), possesses some important potential for our own personal ‘transcendence’ as well.

Eros and the desired ‘Other’ is always a bridge for us into these other realities we perceive and desperately want to experience fully, or realities we intensely wish to create. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari: “We always make love [to] worlds,”¹⁵² highly complex ‘worlds’ which our desires construct by imaginatively and repetitively connecting the past, present and future and by drawing on a multitude of situations, experiences and ideas, both real and imagined. Our longing is actually not so much for the primary human ‘object’ that our desires seem to be fixated on—but more accurately, for an assembled realm of fantasy far beyond any one ‘thing’ or individual. And for the intricate combination of very special ‘objects’ and experiences, that we believe loving or desiring a particular person, will give us access to.

¹⁵² Deleuze, “*Désir*”; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 294

Chapter 2.

'Proustian' Desire / Assemblages of Longing

As a fictional piece of literature, Proust's work is more inquisitive and exploratory, than it is insistent on positing any hard 'truths' about the nature or process of human desire. But even with any firm, singular stance on longing being notoriously elusive from this work, what does seem indisputable is Proust's very intentional portrayal of the sheer complexity of our desirous longings. It's an overarching characteristic largely ignored, or at the very least not given the significant thought and weight that this central aspect of desire deserves, in our discussions and theoretical assertions regarding this powerful force we all contend with on some level.

These mechanics involved in assembling longing and the complex conditions needed to both form and uniquely shape each of our desires, are intimately explored by Proust through a vast assortment of fictional characters, arranged in situations that force the reader to acknowledge other explanations and possibilities for desiring, than what we've typically understood. Proust's novel delves deeply into the complicated nature of human desire and the relationships between a myriad of elements needed to be involved before desires can even form.

A close reading of *In Search of Lost Time*, in combination with the theories proposed by Lévinas, Deleuze and Guattari, vividly illustrates how other human beings are repeatedly a potential bridge into these other 'worlds' that the characters in Proust's novel so desperately wish to penetrate. Their intense desperation for the coveted human 'Other' always appears to be intently focused on that particular living, breathing 'object'. But as we peel back the layers of how their desires are both ignited and fuelled, (as well as how they're extinguished), we can clearly see that Proust is demonstrating how all of the characters' longings are exceedingly more complex than simply wanting, craving or yearning for any specific individual.

Odette de Crécy

Odette's initial desire for Swann is portrayed by Proust as being constructed around the sophisticated lifestyle, financial security and opportunities for social acceptance that a close relationship with Charles Swann would afford her. Upward social mobility and establishing her own Parisian salon where 'smart' and 'fashionable' visitors all wish to attend and participate, is depicted as being at the heart of this courtesan's deepest desires.¹⁵³ Because of that, each of those details are intended by the author to be understood as crucial elements in the fictional assemblage of desire she forms around Swann—and the trajectory towards that apparent quest of 'possessing' him.

While the novel never fully explores any of the deeper feelings of Odette, at the same level it investigates those of Swann or other desiring male subjects, or even some of the more humorously eccentric women in the story, I would argue that this intentional literary technique only serves to emphasize Swann's own inability to ever truly know Odette in any significant way. It also reinforces the idea of Odette primarily as an 'object' of desire in this story, rather than as an independent being who also possesses her own incredibly complex personal desires, beyond only the calculated ones the reader is privy to.

What we do know for certain from what Proust shares with us, is that the fictional Mme de Crécy craves a luxurious life and strategically encourages Swann to improve his writing, in order to attract the coveted salon attendees she wishes for so desperately. The author also makes it well known that because the character Odette doesn't believe Swann would ever be willing to marry his mistress, she presumably 'traps' him into doing so, with her pregnancy of their daughter Gilberte. Despite her initial interest in him, it's critical to note that the figure Swann isn't ever meant to be understood as a person that Proust's character Odette desires for his own 'self'. More accurately, what he signifies for her, is a representation of all the other 'things' and experiences she wishes for most in life.

It's clear through Proust's depiction of Odette that she never experiences the same obsessive, agonizing, tortuous love and desire for Charles Swann, that he's consistently portrayed as finding himself prisoner to. In fact, the lack of tension within this feminine

¹⁵³ Proust, *WBG* 50-59, 113-125, *SG* 197

Proustian character is blatantly obvious. And the story unfolds in such a way that once she lures this sought-after bachelor Swann in and 'hooks' him, achieving her ultimate desires and ensuring her improved place in society, she's depicted from this point forward as simply not having the same desires or romantic interest in anymore. This is because, as Emmanuel Lévinas argues and Marcel Proust illustrates through elaborately defined characterization, Odette is no longer separated from this desirable figure Swann by the 'height and distance' that metaphysical desire demands. But it's also due to the fact that independently, Swann isn't meant to be understood by the reader as a great 'object' of desire for Odette, in any way. Meaning, her original desire doesn't arise out an interest in Charles Swann himself as a man this character could actually fall deeply in love with, in just any life situation or environment. These longings are portrayed by Proust instead, as a desire Odette constructs in a very specific context. One involving a special 'world' she desperately wishes to inhabit, which also just happens to involve the idealized 'object' M. Swann, for really no other reason than he is a pleasurable way for her into this particular 'universe' she longs for so intensely.

In Odette's case, Proust give us plenty of evidence throughout the story that Swann could easily be replaced for her by another living 'object', as long as that person also allows her access to the 'world' she so greatly desires to make her own.¹⁵⁴ And in fact, Proust indirectly makes it clear that Swann himself was essentially a replacement for a previous husband she completely 'ruined'. Odette does in fact form similar desires around many others in the story, some romantic or sexual and others strategically platonic. But what these Proustian depictions of Odette's longing all share in common, is the possibility for some powerful form of 'transcendence', just as Lévinas' concepts explain.

What's interesting to note about Proust's intent in illustrating this love affair, is that it isn't even really Odette's seductive efforts and coquettish charms, which ultimately create burning desire in Charles and forge the powerful bond between these two lovers. This author portrays a story where it's actually through a combination of Odette's seduction of the 'object' Swann, as well as the elaborate desire assemblages that he himself creates, (independent really of her own efforts), that she is eventually able to achieve her true desires of 'infiltrating' French high society to a certain degree—and

¹⁵⁴ Proust, *SW* 431, *TF* 773, *TR* 480-482

living the decadent, fashionable, salon and travel-filled lifestyle she so desperately covets.

This is an intriguing detail of the novel because it reminds us of the challenges in treating other individuals simply as 'objects'. We see very clearly through this prose how human 'objects' have their own desires, as well as their own free-will to respond to our longing for them in whatever way they themselves chose. Odette is depicted in Proust's narrative as a highly skilled seductress, a woman well-versed in the 'art' of manipulation and a variety of coy games, all aimed at attracting and seductively charming men. She employs these 'talents' regularly, using them especially as a tool for provoking jealousies within various gentlemen, cleverly meant to further the distance between herself and the desiring subjects—all of which only fuels their burning desires for her even more.¹⁵⁵

Odette's own back-story is eventually revealed by Proust of course, intentionally with just enough detail to learn that from her earliest days she herself was treated as an 'object', (literally sold by her own mother). So presumably in turn, this likely produced an understanding within this character that all people are meant to be used for one's own gain. She clearly demonstrates an ability to seduce Swann on some level at least, completely on her own: Once "[...] she gave him a smile that told him she was entirely his"¹⁵⁶, Swann's addictive love-sickness "was no longer operable".¹⁵⁷

It's entirely plausible that perhaps something about Odette's early attraction to Swann is meant to be portrayed as an element that draws him towards her as well. Proust does suggest that her initial feelings for him do create some form of desire within Swann:

[A]t the time of life, tinged already with disenchantment, which Swann was approaching, [...] a man can content himself with being in love for the pleasure of loving without expecting too much in return [...]. In his younger days a man dreams of possessing the heart of the woman he loves; later, the feeling that he possesses a woman's heart may be enough to make him fall in love with her.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Proust, *SW* 106

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 424

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 439

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 277

But this excerpt is actually better understood as part of the exploratory nature of Proust's work and his thoughts on the complexities of human desire. And even that particular element, (her attraction for him) alone, needs to be seen as simply another part of Swann's own assemblage, rather than as an independent source of his desire. It's also important to note that this (albeit fictional) love affair, didn't at all begin as the kind of 'disenchanted', comforting, just 'settling' for 'someone who might love him in return' kind of relationship, that Proust refers to in that specific passage. Swann's life circumstances certainly aren't depicted by the author as being desperate enough to fall this hard for a woman so contrary to his tastes and desires on every other level. And the author makes it very clear that there's no way Odette herself, independently, could have ever created the intense desire for her within Charles Swann, that eventually emerges in this tortured character. Her acts of seduction contribute to it. But Proust clearly tells a story of how it's Swann himself who assembles this profound longing which takes him down such a turbulent path, of life-consuming obsession for a member of the demimonde referred to by others as a scandalous and "wretched" creature and "a woman of the worst type".¹⁵⁹ And in their particular dynamic, it is in fact Swann's own personal desires which actually propel the possibility of Odette finally being able to achieve her own. The result of which is of course the fading and eventual demise of any desires she once had, related to Swann, as well as the inevitable need for her to then produce entirely new longings, once the disappointment of 'satisfaction' fully sets in.

Charles Swann

Entrance into an ideal, desired 'world' is depicted by Proust as absolutely essential to Swann's attraction for Odette as well, a formidable desire we witness evolving despite there being no apparent reason for it to ever transpire.¹⁶⁰ What the combined reading of Proust, Deleuze and Lévinas can highlight for us, is that just as in real-life relationships, neither Swann nor Odette really desire just the 'Other' specifically. Neither living 'object' is presented as someone who the subject actually wants, 'needs', or loves, independent from their important context. What's explored through the intimate saga of Swann and Odette, is the fact that longings form within us all not for the actual person our desires

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 26, 45

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 276

appear to be fixated on, but instead, for that distinct, primary, out-of-reach human 'object' as part of an entire assemblage of interconnected elements, which collectively, always represent an idea far beyond any one specific person or 'thing'. Ultimately, it's suggested by Proust that what Swann and Odette are both craving, is the alluring life and desirable 'worlds' that each passionately believe can be entered through a close association with this other person, as well as the addictive combination of pleasure and pain, involved in the journey of getting to that 'place'.

The elucidating exchange between the comprehensive theories put forth by Deleuze and Lévinas and the nuanced prose throughout *In Search of Lost Time*, help unravel for us exactly how this process of constructing desirous 'worlds' and highly individualized context-driven assemblages happens. Through these fictional characters, Proust's novel illustrates the complexity of what takes place within each of us, revealing detailed new possibilities on how the activity of desiring actually works. More specifically, he shows us how these powerful desire aggregates formed around a distant 'Other' love interest are able to come into existence, expand and eventually transform, or fade away.

One of the most compelling examples of metaphysical desire for an unreachable, 'elevated', finite being, is expressed through these tormented yet intensely passionate desires that Proust's figure Charles Swann is shown to experience for Odette de Crécy. The entire process is shown by Proust as a metamorphosis of sorts, as M Swann begins to construct a deeply impassioned, eventually obsessive and utterly life-altering desire for this demimondaine. In time, Swann perceivably comes to hold her in such high regard, that he seems totally oblivious (or at least gives little weight) to the disapproving opinions of others in this story, who instead see Madame de Crécy as a very unsuitable and unworthy match for this eligible, distinguished gentleman and in fact, continue to view her more or less as "a prostitute".¹⁶¹ The author carefully guides us through the complete transformation of Swann's feelings regarding 'The Lady in Pink', all of which is shown to happen of course after he begins to associate their time spent together with an extremely moving piece of music he adores and once he comes to connect Odette to the beloved artistic world, viewing her as an exquisite work of art herself and as a perfect

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 26

representation of idealized feminine beauty, as seen through the eyes of those he most admires.¹⁶²

But even before any of these connections or associations take place within this character, the author illustrates how the stage for Swann's once-in-a-lifetime desire assemblage is primed by external sources, indicating to the reader how others may not be able to construct our desires for us, but certainly can play a vital role in influencing how we ourselves produce them: When Swann is first introduced to Odette by the Baron de Charlus, his trusted friend and a figure Swann greatly admires, Proust purposely has Charlus present her as "a ravishing creature with whom [Swann] might possibly come to an understanding", but also has him make Odette out to be much "harder of conquest than she actually [is]", in order to appear as though he'd done Swann an even "bigger favour" with the introduction than he actually had.¹⁶³

Proust makes it evidently clear that upon meeting her, Odette strikes Swann "not [...] as being devoid of beauty", but rather, as "endowed with a kind of beauty which left him indifferent, which aroused in him no desire, which gave him, indeed, a sort of physical repulsion".¹⁶⁴ And yet, this positive endorsement from Charlus can be understood by the reader as a very clear example of mimetic desire, where "[t]he mediator's prestige is imparted to the 'object' of desire and confers upon it an illusory value."¹⁶⁵

Although it's clear through Proust's depiction that this sophisticated "man of the world"¹⁶⁶ forms his own immediate impressions of Odette, the Baron is also purposely included in this author's elaborate example of the complicated nature of desire being assembled. Charlus speaks highly enough of the courtesan during this exchange, to at least transform the young woman in Swann's mind into a female far more prized in Parisian high society than what she actually is. The Baron's testimonial makes it possible for Swann to envision Odette as a woman increasingly more distant, unreachable and 'valuable', than he otherwise might estimate her to be. So Proust's illustration of this assemblage indicates how it's by aid of Charlus that an important transformation takes

¹⁶² Ibid. 314-319, 337-344

¹⁶³ Ibid. 275-276

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 276

¹⁶⁵ Girard 17

¹⁶⁶ Proust, *SW* 209, 285

place. One which allows for the ensuing desire to be fully constructed. A crucial element of this assemblage is that the character Odette evolves into someone Swann is now at least willing to accept visits from when she (later) reaches out to initiate such. And due to the affection Odette repeatedly bestows upon him during those regular visits, she further becomes a feminine companion whose company Swann apparently enjoys and whose presence he's now of course fully aware of, on the eventful night he becomes hypnotized by the enchanting sounds of an unknown piece of music he'd heard only once before. The stirring musical phrase that "opened and expanded his soul" and which he'd longed to encounter again.¹⁶⁷

Proust doesn't depict Charlus as able to 'cause' Swann's eventual love or potent desire for Odette. Not even the character Odette herself could stake claim on 'creating' these desirous feelings within Swann, since longing is a constructive activity produced entirely by the desiring subject. But Proust shows us how the Baron's intervention is nonetheless, one of the many intricate elements portrayed as being necessary for the complicated emergence of desire, in this particular case. The described actions of both M de Charlus and Mme. de Cr cy are crucial details, which Proust indicates influence Swann's awareness and perception of Odette, all of which lays the foundation for his future desires and essentially becomes part of his own powerful assemblage. The way Charlus speaks of her on this evening creates a false sense of elevation to this coquette and an imaginary distance between herself and Swann—a separation that is always a necessary condition in order for desire to surface. Without these notions, it would be virtually impossible for Swann to ever assemble these life-changing desires.

Typically, the character Swann didn't ever "make an effort to find attractive the women with whom he spent his time" with, but instead, only "sought to spend [...] time with women whom he had already found [alluring]."¹⁶⁸ And these were always females "whose beauty" during this particular era was seen as being "of a distinctly vulgar type", more specifically, he was "instantly aroused" by the sight of "healthy, abundant, rosy flesh", by females whose physical characteristics in fact were "the direct opposite of those he admired in the women painted or sculpted by his favourite masters", feminine creatures whose "depth of character" and "melancholy expression" drew out Swann's

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 294

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 271

enormous respect for the artist, but personally would "freeze his senses", on a sexual or amorous level.¹⁶⁹

What Charlus imparts onto Swann, however, is a false but necessary understanding of who Odette de Crécy 'is' in the first place. And Proust shows us how this essentially opens the door for Odette to then employ her coquettish charms, on this sexually adventurous yet otherwise very refined and sought-after Parisian gentleman. The author describes in detail how this coveted bachelor transitions from absolutely cold with disinterest, into at least willing to spend time with Odette privately, due to the Baron's strategic endorsement. All of course allowing her now to be fully 'visible' to Swann and present with him, on the eventful night he becomes enraptured by the piece of music which forever changes his feelings about Mme de Crécy. These inclusions of various elements by Proust emphasize the sheer complexity with how our desire assemblages come to be. All of them being necessary for Swann to later associate Odette with this profoundly pleasurable musical experience he has, one which becomes so deeply entangled with his desirous feelings about her, eventually becoming the official "anthem" to their love.¹⁷⁰

Proust's in-depth characterization allows us to recognize another critical feature which helps our understanding. In the case of Charles Swann and trying to somehow make sense of the paradox¹⁷¹ surrounding this development of overwhelming lust and desire for Odette, as well as how he's eventually able to fall undeniably in love with her, it's essential to understand more about Swann himself. Specifically, his values, his other desires, what his individual notions of 'self' are and how he absorbs and processes information about the world he inhabits.

We see the prominent character M. Swann depicted throughout Proust's novel as a true aesthete. His greatest passions in life focus around beauty and all things artistic, which he's well known for having discerning knowledge on, yet otherwise no cultivated talent himself. One easily gets a sense throughout the story that Swann's deep respect for the arts leads to some of his own creative aspirations, in addition to personal feelings

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 271

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 308

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 273, 276, 543

of inadequacy in that regard, as well. This highly cultured and well-respected figure is portrayed as leading a 'worldly' and privileged lifestyle many would envy. Yet, is also unproductive, creatively idle and consistently plagued by a certain ill-content over the fact that he simply isn't experiencing life at its fullest, most vibrant and meaningful potential. For an individual who reveres the creative genius in others and the beautiful artworks produced by them, this appreciation naturally generates within Charles Swann a personal sense that he himself is failing in a way, artistically in particular. As a result of his highly attuned aesthetic sensibilities, a "peculiar feature of Swann's relationship to the world around him" is that this distinguished gentleman "tend[s] to see individuals through [...] 'the lens of pictorial reminiscence'", more specifically, he very clearly "demonstrate[s] [a] proclivity for connecting people in his quotidian existence" to various works of art, especially to "paintings and sculpture of the Italian Renaissance."¹⁷²

This is exactly what happens in his relationship with the coy seductress Odette de Crécy. Proust shows us how Swann's once-in-a-lifetime desire evolves over a period of time, as his indifference towards her transitions through a very specific assemblage he constructs, around both the primary human 'object' Odette and the artistic world. The one area of life he values above all else—and that he feels most compelled to achieve some form of 'transcendence' into. The author indicates of course how two significant works of art bridge the vast divide between Swann's detached apathy and his eventual life-controlling obsession for this demimondaine. We know that Swann's passionate fixation on Odette arises once he forges a deep connection between her and the hauntingly beautiful sonata, composed by the piano teacher M. Vinteuil. And also as she undergoes a complete metamorphosis in his eyes, with Odette ultimately becoming for Swann a living incarnation of the virtuous figure Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, depicted by the Italian Renaissance painter Sandro Botticelli in his famous Sistine Chapel fresco.

After associating Odette with Vinteuil's deeply moving piece of music, as well as envisioning Mme de Crécy's strong physical resemblance to Zipporah in the Florentine master's painting, (both artistic works being of course highly notable to this aesthete and well-versed collector of art), the author illustrates how Swann is able to re-create a new version of Odette for himself and is finally able to view her, as a work of art herself. And

¹⁷² Ibid. 243, 315; Smith 145

as a representation of virtue and ideal feminine beauty, as seen through the eyes of those creative masters and virtuosi he holds in profound admiration.

As shown in the story, these elements allow Swann to eventually create profoundly intense desire for a woman he can now deeply, passionately love. And the author illustrates how these obsessive desires for Odette become so powerful in fact, that his love for her ultimately transforms Charles Swann into an entirely different man,¹⁷³ with this new 'self' portrayed as being virtually unrecognizable in thoughts and behaviour, both to Swann himself as well as to those who know him well.

The author makes it clear to us that this incredibly intense, overwhelming desire Swann experiences is never really about Odette herself though, but rather, it's built around the meaning he attaches to her as she transforms (in his heart and mind) into a representation of all the things in life he values, covets and takes immense pleasure in. Her perceived resemblance to Zipporah is striking to him. And the piano music itself is depicted to have such a mysteriously profound and transformative effect on Swann, it's as if the notes played were a beautiful woman herself. The musical experience opens him up to uniquely pleasurable sensations he's never before felt, desperately pulling the fictional character Swann towards a realm of beauty and sensuality that seems to him both distant and elusive, yet at the same time, also attainable.

Once Swann associates the famed painting and the mysterious music with Odette, his memories of her and his feelings about the artworks become one of the same. Odette de Crécy is never merely an 'object' of his desire, in Proust's depiction, but more precisely: she becomes the living, breathing, representation of his ideal life in its entirety. Because of the very specific assemblage Swann produces, for him the elusive Odette now embodies a lived experience based on fine art, sophisticated salon lifestyle, elegant worldliness and in general, all the vitality associated with the Renaissance period and the sheer decadence connected to *La Belle Époque*. Proust reveals these impressions and memories of her to also become intertwined with the very real sexual pleasures Swann experiences during their intimate encounters together. And soon, the temptress Odette 'becomes' a habit. One which encompasses all that he values and one which is

¹⁷³ Proust, SW 333, 354, 384, 389, 420, WBG 1-2

deeply and profoundly intensified, though the repetition of physical pleasure—and the repeated pain of never quite being able to ‘possess’ her.

Swann’s longing for Odette clearly is illustrated in such a way that it involves the imaginative, productive assemblages and other characteristics of desire theorized by Deleuze, as well as features of metaphysical desire described by Lévinas. She becomes for him a sublime 'Other', completely enveloped by a very particular landscape. And is separated from Swann by a persistently mysterious distance, in a desirous realm which involves a high level of complexity and a continuously evolving flow of desire between the subject, 'object' and longed-for context. There is absolutely nothing “nostalgic” about Swann’s desires for Odette in Proust's portrayal, as this (previously) confirmed bachelor now finds himself in a complicated predicament he’s never before experienced, one which involves profound life-changing desires obviously “directed away from the familiar”,¹⁷⁴ towards a sphere of pleasures and pains far too complex to be identified as simply induced by an 'object'. The realm of Odette is as 'distant' to him and as tragically longed-for, as any relationship a subject might encounter with the divine. And the fictional figure Swann is depicted as being acutely aware of his own vulnerability, as well as his painfully obvious lack of autonomy, or control, over how the difficult relationship with Odette progresses.

Yet this profound longing and life-altering desire isn’t in any way shown to be born from lack or can be accurately termed as representing lack in some form. This intense desire emerges from an elaborate construction through a highly specific combination of elements representing all that Swann admires and attaches great importance to. The character Odette never before registered with Swann as a lack in any kind of way. He wasn’t in the least, shown to ever be pained by or even aware of her absence, prior to producing such overwhelming desires for her. And the distinguished gentleman Charles Swann in general, certainly isn’t depicted by Proust as lacking for female affection or for sexual intimacy. In fact, the author intentionally reveals how on the very night Swann first feels "a sudden stab at the heart" regarding Odette, when he suddenly for the first time ever "tremble[s] at the thought of being deprived of" seeing her, he had literally just

¹⁷⁴ Dalton, “Vaccination” 25

returned from an explicitly intimate, purposely extended carriage ride with a young seamstress whom he hadn't even wanted to leave.¹⁷⁵

Proust describes Swann as having had “delay[ed] as long as possible the moment of his appearance at the Verdurin’s” salon, even knowing full well that Odette was expected to be there.¹⁷⁶ So it's meant to be obvious that he clearly didn't ever before experience a painful void needing to be filled, either related to Odette, or to female relationships in general. But due to the complex desire assemblage produced around her, in relation to the highly valued fresco and the captivating sonata, it ends up being the female ‘object’ Odette rather than any other woman, who becomes and remains for Swann, his distant, “always still ‘Other’”.¹⁷⁷

Swann’s amorous and lustful desires are shown to eventually invoke a sense of delirium within him, exactly as Deleuze theorizes, as his thoughts soon involve intense jealousy, paranoia and desperation. And just as Lévinas warns is inevitable, due to our misunderstandings of how metaphysical longing functions, Swann's newly-formed “reckless” behaviour comes to dominate his entire existence, a life soon filled with a constant mix of torment, excitement and an agitating “restless[ness] and ill-content”,¹⁷⁸ as he consistently strives to bridge the distance between himself and his highly revered ‘coquette’, but finds Odette repeatedly ‘unreachable’ and ‘unknowable’ to him, in any real way. Swann himself is depicted as experiencing both intense pain but also exquisite pleasure, as his totally debilitating hunger to ‘transcend’ into this delirious ‘world’ he’s constructed around the idea of Odette in a very precise context, completely, utterly, overtakes every fibre of his being.

The story unfolds for us how Swann initially assembles these desires, when on his very first visit to the Verdurin’s salon he hears ‘*la petite phrase*’ in Vinteuil’s sonata, for only the second time in his life:

It had at once suggested to him a world of inexpressible delights, of whose existence, before hearing it, he had never dreamed, into which he felt that

¹⁷⁵ Proust, *SW* 247

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Dalton, “Vaccination” 25

¹⁷⁸ Dalton, “Longing”, “Vaccination” 23-24, 26, 28

nothing else could initiate; and he had been filled with a love for it, as with a new and strange desire.¹⁷⁹

This encounter with '*la petite* [musical] *phrase*' is of course relayed to us as a deeply moving aesthetic experience for this lover of the arts, but also a highly sensual one as well. One which seduces Swann with promises of entrance into the 'unknown worlds' it represents. And Proust of course cleverly reveals how it just so happens that Odette, (who Swann is now aware of and holds in some form of elevated regard, due to Charlus' introduction), is, (due to Mme Verdurin's doing), the one seated close to him when this profoundly moving, metaphorically carnal experience takes place. So he in essence 'shares' this deeply affective sensation with her, as well as transfers his thoughts and feelings about the music, essentially his physical and emotional desire and 'love' for it, onto Odette herself. And a deep longing and exquisite 'need' for this little section of the sonata completely invades Swann's life from this point forward:

[W]hen he returned home he felt the need of it: he was like a man into whose life a woman he has seen for a moment passing by has brought the image of a new beauty which deepens his own sensibility, although he does not even know her name or whether he will ever see her again.¹⁸⁰

And because of his sensual, artistic association between the music and the woman seated beside him, Proust indicates that a profound desire for Odette begins to burn within Swann as well. Enraptured by the beautiful sonata, Odette de Crécy is now forever connected to it in Charles Swann's mind, heart and soul. Therefore, she's intricately tethered to an immensely pleasurable, aesthetic experience, which also contains within it a provocative sense of mystery and transcendence for Swann as well.

One could imagine the possibility of an entirely different woman being seated next to the Swann and him transferring his intense desire for '*la petite phrase*' in the sonata onto this person instead. But each meticulously thought-out detail in this novel, intentionally addresses this possibility of not being able to alter the story. The recent belief in Odette's elevated and 'distant' status imparted by Charlus certainly helps. Far more importantly though, Proust reveals enough for us to know that even for someone else seated in close proximity to Swann on such an important evening, to compete with this powerful assemblage they'd also need to at some point share a striking resemblance to a figure in

¹⁷⁹ Proust, SW 296

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

one of the artworks Swann greatly admires, as he believes Odette herself does. Or connect him in some other profound way to the artistic and creative world, in order for the same kind of intense love and burning desire that Swann is depicted as forming for Odette de Crécy, to emerge for them instead:

Standing there beside him, her loosened hair flowing down her cheeks [...] her head [tilted to] one side, with those great eyes of hers which seemed so tired and sullen [...] Odette suddenly] struck Swann by her resemblance to the figure of Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, [...] in one of the Sistine frescoes.¹⁸¹

This perceived resemblance and connection, Proust wants us to know of. It's crucial for Swann's assembled desire, as it completely transforms Odette through the views of a revered artistic master, as well as the entire art world in fact, endorsing her value, beauty and desirability, via the aesthetic references most important to him in life:

[W]hereas the mere sight of [Odette] in the flesh [...] cooled the ardour of his love, those misgivings were swept away and that love confirmed, [once Swann] could re-erect his estimate of her [based] on the sure foundations of aesthetic principle.¹⁸²

This pivotal moment when Swann is shown to perceive an incredible resemblance between Odette and Zipporah, provokes him to produce even greater desire for her and conclusively seals his profound love for Odette, the woman whom he now transfers all of his aesthetic admiration and adoration for both the musical '*phrase*' as well as the fresco, onto. She is now for Swann, the one and only 'elevated' and 'distant Other'. And is his focal point for an all-consuming, burning aggregate of longing, related to an intensely coveted artistic 'landscape' and a woman Proust makes clear to us Swann now sexually and emotionally desires, respects, idealizes and has the truest feelings of love for.

The assemblage related to Swann's desire is built from a complicated reciprocation cleverly revealed by Proust: When he looks at the painting or hears '*la petite phrase*' in the enchanting sonata, Swann is instantly connected to Odette, desires her even more powerfully and falls more deeply in love with her each time. But the reverse is true as well. Each time he sees or thinks of Odette, this activity triggers a complex connection of involuntary (as well as voluntary) memories for Swann. Recollections which certainly do

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 314-315

¹⁸² Ibid. 317

involve the special, living 'object' Odette, but ultimately embody the music, fine arts and decadently cultured lifestyle that Swann values so highly. Through this repetitive cycle, a 'new' and more intense desire is created each time. So in that sense, it is through Odette that finally M Swann is perpetually connected to his now active, artistic self, something which was previously located outside of him, still beyond Swann's grasp.¹⁸³ And the inverse is true as well, that by way of the transformative power of the sonata and the Italian fresco, we can see how Swann is always connected to his beloved Odette.¹⁸⁴

When he had sat for a long time gazing at the Botticelli, he would think of his own living Botticelli, who seemed even lovelier still, and as he drew towards him the photograph of Zipporah he would [always] imagine that he was holding Odette against his heart.¹⁸⁵

As Proust so vividly illustrates, nothing about this profound, life-changing desire that Swann produces originates simply from lack or is as basic as movement towards a solitary absent 'object'. And although his longing may initially appear to be focused on the 'possession' of Odette, this too proves to be inaccurate. Just as Deleuze theorizes, what Swann becomes enraptured with isn't Odette, but an entire 'world' he imaginatively constructs around her. His desire emerges not from a lack of this particular human being, but from an elaborate construction of desires produced in relation to the primary 'object' Odette. And an intricately detailed 'landscape' which does indeed include her, but more importantly, is shown by Proust to involve all that Swann values, reveres and passionately aches for.

This intense love affair is a fictional, yet very clear example, of how powerful desires materialize from a positive 'abundance' of elements, as Lévinas argues, not from the absence of someone or something. These intoxicating desires are, as concepts drawn from Lévinas explain, metaphysical desires that are stoked by the mystery and Swann's perpetual 'distance' from Odette, yet also absolutely exceed the notion of longing for any one particular person or thing. Odette embodies a complete 'realm' for the character M Swann. A realm far too elaborate, meaningful and complex to be reduced to just a single, alluring, living 'object' he's drawn to. And Proust's inclusion of Swann's incredibly perplexing and seemingly contradictory statements on how this relationship with Odette

¹⁸³ Ibid. 314-318

¹⁸⁴ Epstein 213-215

¹⁸⁵ Proust, *SW* 318

ends up being both the worst, most painful experience of his life, as well as his 'greatest' love affair ever, also illustrates beautifully how metaphysical desire needs to be understood not as a force aimed towards satiation and fulfillment, but instead, as an astoundingly complex experience, situated far "beyond [the realm of] satisfaction and dissatisfaction".¹⁸⁶

A major theme within *À la Recherche* is of course Proust's detailed exploration of the concept 'involuntary memory'.¹⁸⁷ This powerful phenomenon, is most famously depicted early in the novel, when the narrator Marcel describes the experience of dipping his Madeleine biscuit into a cup of tea and then suddenly being overcome by (involuntary) memories of his childhood and life events. Each reader is aware that this well-known scenario essentially 'begins' Proust's narrative which follows and that this scene is most often discussed in the context of time and memory, a central theme alluded to in the work's title. But the exploration of erotic and romantic desire is another dominant subject of this work of fiction, rampant in fact, throughout most of the novel. And it's particularly useful in our attempt to grasp desire's essence more reliably, to note that an accurate description of desire actually parallels the workings of involuntary memory, that are so thoroughly explored by Proust.¹⁸⁸

The motif of involuntary memory illustrates the flood of sensations that take place within us when we're actively desiring. This interesting parallel between desire and involuntary memory also shows us exactly why desires, especially longings of a sexual or amorous nature, can have such astounding command over our lives: The absolute power of desire comes through its complicated ability to simultaneously connect us to both pleasure and pain, as well to the past, present and future. All experienced at the same time.

Desire is often (incorrectly) perceived or portrayed as a spontaneous and immediate want for a particular single 'object' and the subsequent 'movement' towards 'acquisition' of that 'object' that's being desired. But in truth, the desires we construct are assembled from a complex connection of feelings, beliefs and experiences, which are quite often

¹⁸⁶ Dalton, "Vaccination" 27

¹⁸⁷ Proust, *SW* 59-67

¹⁸⁸ Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars* 90; Proust, *SW* 60

drawn from multiple moments in time. This is especially the case with romantic and erotic desires, where the encounter a subject longs for and feels in the present, is something frequently involving elaborate connections to the past and/or the future, as they imagine it. These desires can also involve a variety of 'places' connected to the full aggregate itself, something repeatedly explored by Proust through his character Marcel especially. A less surveyed aspect of desiring is that (not unlike involuntary memory), it is never restricted to the exact moment in time and space that it's being felt in.

If we follow Deleuze's explanation of desire as being constructed from within an assemblage of 'objects', as well as Lévinas' assertion of metaphysical desire aiming towards "an indeterminacy, a kind of 'otherness', something which is always further afield than any [one] particular thing",¹⁸⁹ all of this reinforces our understanding of desire as being reliant on this complex web of connections and functioning in very much the same way, that Proust indicates involuntary memory does. In all of these experiences, time needs to be appreciated as something layered, rather than linear. And space also needs to be envisioned in a similar overlapping (rather than distinct) manner. What we see throughout Proust's novel is that both human desire and involuntary memory, help each of us to connect the present with the past and the future, producing intense desire assemblages that involve multiple moments of time and place. All of these combined impressions form a significant part of the explanation of why desire is capable of 'taking over' our lives with such intensity, yielding inexplicable power over our existence: As we can see from this combined reading, the force of desire connects us to a multitude of values and ideas, in addition to both pleasurable and painful experiences and memories, as well as different moments in time and place, specifically, all at once.

If we recall the paramount scene within Proust's novel where Swann is raging with obsession over not being able to find his beloved 'Other' Odette, when he arrives at the Verdurin's so late one evening that she has already departed, Proust makes it clear that before this pivotal moment Swann wasn't even fully aware of his love for Odette. But upon arriving and viewing "the room bare of her", he feels a "sudden stab [in his] heart" and becomes overwhelmingly distressed over the "the thought of being deprived of a pleasure whose intensity he was able for the first time to gauge", a pleasure which until that instant he always had "certainty of finding [...] whenever he wished", which, as in

¹⁸⁹ Dalton, "Longing"

"the case of all our pleasures" Proust reminds us, had previously reduced the sheer intensity of it, "if it did not altogether blind him to its dimensions."¹⁹⁰

Swann of course frantically roams the streets of Paris in search of Odette, all the while, his imagination fully engaged and his mind racing with distressing thoughts over where she could be and who she might be with. His desperate behaviour is shown by Proust as a response that reflects a huge range of concerns over what this specific 'disappearance' of Odette all means to him. But it's not about her being absent, in the traditional sense that desire theory refers to. The entire spectacle provides a clear example of Lévinas' explanation of longing for an entire realm associated with the valuable 'distant' and 'elevated' 'Other', as well as Deleuze's central arguments in response to common perceptions of desire, more specifically: (1) the productive nature of the subconscious in reality working as a "factory", perpetually producing all of these desires; (2) delirium in relation to a "whole world", connected to a larger, more cosmic scale than the familial domain psychoanalysts always attribute it to, as well as finally (3) assemblages of desire seemingly aimed at a primary desired 'object', but in truth, involving an entire 'landscape' or context associated with this real, primary 'object'.¹⁹¹

This well-known scene within the novel is also an unmistakable example by Proust of how it is 'distance', rather than lack or absence, which in truth stokes the powerful flames of human desire. When discussing desire, there's a crucial difference between these terms. Our common language as well as our sensations may interpret 'distance' as a void or lack, but in reality, these aren't the same experiences and are not the most helpful or even accurate way of understanding desire.

The absence or lack of an 'object', in no way implies something is necessarily out of our reach. It doesn't always imply scarcity or an impossibility of obtaining it, it simply means that it isn't present, or we don't have possession of it. 'Distance' however, is a provocative separation we can deeply feel. It requires a certain level of awareness of the primary 'object' and the associated realm separated from us, as well as some kind of understanding that they are in fact, currently beyond our reach in some way. We construct desire in such a way that it responds to this perceived 'distance' with an

¹⁹⁰ Proust, *SW* 320

¹⁹¹ Deleuze, "*Désir*"; Proust, *SW* 318-344

element of hope as well as belief, in some other relationship with this person different than what it is we're currently experiencing. And this is also the case for all our desires, for those involving non-living 'objects' as well as human ones. Longing is a strong and sustained desire, especially for something unattainable or hard to acquire.¹⁹² Yet the very difficulty or impossibility of achieving possession isn't actually an obstacle to desire, but is in reality, an important influence for intensifying our wants. 'Distance' is sensed by us and is in fact deeply troubling, or agitating. Yet is also in a sense an experience we find highly pleasurable—making it a very important feature and a fluid aspect of all the passionate desires we construct.

In response to arguments which champion lack as the source of desire, it's crucial to note that Swann is shown to no longer have any kind of interest in the (now absent) seamstress, whom only moments before he was finding so difficult to leave. And it's not even Odette's 'absence' per se, from the Verdurin's salon, that Proust means us to see as responsible for producing the burning desires within Swann, that he eventually feels for his cherished 'coquette'. It is, more precisely, the profoundly mysterious separation that he senses, between himself, Odette and the important context he's now associated with her. A provocative 'distance' first established through Charlus' introduction, which then rapidly evolves in a complex and elaborate way from that moment forward.

The fact that Swann isn't shown to be at all troubled by the absence of the seamstress, is partially because it's been made clear in the story that his physical and emotional desires have already been temporarily satisfied by her, so their satiation leads to desire's inevitable demise and further longings now need to be produced. But the other critical reason this example illustrates how Swann isn't pained by lacking this same female companion he spent time with earlier that evening, is because his spontaneous attraction to her can't even begin to contend with the intoxicating assemblage he's shown to have been gradually producing around Odette. An enveloping 'landscape' that involves a captivating selection of elements deeply valued by him, all wrapped up into a highly specific desire aggregate that's already well under construction in Swann's heart and mind at this point, even if he's shown not to have awareness of the mechanics in motion.

¹⁹² Burton 6

The portrayal by Proust is that Swann just doesn't feel this same sense of wonder, mystery and profound sense of separation from the seamstress, whose related attraction is nothing he hasn't before experienced, many times over. And whose company and perceived 'possession' is also something he feels certain of having access to, virtually any time he so craves. This earlier desire, which doesn't involve any element of true height, distance or separation and doesn't intrigue or perplex him in the same kind of way that his feelings for Odette do, simply can't compete with the complicated array of interconnected longings shown by Proust to be built around Mme de Cr cy. We're meant to understand how Odette not only makes Swann feel an overwhelming component of separation that consistently intensifies his powerful desires for her, but also that through her, he senses another crucially important feature that doesn't exist with the seamstress, or anyone else he's ever before met: Odette de Cr cy represents a totally priceless and unprecedented opportunity, for Charles Swann's personal (creative) transcendence.

Swann's emotional torment and distress is rendered as being intense. But there are many other people also absent from his self at this exact moment in the story and yet, he doesn't desire any of them. It's illustrated that he now hungers specifically for Odette and Odette only. As Deleuze and L vinas theorize and as Proust illustrates so vividly, Swann's want for her doesn't emerge from the absence of a single 'object', but instead, comes from belief in and 'distance' from, an entire contextual assemblage. So for the character Swann, from this moment onward, we're meant to understand that his now beloved Odette is the only living 'object' capable of possessing such magnetic attraction for him.

Swann can't bear the idea of abandoning his search for her on this fateful evening, because as with all of us, the 'chase' itself only further intensifies the powerfully addictive feelings of pain mixed with pleasure, that our longings for elevated 'Others' produce. Or as L vinas' concepts can help us understand, Odette and this particular desire trajectory doesn't fulfill Swann's 'need' or want, but in reality, "deepens it."¹⁹³ Through this specific kind of desirous pursuit, Swann's initial longing for Odette only finds itself "even more desirous, even more restless."¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ L vinas, *Totality* 34

¹⁹⁴ L vinas, "Collected Philosophical Papers" 121

Depicted with absolutely no understanding of how desire actually functions, Swann himself believes that he's pursuing a pleasure and a certain happiness that his reason seems incapable of regarding as unattainable. He's intent on finding Odette, operating from a belief that 'possession' of her will bring him some kind of intense pleasure, deeply soothing unity and meaningful satisfaction. But this is a clear example of how our desire can in fact work against itself, or more accurately, against us,¹⁹⁵ or even more aptly, how our common misunderstandings of desire can impede our happiness in unnecessary ways. Swann has no comprehension of the fact that any 'acquisition' of Odette can never bring him the kinds of sensations he expects. The hard truth being, instead, that in order for his painfully pleasurable desirous feelings to maintain, Swann's beloved Odette must always remain beyond his reach.

The intensity of that particular dramatic scene in the story with Swann signifies many things to Proust's reader. It magnifies Swann's idea of bridging the divide and his misled conceptions around the possibility of 'possessing' Odette as an 'object'. And it vividly illustrates the addictive quality of love and the obvious potential desire has to become obsessive—truths all clearly illuminated by Proust's writing. But it also speaks very much to Swann's veritable desperation to be lost in another 'world'. More precisely, lost in the exact 'world' that he constructs around Odette. A place where the connection between art and reality is powerfully forged, through both the sonata as well as his perception of Odette's striking resemblance to Zipporah. For M Charles Swann, the 'flow' or the complex ascending 'trajectory' within this assemblage his desire creates, involves a mysterious 'universe' where he, (the passionately devoted aesthete), literally 'becomes one with the art'.

The transformative qualities of desire are magnified in this author's fictional work through his overall depiction of the intense relationship between Swann and Odette, as well as via that scene in particular, for another crucial reason as well: This is the very first time Charles Swann has ever experienced the incredibly powerful and highly addictive combination, of pleasure and suffering. A unique sensation so characteristic of the most intoxicating forms of our amorous and erotic desires. And an experience that most of humanity, without even being aware of it, both fears and values equally.

¹⁹⁵ Burton 94

In this tortured love affair, the figure Odette is essentially portrayed as a vessel in which Swann stores all of his life's desires, most of which are associated with art, beauty and sophistication. So she is routinely and intentionally seen, as the human 'object' who transports him into an existence filled with the artworks and fine living that he so deeply appreciates, such as their stimulating social evenings at the Parisian salons. Despite being painted as not at all his 'type', Odette does in another way also connect him to the 'lower' social class of women who always seems to be a necessary presence in order for Swann to acutely intensify his aesthetic perceptions. But in addition to this, the fictional Odette bridges Swann to the intensely powerful nature of art and desire that parallels the essence of involuntary memory. Specifically, Vinteuil's sonata, the Botticelli fresco and all the other elements involved, allow Swann to profoundly experience multiple moments of time and place, layered one upon another and all 'felt' by him in the present. And to also experience the profoundly intense combination of simultaneous pleasure and sorrow. What Odette does for Swann, through forcing him to experience *both* pleasure and pain, is imprint herself upon this cultured gentleman in an unusual and unforgettable way. And to ultimately, make him feel more 'alive', than he's ever felt before.

So the utter panic for Swann when he can't find Odette, is meant to be understood by us not as due to a simple issue of her absence, but as coming from the fact that his intense love and sexual desire for her is bound up in such a complicated assemblage of crucial, interrelated desires: What Swann senses, is that if he loses her, he would in fact lose everything treasured and vital to him. He would lose the newfound intensity of life itself. Swann constructs this idea of Odette and his erotic and romantic feelings for her within such an intricate web of connections to everything he values most in life, that to be deprived of her would be devastating far beyond the loss one would experience of losing 'just' her. When we say that someone 'is [our] world', it's this vast network of complex associations we build our desires around, that make us feel such profound connection to a particular, 'elevated' individual.¹⁹⁶

When we love and desire another human being, we "bestow [a certain] value onto them".¹⁹⁷ The very fact that something or someone initially appears 'out of reach' to us, also adds significant worth to them in our eyes. And as Proust's story repeatedly and

¹⁹⁶ Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars* 214-217; Epstein; Proust, *SW* 44, 261, 294-339, 374, 385

¹⁹⁷ Singer, *The Philosophy of Love* 113-114

artistically illustrates, desire is also forever inseparable from imagination. So engaging with desire is always connected to our creative self on some level. And by loving an 'Other', it's a way that Swann can literally behave in "an active, creative way".¹⁹⁸

Our intense passions and longings also become "internalized" as "self-defining" beliefs and activities.¹⁹⁹ So without Odette, Swann's newfound journey towards creative transcendence is in jeopardy. And losing her would mean his entire existence and sense of 'self', would literally cease to be. Independently, the character Charles Swann is definitely no stranger to Renaissance art, exquisite musical experiences, or the beauty and decadence of *La Belle Époque*. But through his unprecedented desires related to Odette, Proust shows how he experiences these personally valued elements at such a unique and profoundly intimate level, in combination with pleasure and pain, mixed with joy and sorrow, that this particular lustful relationship and *coup d'amour* is, in a repetitive reinforcing pattern, utterly life-changing for him, in many ways.

Initially, this particular set of assembled desirous elements reforms Swann's fiercely independent bachelor life into an existence utterly controlled by his unbridled, obsessive love and sensual desires for Odette. Proust indicates how the intensity of M Swann's longing is driven by an intoxicating combination of factors, which definitely include the immense value he places on the 'world' Odette now represents for him. But it's also propelled by the self-defining effect of these specific desires, which deeply connect this previously idle aesthete to active creativity, beauty and the world of art. And his desires are also further intensified by the powerfully addictive combination of pain, intricately mixed with pleasure.

Desire is shown to be so transformative for Swann (and this stage of his life is so completely different from all the years leading up to it), that the author makes it clear how he comes to be seen as an entirely 'new and 'different Swann' after forming these specific assemblages. The many heartaches, uncertainties, jealousies, anxiety and even the profound suffering experienced by him during this unprecedented romance and uncharacteristic time in his life, are all fully expounded upon throughout the early volumes of Proust's novel.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 113, 116

¹⁹⁹ Vallerand 743-744

We of course learn that eventually, Charles Swann does in fact 'survive' this ongoing, turbulent love affair and the debilitating desires he continues to have for Odette. But it's important to note, that any attempt at 'attaining' the human 'object' and the landscapes associated with them, doesn't end with 'satisfaction' per se, for either Swann or Odette, as all the prominent theories on human desire would predict. Once their desires become fulfilled, new longings now need to be produced for each of them. As with all desires, this is because the passion of this intensely consuming relationship can only be kept alive through 'the thrill of the chase'. Specifically, the addictive 'hunt' for a specific realm they each strive towards, or as Lévinas and Deleuze theorize, the trajectory and the divide maintained between them and all of the important elements involved with their highly complex desired assemblages.

In due course, boredom inevitably sets in. Proust emphasizes how Odette de Crécy loses interest in Swann, once the determined courtesan achieves through him a level of desired station in society that previously seemed distant and totally out of reach for her. And the author makes it clear to us later in their story, how Swann's amorous and sexual desires for Odette too fade, transforming in fact, through the repetitive act of habit, as he once again experiences a complete 'metamorphosis' into an entirely new 'self', this time taking on the role of "Odette's husband".²⁰⁰ Swann's new life becomes one of habitual, repetitive, 'domestic bliss', now free from the painful romantic obsessions, jealousies, suspicions and overwhelming sexual desires that previously gripped his life with such painfully fierce intensity. The 'price' for these freedoms from suffering and torment though, is essentially paid by living a life now also void of all the intense pleasures, previously associated with his feelings and experiences of loving Odette.

Proust reveals how Swann's 'revised' assemblages and new realms of desire still include his primary living 'object' Odette. But from this point forward, involve an entirely different landscape associated with her, as his focus completely turns away from the previous erotic and amorous desire he once felt for her with such magnitude. Instead, Swann now refines and constructs entirely new desires involving Odette, aggregates which this time are based upon the context of being a good father and husband. And wishing for his daughter and his former mistress to be fully accepted, by the society he

²⁰⁰ Proust, *WBG* 1-2

was once so well respected in.²⁰¹ These are the specific elements which allow for the emergence of Swann's original, newly developed desires. Longings produced from an assemblage related to a new distant 'world' so very different than his original one, which previously focused on 'possessing' his Botticellian coquette and connecting to his artistic self, through a completely mysterious attraction and a profound mixture of pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow.

Before Odette and Gilberte came into his fictional life and turned it upside down in so many ways, Swann may have been lacking this kind of family lifestyle, which in the end he took to so strongly. And Proust tells us that he even thought about this possibility, wistfully on occasion. But a life of domesticity also wasn't exactly something he regularly experienced a painful void from not having. Or sensed as a truly crucial and immensely pleasurable experience he may have been missing out on. In reality, quite the opposite. And as far as his first intensely powerful, life-changing desire aggregate, the one Proust paints as being constructed around the seductress Odette, this author also makes it very clear that in no way was Swann ever 'lacking' in opportunities for love or attention from female 'objects'. Nor was his manner of living void of mutual passion and sexual activity with other women. In fact, his highly privileged social status, bachelor way-of-life and esteemed reputation in Parisian society, meant that Swann could easily commence virtually any type of relationship he wanted to. This connoisseur of artworks and high society living, also certainly wasn't illustrated as missing out on a lifestyle filled with art and beauty, provocative conversation at Parisian salons, or any of the other 'worldly' adventures he valued. So collectively, this combination of circumstances regarding the life of M Charles Swann means that Proust could have written any number of other women to potentially become his desirous 'Other', if the absence or lack of an 'object' are what this author believed is truly all that it takes for desire to manifest. And if Proust viewed 'acquisition', pleasure and satisfaction, to really be what desire is all 'about' and in search of.

Odette de Crécy didn't replace anyone or anything, in Proust's story. But the perplexing fact that Swann eventually found himself not only so wildly attracted to, but also deeply in love with, someone initially so unappealing to him on every single level, clearly emphasizes how metaphysical longing is an intricate exercise of assembling

²⁰¹ Proust, SG 108

multiple elements into an aggregate that creates something new, by encompassing a multitude of things one values even more highly in combination, than independently. And clearly this is something this author was insightfully aware of, long before it was formally theorized by others.

By going through this constructive exercise, Swann produces an overwhelming 'need' for this courtesan that Proust makes evident can't in any way be credited to intrinsic desire or lack. Despite his envied and eligible status in society, it's not as though Odette was the only individual somehow separated from him by the distance required, in order for desires to surface. Yet, because of all the particular highly valued elements involved, it's only the 'distance' from her specifically, that's illustrated as mattering to him. Through his burning desire and his productive assemblage of a highly coveted realm associated with Odette, Swann manages to construct her, (in his own eyes at least), into a woman very different. Far more virtuous, appealing and valued, than Marcel Proust indicates she ever really was. The entire intense desiring process is for Swann, an imaginative and repetitive act of creativity, on his part.

With absolutely no understanding of how desire operates, made evidently clear to us by the author's depictions, in addition to a complete lack of awareness regarding the external influences in place, Swann himself is conveyed to be both perplexed and very intrigued by the powerful attraction he eventually forms for this woman. But with his imagination highly engaged and fully invested in this detailed assemblage involving the Italian fresco, Vinteuil's sonata and all the other longed-for elements, Proust shows us how Swann alters his vision of Odette in such a way that not even her dishonoured reputation or the 'imperfections' of her physical characteristics can interfere with the imagined idea of her that he constructs. Each and every one of her 'flaws', or suspicious behaviours, rather than repulsing Swann simply increases the aura of mystery around Odette in his eyes even further, as does the very fact that he's drawn to her at all. The combined effect of which, in turn, Proust indicates continuously makes her even more 'distant' and alluring than any different potential 'Other'. And as a result, Odette de Cr cy comes to "absorb the whole of Swann's day-dreams", fantasies previously occupied by

countless other women, as she becomes his one-and-only coveted 'Other' and the solitary person, "capable of causing him joy or anguish."²⁰²

Swann is always shown to believe that his fierce longing for Odette truly was all about and because of her. Yet what he's depicted as comprehending about his love relationship, is of course not in fact the truth on how desire had manifested. As Proust likely means to convey, this is largely due to the complexity of our assemblages and desire trajectories, but also because there's often a discrepancy between what we truly want, versus what we think we desire.²⁰³ The role of imagination and repetitive, creative construction, are clearly hallmarks of the human desiring process which traditionally are overlooked, in lieu of a customary focus on 'lack', 'object', 'acquisition' and 'satisfaction'. But this idea of creatively producing assemblages and bestowing value onto the 'object' of our desire,²⁰⁴ especially in relation to the vast array of other distant elements involved, is exactly what we do ourselves and what we intentionally see happening throughout all the volumes of Proust's narrative. Odette's ultimate power over Swann, is that longing specifically for her means access to a 'world' involving the culmination of all his other desires, as well as a continuous realm of productive creativity. And the combined effect of pleasure and pain involved in this transformative journey, is for Charles Swann, a new, transcendent and mysteriously intoxicating experience.

In Odette, or rather through Odette, the fictional figure Swann finds a way to not only encapsulate every single thing he values into one place, into a single person in fact, so that he can always keep these cherished elements close to him in every possible sense. But he also finds a way to live out his life's one ultimate desire, based on an assemblage he'd unknowingly been constructing over an extended period of time. Longing for Odette provides him with the opportunity to expound his aesthetic sensibilities beyond those of just a skilled admirer—and to experience instead the intensity of being actively creative.

His perplexing conclusive declaration on "wast[ing] years of his life" and "long[ing] to die", in combination with experiencing his "greatest love" ever, all in relation to a woman who initially had absolutely no appeal to him in any way, who in fact repulsed him at the

²⁰² Proust, *SW* 280-281

²⁰³ Orwell, *Plomedia*, Žižek

²⁰⁴ Singer, *The Philosophy of Love* 113-114, 116

onset, all seems impossible.²⁰⁵ Completely absurd in fact, both to Swann himself, as well as to Proust's reader. And this statement will continue to confuse us, as long as we persist with trying to understand desire through the flawed intellectual paradigms and colloquial understandings that have endured throughout Western history. Embracing the pain/pleasure dichotomy, including a belief that humanity always moves away from pain and approaching Swann's story only from an appreciation of what was determined 'good', pleasurable or valuable by him, but also 'missing' from his life, does very little to explain the exact process of how his original indifference and absence of attraction for Odette, eventually transitions into an obsessive, excruciatingly painful, yet exquisitely pleasurable, completely life-consuming love affair. Or why this tumultuous relationship later becomes one of a soothing, calm but monotonous, 'domestic bliss' instead, where Swann is described by others as being 'less unhappy', now that he is 'less in love'. And most importantly, what applying dominant understandings and defining desire as lack aiming to satisfy all of Swann's wants through the 'acquisition' of a good 'object' fails to answer for us, is: Why specifically Odette? Of all the incredibly alluring and far more compatible women Charles Swann might have loved and longed for, might have had an equally passionate experience with, penetrating the complex workings of desire through the collective lens of Marcel Proust, Gilles Deleuze and Emmanuel Lévinas, allows us to fully comprehend exactly how and why it happens with her—and her only.

²⁰⁵ Proust, *SW* 543

Chapter 3.

'Proustian' Desire / Beyond the Dichotomy of Pleasure/Pain

From the initially paradoxical claim that Proust intentionally has Swann make, we're made aware that the entire experience of loving and desiring Odette de Crécy, is meant to be understood by us as 'somehow' being both the most painful, as well as the most blissful experience, of Swann's entire romantic life. Of his whole life, in fact. And through the overwhelming number of references to both pleasure and pain throughout this entire work, it's clear this is a characteristic of desire aggregates Proust wants to thoughtfully explore. And urge his readers to contemplate on a much deeper level as well. The entire multi-volume novel is saturated with engagement on the incredibly complex intricacies between pain, pleasure and desire, right from its earliest pages which describe young Marcel's dramatically "excruciating" encounter with the complexities of desire, during the iconic 'goodnight kiss' episode with *Maman*.²⁰⁶

This is a vital scene within the novel, which essentially sets the tone not only for Marcel's future experiences with desiring, but for the entire exploration of 'Proustian' desires which are to follow. And it's in this bittersweet moment, when the childhood version of our narrator is shown to have his first glimpse into desire's insatiability, sensing that any pleasurable comfort and 'satisfaction' will be fleeting and is totally ruined, that the joy of exclusively 'possessing' his mother while she reads to him in his room was allowed that night, but inevitably will come to an abrupt end. And on some level, the child seems to understand that he'll then be forced to endure the same suffering the very next evening, as well as the one after that, over and over again. In this particular scene, Marcel receives exactly what he so 'urgently' desires. But it ultimately creates misery for him. His triumph is short-lasting and his victory, sadly, bittersweet. He's unable to experience any real or lasting pleasure from this successful 'acquisition', a conquest he in fact finds just as painful as enjoyable, once he realizes that the soothing comfort and pleasure is destined to stop. And when he also comes to learn, through his mother's quiet tears, that getting what he wants and 'needs', that his own

²⁰⁶ Proust, SW 41

intense and deeply longed-for comforting pleasure, appears to be at his adoring mother's painful expense.²⁰⁷

This particular evening, which remains forever in Marcel's heart and mind as "a black date in the calendar" and the exact moment to open an entirely "new era" for Proust's narrator, is one of the author's earliest and most memorable examples on just how complicated the connections between pleasure, pain and desire actually are.²⁰⁸ The entire scene showcases an event where young Marcel, who will continue to struggle over these insights as well as misunderstandings throughout his entire fictional lifetime in the story, nonetheless, receives some of his earliest introductions to the combined pains and pleasures, the "exquisite torment", of living, "understanding and loving".²⁰⁹

But neither this dramatic excerpt and event with the childhood Marcel, nor the legendary romance between Charles Swann and Odette de Crécy, are by any means the sole representations of desirous longings which emphasize this highly complicated relationship between desire, pleasure and pain. Vivid literary illustration of Deleuze and Lévinas' solid theoretical concepts, outlining intricately constructed desire assemblages and painfully pleasurable metaphysical longings for "an always still 'Other'",²¹⁰ are alive and well throughout all volumes of Proust's work.

We gain insight into the mystifying process of longing for another, through this author's fictional exploration of the utterly consuming and often debilitating desires, experienced by several important characters throughout the story. Most notably this includes desires produced by Swann of course, in his widely referenced love affair. But also those of the complex character M de Charlus, in addition to the complicated desire Marcel's trusted confidante Saint-Loup suffers through, for Rachel. And of course, the entire story includes the fascinating, tortuous, yet at times entertaining, saga of the never-ending desires created by the story's passionate narrator, Marcel. Every one of these detailed aggregates in Proust's narrative, represents an example of the crucial multi-element context always enveloping the elevated amorous or erotic 'Other', all of which is intended by the author to, in some form, replicate the various characteristics of

²⁰⁷ Proust, *SW* 51

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Proust, *SW* 130, 133

²¹⁰ Dalton, "Vaccination" 25

real-life desiring as well. But what each of these fictional depictions of wanting also share and what Marcel Proust's iconic *À La Recherche* so intensively examines, is the inescapable connection these assemblages of desirous sensations all have, to intense experiences of pleasure and pain. And in fact, specifically to the ineffable experience of engaging with them both, either consecutively or even concurrently. Swann's entire romantic story describes exactly that type of journey. And as we can clearly see on the night he frantically searches the streets of Paris, the evening he first realizes his love for Odette and how extreme his desire for her is, it becomes evident that his most profound feelings for Odette emerge specifically when pleasure and pain intersect.

It's impossible to adequately discuss the activity of assembling desire, without at some point giving proper recognition to its unavoidable relationship both with profound suffering, as well as intense pleasures. Experiences that are inevitably associated with the complicated act of desiring 'another'. But what exactly causes each of these painful or pleasurable sensations, in relation to the active desiring process and how we as human beings in turn respond to both pain and rapture, during our engagement with desire, presents just as many complexities and longstanding misconceptions as the favoured definitions and explanations on the workings of desire do. And this is another important characteristic of our aggregates of wanting that Proust strategically conveys. His narrative pays exceptional attention to these details, through fictional depictions of the excruciating pains, as well as the unprecedented bliss, that Swann, Marcel, Charlus, Saint-Loup and virtually all his desiring figures in the novel, either endure, embrace or experience.

Absolutely no depictions of desire in this work are limited to unrealistic portrayals of never-ending pure bliss, which don't at some point face equally anguishing moments of torment and despair. Yet none are described by this modernist writer purely as painful either. What Proust's examples all emphasize in fact, is that the strongest desires and the most profoundly intense life experiences these fictional figures encounter, seem to all take place during relationships, moments and experiences that can neither be defined strictly as something called suffering, nor as entirely pleasurable. But more accurately, demonstrate to the reader an intense and addictively powerful combination of both. And I would also argue that in the case of both Swann and Marcel, in the final closing of both of their stories, we also come to learn how these painfully pleasurable love experiences, end up also to be the most transformative and rewarding encounters of their lives. And

yet, the entire experience of desiring, especially the role that pain and pleasure have within it, are persistently misunderstood by Proust's figures, intentionally of course. Just as we too fail to adequately discuss desire in a way that truly reflects its essence, or accuracies on matters of pain and pleasure.

The principal difficulty and source of our significant misunderstandings related to such a vital interconnection of experiences, stems from a basic concept that historically has remained firmly undisputed, at least to the degree needed to effect a true paradigm shift: The pain/pleasure dichotomy,²¹¹ is of course a binary view which posits pain and pleasure as rival experiences, originally stating that: "the soul [...] is consciously brought into its normal state of being" as it moves towards pleasure—and away from "pain, its opposite".²¹²

The idea that we're drawn only towards what is pleasurable and repelled by all that's painful, may initially seem quite logical. Rather obvious in fact and fairly indisputable.²¹³ And yet, I assert that to challenge this longstanding belief, as I argue all three of these works indirectly do, each in their own way, can in fact bring us towards an even more clear understanding of desire assemblages and the helpful concepts either proposed or explored, by each of these creative intellectuals. In Western Tradition, pain and pleasure have always been defined and described as complete opposites, with the most common notions of pleasure being grounded in concepts such as 'happiness', 'enjoyment', 'satisfaction', or 'ecstasy', but even more importantly, the absence of pain. And yet, neither Proust's novel nor the philosophical writing of Deleuze and Lévinas describes an experience of desire that can accurately be defined only as pleasurable or painful, or of desiring subjects being drawn only towards what they deem solely pleasurable and consistently repelled by pain and anguish. Swann, Marcel, Charlus and Saint-Loup all in fact were most powerfully pulled towards their idealized 'Other' after they experienced the intensity of both sensations together. Each of these writers share explanations or examples of desire which in fact defy this classic 'either/or' approach to pleasure and pain, presenting instead an experience of desiring which in fact refuses to conform with such a dichotomy and indirectly confronts the notion that these experiences are mutually

²¹¹ first put forth by Aristotle and then formally reinforced by Freud in the early 20th century

²¹² Aristotle Book 1 Chapter 11, 1370a

²¹³ Freud classified anything outside this preference to be a mental disorder (Krzywinska 192).

exclusive. Remaining bound to this antiquated understanding of the deceptively complex relationship that exists between pleasure and suffering, as well as subsequently, between desire, pain and pleasure, greatly limits our ability to truly understand the productive process, or the trajectory, of all the desire aggregates that either we or these fictional desiring subjects create.

The feelings and assemblages built around an out-of-reach romantic or erotic 'Other' and the flow or trajectory involved in this ongoing experience, can neither be categorized as purely painful, or as entirely pleasurable. Desire is better understood as an ongoing experience of a profoundly intense mixture of both bliss and suffering. And it's only by embracing this reality about desire and confronting concepts which don't in fact help us gain further understanding on the complicated human experience of longing, as each of these writers do in unique ways, that we can truly comprehend this complex experience which has such unparalleled intensity and influence on our lives. Doing so is also how we begin to eliminate any other ideas that also restrict comprehension of the mysterious qualities associated with desires, such as why our desire assemblages can diffuse, even though they've connected us to something we find 'pleasurable'. Or even more intriguing, how our desires can still expand, even in the presence of pain or suffering. This is of course an important aspect of desire in Proust's literature that this author, by indirectly challenging the idea of pain and pleasure being only dichotomous experiences, is able to fully explore in a unique and interesting commentary, through a novel completely full of desirous assemblages of 'painfully pleasurable' wanting.

Re-thinking the pain/pleasure dichotomy, especially its specific relationship to desiring, can potentially unfold for us a much better explanation of what it is humanity is really looking for, when we produce and experience 'desire' for something or someone. Marcel Proust depicts his characters to never fully understand how it is in fact the entire trajectory of desiring, the 'hunt' or the 'chase' towards who or what they want and being fully engaged with the entire complex realm they've become intoxicated with, that more truthfully describes what they're actually craving most and desperately wanting to keep alive. Thinking beyond this and other binaries, as Proust writing clearly did, can also much more accurately address the question of why these aggregates of desire have

such ineffable power to at times completely take over our lives,²¹⁴ a reality Proust's work draws considerable attention to not only via Swann's dramatic narrative, but virtually with all central characters depicted throughout this complex story as well.

It's true that especially with our common misunderstandings on how desire 'works', we propel ourselves towards people, things and experiences we believe will result in great joy or pleasures of some kind. But what Proust's work highlights, is that our strongest and most life-altering desires actually build around experiences that engage with the simultaneous 'opposites' of both pleasure and pain. This story describes an experience of the 'addictive' quality these personal relationships create for each of the intensely desiring subjects, particularly Swann, Marcel and Charlus. And I assert that what this intensely sought-after experience actually is, can better be described not as purely a quest for pleasure, 'acquisition', or even a total respite from pain, but in fact the overwhelming and largely addictive sensation of experiencing an ongoing combination of both bliss and suffering. I believe this is inherently part of the descriptions of desire, of assemblages of longing, theorized by both Deleuze and Lévinas. And is exactly what Proust is in fact, ultimately giving us an in-depth glimpse into.

As both Deleuze and Lévinas remind us, Western theories and dichotomies have us understanding desire's ultimate goal as the attainment of 'objects' we pursue and position any pleasure associated with desire, as being directly related to our successful possession of the 'object' that we long for so passionately. But as both theorized and illustrated by each of these distinct thinkers, this is a fatal flaw, in our philosophical and psychological assertions and common understandings of desire, as well as of pain and pleasure themselves. As Deleuze asserts, because this focus on the "acquisition" of 'objects' is traditionally customary in our understandings of desire's goals and process, desire itself becomes an abstract and "idealistic [...] conception" in Western culture.²¹⁵ We expect desire to somehow lead us towards lasting pleasure, happiness and satisfaction. Yet our lived experiences tell us this is often not the outcome. We're frequently aware of desires which have technically been fulfilled, so theoretically should have assuaged our cravings and resulted in deeply meaningful satisfaction, yet in reality,

²¹⁴ Bowie, "Bersani on Proust" 23-25; Kerslake 56; Krzywinska 192-195; Proust SW 15, 40-42, 327, 451, 537, 543, WBG 502-521, TGW 69-75, 83-85, 189, TR 168

²¹⁵ Deleuze, "Désir"; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 25

end in extreme disappointment, or leave us still with an ongoing longing of some kind. And we're also fully aware of desires which develop an increasingly painful element to them, yet for whatever reason, still possess a magnetic pull for us which we find incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to overcome. We see this clearly and repeatedly in Proust's dramatic portrayal of Swann's intense affection and attraction to Odette.

What happens within us when we're deeply engaged in the act of desiring, simply can't be succinctly categorized as either a quest for pleasure, or even an avoidance of pain. It is more accurately, an attraction to the intensity of the combined experiences. Clearly Proust was acutely aware of the potential 'exquisiteness' of pain and pleasure colliding. And he wanted us to be as well. These confusing characteristics of the overall desiring experience are all conveyed to us by this author, throughout his many fictional depictions. Swann, Marcel, Charlus and Saint-Loup as well, all suffer tremendous pains as part of their longings for 'another', not only in wanting them initially, but even more so once they've 'acquired' them in some way but find the reality of 'possession' not to match with the particular aggregates they each fantasized. And yet, the author doesn't indicate these characters to be in any way repelled by this suffering. In fact, the opposite. The painful sensations experienced by these men as a result of their elusive human 'objects', only increases their profound desire for them, taking it in fact to an entirely new level of obsessiveness and an often deliriously envisioned 'need'.

Deleuze describes the complex multi-element aggregates we all form and Proust's fictional characters are of course meant by the author to illustrate qualities of desire, which we ourselves can identify with and relate to on some level. If it was only pleasure these figures were in search of and if our Western paradigm on pain/pleasure was totally accurate, these individuals would move away from this pain and from the desired person they believe to be causing it. And yet, this author illustrates each desirous figure being pulled even more magnetically towards the very 'Other' known to be causing them such intense suffering. He also depicts them as losing interest in situations they previously longed for and found pleasurable, such as when Swann and Marcel finally achieve 'possession' of their coveted 'Other'. This interconnection between pain, pleasure and desire is a crucial aspect to our assemblages we create. Just as we're meant to relate these imaginary illustrations of desire aggregates in the novel directly to our own desirous encounters, we too can connect the characters' intense engagement with concurrent bliss and suffering, to our own experiences of pain and pleasure.

Deleuze highlights how imagination and repetition are crucial facets of desire. And yet what is most interesting is to note their connection to the painful and pleasurable experiences of desiring. For Proustian characters, love and desire are conveyed to the reader as an act of the imagination. One which is eventually halted by the successful 'possession' or 'acquisition' of their special coveted 'Other'. It may silence the intensity of their pains, but also in most cases their depicted pleasures, eventually putting an end to their desire and requiring the construction of new wants and fantasies instead. Swann and Marcel both experience this and do so in similar ways. Swann's love ignites when his imaginative process makes him able to see the once uninteresting and unappealing Odette, as now a vision resembling the Botticelli fresco, as well as an integral part of his entire encounter with the enchanting sonata. But his desire isn't only kept alive through the pleasure and pain he finds in this assemblage of elements. It is consistently fueled, by the agonizing mystery of who Odette really is and the tormenting suspicions she creates within him, over ideas about her past and present sexual activities with others, just as Marcel's desires for Albertine are affected in the same way.

The sheer mystery around both women's' sexuality acts as a provocative fuel which ensures the distance always needed for desire to maintain, but also as a painful point of intense jealousy for both characters. Proust presents a story which recognizes how there is nothing more excruciating, but nothing perhaps more motivating either, than knowing the 'object' of our greatest desire is experiencing pleasure elsewhere, without us. This is a reality he sheds light on through many a character in this story, including Marcel's envious desires for both Gilberte and Bergotte, those surrounding Albertine and her suspected female lovers, as well as Swann's passionate desire for Odette. He also depicts this kind of scenario even with regards to the tormented feelings Charlus and Saint-Loup are forced to suffer, at the hands of Morel and Rachel. But what's most crucial to remember, in terms of Proust's depictions of these complex experiences related to pain/pleasure, suffering/joy, is that Swann fell madly in love with and also maintained intense desire for Odette, not only because of pain he experienced through her, or even due to pleasures he enjoyed because of her, but in truth, the highly affective combination of both. What we can see through the desirous depictions all throughout this author's novel, is that it is in the 'place' where pleasure and suffering merge and through assemblages which combine an intense level of both experiences, that most

human beings seem to form their strongest attachments for others. And essentially, feel their most 'alive'.

The Baron de Charlus

The desires illustrated as being formed by the intriguing figure M de Charlus, are some of the most interesting examples of this complicated interconnectedness between desire, bliss and suffering. Firstly, because Proust reveals details both of this character's longstanding amorous longing for Charlie Morel, but also of the purely carnal desires he regularly forms for other individuals as well. But it's further intriguing how Proust makes use of this figure for an in-depth exploration not only of all-consuming emotional pain and pleasure, but too brings the traditional pleasure/pain dichotomy front and centre in this story, through the inclusion of direct physical explorations of it as well. The author vividly shows how this complex interrelation between both cerebral and physical pain and pleasure, play such a vital role in the Baron's explicitly sexual assemblages. And he explores the relationship between emotional pain and wished-for physical pleasure, that combine to form Charlus' intensely romantic desires for Morel. All of which, helps us to further understand this complicated aspect of everyone's aggregates of desire.

Like so many other characters in *À La Recherche*, Charlus is portrayed by the author just as Deleuze and Lévinas both theorize: as a desirer forever impelled towards elusive, living 'objects'. People who represent an entire alluring realm for him and that he believes he can 'acquire', but who also perpetually feel to him somehow 'distant' and escaping his ultimate grasp. And both his deeply coveted love 'object' Morel, as well as those he views to be purely sexual male 'objects' of interest, are always enveloped by complex multi-element landscapes. They are as well, always eventually revealed to be hopelessly unsatisfying solutions, to this actively desiring subject. All of which forces Charlus to alter his profound longings for his one love interest, Charlie, as well as to perpetually seek out other 'objects' of desire in an effort to 'satisfy' his various sexual, psychological and emotional cravings.

The amorous desire Proust describes being produced around Morel and the erotic desires he's illustrated as constructing around various sexualized male acquaintances, all come from just as imaginative and complex a collection of elements as what Swann's overwhelming love and lust for Odette entails. Charlus has a very specific attraction to

'rugged' men of a 'lower' social class standing than himself. In his purely sexual liaisons, he needs this characteristic to be blatantly obvious. Yet in the romantic, or even platonic spheres, his assembled aggregates of desire also encompass his intense need to portray anyone in his company as someone worthy of moving in the same coveted social circles that his upper-class, aristocratic heritage grants him privileged access to. In a genuine love relationship, Proust illustrates how the Baron possesses an intense need to generously share his wisdom, his social capital and overall, to improve the lives of those special 'Others' he finds himself drawn to. But there's always an entitlement and a transactional nature to his assembled ideas around what he desires and therefore to his relationships as well. It's intentionally made clear to the reader that Charlus also requires total and complete domination, in every sense. And for his 'superiority' to be fully understood by all parties involved in or aware of, any of his personal connections. So, these vital features of his sexual and romantic aggregates and his genuine need to provide for those he's attracted to, or simply enjoys the company of, are also in a significant way further extensions of his powerful need for utter and complete 'ownership' and control, of every single person or experience in his life. This element is so extreme, that Proust even depicts Charlus plotting for 'possession' of Jupien's niece for example, as an extension of his need to dominate and have control over Morel.

This complex character M de Charlus, is conveyed to us as being a sexual masochist and an arrogant 'snob', in the truest sense. And yet also, painted as extremely sensitive and ultimately, highly vulnerable on a deeply emotional level. The Baron adamantly believes in all of his aggregates, an element which as Deleuze argues is required in order for them to form and endure, specifically maintaining belief that the complete control and subjection of anyone he feels attracted to or wants to include in his assemblages is absolutely possible. His generosity with Morel and wish to grant him access into the privileged Parisian high society 'world' is sincere. Yet it's clear from the author how Charlus also takes a certain intense pleasure in constantly being aware of his perceived 'superiority' over those he wishes to help or romantically seduce. And that he thrives only by producing assemblages of desire that in some way, always contain an element of cruelty or 'wickedness' to them.

The intense and consuming assemblage Charlus constructs around his longed-for living 'object' of love and affection, Charlie Morel, is built from exactly this combination of elements, revolving around not only what he deems to be attractive physically, but also

involving crucial issues of class, social hierarchies, wealth, knowledge, opportunities for social enjoyment and the need to 'better' others. But also form around 'ownership' and his strong feelings regarding inherited 'pure' lineage and ultimate superiority. All these elements are pieced together as he creates desirous aggregates which are constantly refined, throughout the process of assembling this extremely potent desire for Morel. Like some others presumably, the Baron is initially drawn to Morel's irresistible physical appearance and initially submissive nature, which of course indicates an interesting juxtaposition against the dominance he demands from those he pursues for purely erotic reasons. But Morel has a sadistic side as well. One that Charlus becomes aware of and strategically encourages, within scenarios that involve doing harm to others. So in a sense he is in fact drawn to this aspect of cruelty in him as well. And Charlus works tirelessly to persuade both himself and everyone around them, that Charlie Morel isn't the son of a valet from humble working-class beginnings yet is instead an extremely kind and respectable 'gentleman'. Someone who's still 'beneath' the Baron's established social class, connections and intelligence, yet certainly equal enough to be worthy of his valuable company, just as his complex aggregate demands.

Morel's bisexuality, intentionally revealed by Proust, in addition to his resistance to Charlus' constant advances, both serve to maintain a perpetual sense of distance and separation from the Baron. Just enough to be powerfully drawn towards all the ideas that he connects around Morel, yet crucially still keeps Charlie far enough out of reach to still be potently desirable to the Baron. And Morel's gifted musical talent also blends perfectly into Charlus' assemblage, because it adds a level of social capital and respectability to him. It of course allows Charlus to still engage in any sexual or amorous fantasies related to Morel. But also makes him a person who can legitimately be brought into acceptable social circles such as at the Verdurin's salon, where Charlus can spend time with Morel freely in the kind of environment he enjoys, presumably without facing the intense social 'stigma' and possible legal repercussions surrounding the Baron's initially 'closeted' sexuality. Threats that could of course affect not only his prized social standing, but his literal freedom as well.

Despite Morel's physical good looks and impressive musical abilities, this character is nonetheless still illustrated by Proust as initially being one of the most depraved and ruthless figures in the entire story, portrayed as being available 'for a price' to anyone capable of paying, as well as known to take advantage of even the most innocent of

others, in a way that knows no bounds.²¹⁶ And his otherwise docile nature turns spiteful in the face of kindness and vindictive in response to misunderstandings. He both possesses and uses the ability to inflict incredible suffering on Charlus whenever he deems warranted, or even just when he so desires.²¹⁷ And yet, just as it happens with Swann, Marcel and even Saint-Loup, both the idea of fully possessing their longed-for loved one as well as the impossibility of doing so, repetitively ignites the Baron's imagination and perpetually intensifies his already overwhelming love and desire for Morel. And because of Charlus' own complicated nature with regards to sadism and masochism, he is both drawn to Morel's cruel tendencies, yet also deeply hurt and enraged by them when they don't align with his own personal aggregates of desire.

The intended affair between Charlus and Morel very much reflects the same fictional dynamic illustrated as existing between Swann and Odette, with M de Charlus being the wealthy, knowledgeable and socially connected man of the Faubourg, in comparison to the calculating and deceitful working class, bi-sexual 'lover-for-hire', who forms desires not for Charlus himself, but for the doors this Baron can open for him into the 'world' of Parisian high society. And Charlus is clearly depicted by Proust as not only finding intense pleasures through this association with Charlie Morel, but also of suffering unprecedented jealousy, pains and even delusional thoughts, due not only to the ruthless vindictiveness of Morel, but from being deprived of a 'possession' that he actually deemed fully possible. Ultimately Charlus is deluded by the possibility of being able to completely control this living 'object' he so passionately desires, just as the narrator Marcel repeats this same mistake later in the story, with his sought-after 'captive' Albertine.

What's important to note is that the Baron isn't repelled by the intense emotional pain Morel causes him. A sensation he's in fact highly vulnerable to, despite his attractions to physical agony. What's depicted by Proust is that Charlus wishes for physical pain on a sexual level, yet is painfully sensitive to the emotional suffering caused by Morel. So in that sense, he is powerfully drawn to one form of pain, yet responds fearfully to another. And in a unique way, Morel does in fact encapsulate the Baron's desire for beauty 'in the guise of a delightful torturer'. This fictional M de Charlus is shown to be unknowingly

²¹⁶ Proust, *SG* 551-558, 626, 650, *TC* 48, 59-61, *TR* 131

²¹⁷ Proust, *TR* 130-131

seeking the same intensity, through a combination of both pain and pleasure, that Swann, Saint-Loup and Marcel also find so highly addicting in their own desirous pursuits. What threatens Charlus' desire isn't specifically the pains or pleasures involved with it, but instead the inability to maintain belief in this potent assemblage he produces around Morel. It's due to Morel's actions of blatantly refusing to see him eventually and destroying this essential element of belief for the Baron, that we find him seeking to be voluntarily chained and beaten at the brothel, in a 'medieval' torture session designed to appeal exactly to his very carefully orchestrated aggregates of sexual desire. Yet one that, nonetheless, fails to deliver the painfully pleasurable experience he desires.²¹⁸

Although it's impossible of course to know with any certainty, Proust did not, I would argue, include scenes featuring sadomasochistic sexuality in this work, as an effort to examine the psychological character of individuals drawn to these experiences. Or even with a primary goal of personal exploration of his own tendencies. What these scenarios appear to highlight rather, is the incredibly complicated relationships between pleasure, pain and desire. Firstly, that the experiences of both pain and pleasure, as well as their associated meanings, are of course completely subjective. What others deem painful and would never wish for, or even be able to endure, Charlus in fact finds immensely pleasurable, in a specific sexual context. So it's impossible to reconcile traditional claims regarding the pain/pleasure dichotomy, with what we know of the many subjective experiences possible within the realm of sexual desire. And what also becomes evident through a close reading of Proust's work, is that for characters such as Charlus, the meaning behind these activities is for all participants, equally as important as the sexual acts themselves.²¹⁹

Despite being portrayed as a sexual masochist, this same need for control is a crucial part of the Baron's erotic fantasies as well. Although desiring a perceivably submissive and masochistic role in the torturous sexual activities he's shown to desperately crave, like all his assemblages, Charlus nonetheless takes full ownership of these encounters. And he does so not only by financing and setting up Jupien in a brothel establishment primarily aimed at tending to his own very specific erotic needs—but also by dictating

²¹⁸ Proust, *TR* 177, 181-182, 184-186

²¹⁹ "Kink Talks Back"

precisely the 'punishment' he wishes to receive. As well as clear specifics regarding who he deems worthy of executing it.

On a purely carnal level, the Baron's constructed aggregates are depicted by Proust to be just as complex as Swann's erotic and romantic desires for Odette. With the War greatly altering Charlus' access to his usual choice of lovers, he's forced to refine his desires and develops new aggregates of a few very specific 'types' that physically attract him. He now finds himself drawn towards Moroccan men, who are to him exotically 'distanced' from both himself and from those he most often encounters. But also to Anglo Saxons, for complicated associations they too spark within him. True intense pleasure for Charlus, whether sexual or cerebral, always needs to be combined in an assemblage involving a certain level of savagery. And when dispensed onto him, his instruments of choice for receiving physical pain resemble those from the Medieval times he's shown to be so passionately connected to. And the man desired to deliver this voluntary torture, needs to fit his assemblage exactly, by being unrefined, brutish and dangerous.

This particular brothel scene is an extremely revealing exchange within the pages of Proust's story, that very much highlights the complicated connections between pleasure, pain and desire in a uniquely vivid way. And stresses just how crucial each one of the various elements involved in our constructed desire assemblages truly are. At the male brothel, the Baron de Charlus receives exactly the 'services' Jupien and staff have come to know that his carnal desires demand. All the other specific elements of his erotic fantasy are present, in terms of the setting and the tools used, the acts engaged in and even the physical looks of the punisher he's set up with. And yet, the author makes it clear that Charlus is nonetheless, totally disappointed and 'unsatisfied' with the overall experience, both on a physical and cerebral level. Or more accurately: he doesn't experience the pleasurable sensations of pain, that he was hungering for.

While Charlus technically receives exactly the form of savage and degrading beating he apparently desired, what we're meant to understand is that it isn't ever 'just' sadomasochistic sexual activity he's in fact looking for. The author indicates how just as we need to see the interconnectivity within Swann's complicated desire for Odette, we also need to view the Baron as building an entire complexly detailed assemblage around his very specific erotic desires. Charlus defies the traditional pain/pleasure dichotomy, because not only is he not repelled by physical pain, but he is in fact powerfully drawn

towards it. But Charlus doesn't only want corporeal pain dispensed on him, in this sadomasochistic sexual dynamic. He also has very particular desires regarding the entire 'landscape', or context. And extremely specific wishes around who exactly it is that he wants dispensing the physical pain he receives. Precise ideas not only in terms of their appearance but perhaps even more so—who they 'are' as a person.

In his powerful quest for pleasure and pain, it matters enormously to Charlus how genuinely 'savage' or 'wicked' the men he has sexual encounters with really are, at their core. Essentially, he cares how the dispensers of his physical pain actually feel about it. And anyone not genuinely experiencing the pleasure and sinister feelings that he needs them to during these discrete liaisons, actually interrupts his fantasies and ability to fully enjoy his desire assemblage. Ultimately, they leave the Baron cold and disinterested, in the same way that women of Odette's 'type' usually did for Swann. Their failure to 'be' who he desires them to, also indicates Charlus' ultimate lack of control over the entire experience, which is an aspect deeply important to him in all his aggregates, despite appearing to be otherwise playing a purely masochistic and submissive role in them.

Jupien, knowing about the Baron's explicit sexual tastes and who Proust makes clear has been set up in business by M de Charlus for the primary goal of tending to the Baron's very specific erotic needs, always does everything possible to support these illusions. Theatrically, he does and says whatever he can think of to characterize the service providers as exactly the kind of "dangerous thugs" Charlus desires.²²⁰ This brothel-keeper vividly paints entire pictures meant to spark burning want within the Baron, telling Charlus details about each particular 'torturer-for-hire', such as how one was a professional dispenser of pain in the army in Africa where he "killed his [battalion] sergeant", or how they'd been convicted on multiple occasions for "theft and burglary" and were in a notoriously rough prison in France, for physical assault and "practically murdering people in the street".²²¹ All of this, clearly depicted by Proust as being done in an effort to appeal to Charlus' very explicit sexual 'tastes', in other words, of trying to help fuel an ongoing erotic desire assemblage of the Baron's, which Jupien and the brothel staff regulars are at least partly privy to.

²²⁰ Proust, *TR* 184

²²¹ *Ibid.*

But on this particular occasion, M. de Charlus, as much as he wants to believe that the reality of his desirous experience will match his fantasy and as much as the otherwise characteristically gentle male sex worker Maurice, clearly carries out the desired acts of sadism on Charlus, the Baron still doesn't fully trust Jupien's salacious tales. So he experiences no pleasure and in fact, is filled with intense 'dissatisfaction', as our common language would state. Because Charlus, chained and beaten by him at the Parisian brothel in exactly the cruel medieval manner to which he envisioned, isn't at all convinced of Maurice's 'thuggery' and sufficiently genuine 'wicked' nature: "I did not want to speak in front of that boy, who is very nice and does his best. But I don't find him sufficiently brutal."²²² Even though Maurice obviously fulfills the Baron's painful and bloody physical element in this desire assemblage and even captures his idea of beauty—resembling Charlus' lost-love Morel—his failure to meet the other important contextual elements results in an unexpected disruption to Charlus' sexual aggregate of desire: "He has a charming face, but when he calls me a filthy brute, he might be just repeating a lesson."²²³

The Baron creates a fantasy desire assemblage in his mind that simply can't be pleasurable without having, as Deleuze states, full "belief in [this] aggregate of two terms", both the context and the primary living 'object' playing such an active and crucial role in it. The full meaning Charlus attaches to this entire erotic assemblage is just as important to him as each of the specific elements involved with it. It's not enough for him that someone theatrically dispenses the pain, even with the exact instruments of torture and effort he specifically desires. Or that his 'sadist for hire' tries to behave with brutal force and the sense of 'wickedness' that M de Charlus is so enamoured with. The Baron needs Maurice to genuinely *be* exactly this type of individual, not simply try to act as though he is. And because ultimate control to dictate every situation and feel superior is also meshed into all of Charlus' desires, of every nature, Proust has Marcel inform us that overall, the Baron de Charlus finds "no one [...] smart enough to be numbered among his social acquaintances" and "no one sufficiently a ruffian to be worth knowing in other ways".²²⁴

²²² Proust, *TR* 184

²²³ Deleuze, "*Désir*"

²²⁴ Proust, *SG* 409

But the Baron's intense need to keep this unfulfilled desire perpetually alive is so powerful, that even after expressing his displeasure to Jupien, the brothel-keeper is able to help further ignite it again within Charlus, by telling him how the young Maurice was also "involved in the murder of a concierge in *La Villete*", exactly the kind of detail that Charlus wants to know about and believe, reigniting in the Baron an extreme erotic interest once again, as he does too by sharing that he also has another man from the "slaughterhouse" available, further fuelling desires within Charlus even more.²²⁵

Like all characters in the novel and all individuals in reality, Charlus has very specific sexual desires and his aggregates include very particular living 'objects'. The threat to his assemblage is clearly portrayed by Proust, as being only one thing: He eventually fails to have a required element, as Deleuze theorizes desire is, belief in this aggregate of two terms, a very precise landscape and a very specific human 'object'. Proust makes it evidently clear throughout the novel that these purely carnal desires indulged during the brothel scenes are built around a complex combination of ideas and experiences that Charlus forms intense cravings, or even 'needs' for. And just as with others in the novel, Proust indicates how these exact assemblages of desires, can cause Charlus incredible disappointment if not met precisely in the way that his aggregate entails.

Just as with real people, the desires that each of Proust's fictional characters have for a romance, love relationship or life-partner, or even a sensual or carnal experience of any kind, are intentionally painted by the author as being such highly complex desiring assemblages that role of primary 'object' can't be filled by 'just anyone'. Nor can these liaisons bring any kind of true enjoyment to the subject, if all the right details of the aggregate aren't met and involved. Desires for another are usually highly complex and very specific. This is a transactional exchange where Charlus can dictate exactly what his partner does to him physically. Yet it's not enough for him to simply have it done. A crucial aspect of his assemblage is that he deeply needs the 'Other' in these scenarios to want to dispense the pain, to genuinely take pleasure out of dispensing the pain. And to be what he views as the kind of 'wicked' individual, who would do both.

What a combined reading of Proust, Deleuze and Lévinas make obvious, is that despite his proclivity for sexually masochistic liaisons, Charlus' forms and responds to

²²⁵ Proust, *TR* 184-185

desire in exactly the same way as all the other figures in the novel do. Each characters' longings and sexual cravings are conveyed as being highly unique. But what Proust is cleverly exploring here, is that while the specifics of Charlus' desires may be vastly different than those of Swann or Marcel for example, or others in the novel for that matter, his process for designing his longings is nonetheless precisely the same. Not unlike all the other characters in this work, it's never simply a living 'object' or sexual satisfaction that he craves, but more accurately it's an entire intricate and distant 'world' of experiences formed around an elaborate aggregate of desire, with just as many complex interconnections as those of Swann, Marcel or others. The desires of Charlus are exactly as Deleuze and Lévinas contend: They flow around very precise concepts built from an associated set of ideas and elements that he imaginatively forms. And M de Charlus is portrayed by the author as being just as much a prisoner of both his romantic and erotic desires, as all the other figures in the story are, due also to his understanding of only a small fragment of his entire desire assemblages, (who the primary 'object' is), as well as never fully comprehending how desire actually 'works' within him.

The intentional depictions of sadomasochism in this work, are designed to provide deeper meaning and a bold statement on desire in general, I believe. Proust chose, (very intentionally I argue), to depict a combination of heterosexual, bisexual, gay and lesbian characters into his numerous examples and scenarios of love and sexual desire, that in one sense or another, all exhibit a sado-masochistic element to them, whether sexual or emotional. By doing so, he emphasizes some glaring truths: pain and pleasure are subjective, are not mutually exclusive and desire itself depicts consistently reliable patterns of both construction and disruption, as well as making it obvious that desire affects absolutely everyone, albeit in very individually diverse ways.

Proust's Narrator Marcel

There is much insight to be gained through Proust's vivid exploration of the lifelong desires encountered by his story's narrator, Marcel. And it is especially notable how the author's examination of the final tortured love affair which takes us to the end of this novel, is entirely unique of course, but also shares the exact same patterns as other characters' desirous portrayals and repeated misunderstandings. It also fully aligns with the important arguments put forth by Deleuze and Lévinas, as all desires in this story do. And it's through this particular central character, that the author engages in some of the

most interesting explorations on the connections between pain, pleasure and desire. What Proust does with this particular depiction of desire in action, is pulls together all of Marcel's related experiences, ongoing misunderstandings and yet possible final insights, gained through this tortuously pleasurable experience with his elusory, ever-mysterious 'captive' and 'fugitive', Albertine Simonet.

What's particularly revealing about a close examination of Marcel's metaphysical desire for Albertine, specifically through the combined lenses of Deleuze, Lévinas and Proust, is that we're not only provided with an in-depth look at how the act of desiring works in this particular assemblage, but can also come to understand how newly formed desires are frequently created in relation to previous desirous experiences we've already had. Essentially, how the desires we produce often have a way of being connected, or repeatedly built upon each other. The author's seven-volume work essentially ends with the aftermath of this utterly life-controlling desire Marcel suffers through, related to his captivating living 'object', Albertine, the very female who he once believed to be his one true love. But it's a longing which ultimately has very little to do with her specifically in fact. And is more about his own painful process of self-discovery.²²⁶ And which is, in essence, a repeated failed attempt of all his other unsuccessful efforts for exclusive 'possession' as well. First with Gilberte, as well as the entire mythic Swann family in fact, followed by his delusional infatuation with the Duchess, all of which model his earliest experiences of torturous longing for *Maman*. Proust indicates how Marcel consistently reaches towards people and experiences that he believes will grant him admission into certain desired 'universes', specifically 'worlds' which he's certain can ease his own desire-related sufferings, pains which otherwise could only be described by this narrator as "excruciating".²²⁷

Each act of exquisitely tortuous longing that Marcel experiences throughout his life, is an entirely unique assemblage of its own. But many of his most important desires are also continuously refined and essentially 'reproduced' in new ways, over his fictional lifetime. The narrative around Marcel's journey highlights how independent desires can merge, overlap, or re-ignite each other, in a way that forms desires which are entirely distinct, yet still intricately connected to previous ones. The (various) desired aggregates

²²⁶ Streip

²²⁷ Proust, SW 41

produced by Marcel are also a superb example of the complicated mix of pain and pleasure, so inescapably connected to our most powerful longings. The intense longings for an elevated 'Other' that Marcel experiences all through the novel, illustrate how desire does not in fact seek to be satisfied or placated in any way. As both Deleuze and Lévinas argue, satisfaction through 'possession' of the 'Other' should never be viewed as desire's end goal—and the quest for pleasurable satiation doesn't even accurately explain the way desire functions. But our narrator's misunderstandings of this truth, are meant by Proust as a clear and true reflection of our own vast misperceptions and confusions regarding desire, pleasure, suffering and satisfaction. He also makes use of this important character to remind us how our current desires are rarely limited in scope by only the present. And in fact, are frequently connected not only to former desires, but also to multiple moments of time and place. When we begin to examine these vividly constructed assemblages sequentially, we're able to see how patterns often emerge in terms of who or what someone desires over their lifetime. This seems especially true when it comes to amorous desires, as previous loves often affect or in some way help to determine the main characteristics of new ones. Or as Proust's narrator explains, certain "habits survive the woman."²²⁸

This is certainly the case for all of Marcel's anxiety-driven longings focused around Albertine. His desire itself wants nothing more than to survive, whereas satiation can only serve to extinguish any of his enjoyable longings. And that's exactly what happens to Marcel's previously overwhelming desirous wants for this 'captive' he seduces. Once he finally 'possesses' her, Marcel begins to no longer desire Albertine. In fact, he spends a great deal of time thinking of all the other independent pleasures in life, that being with her forces him to neglect or give up unwillingly. Proust indicates that after 'possessing' his previously coveted 'Other', Marcel soon becomes "bored" with her, no longer even finds her "pretty" and is certain that he's no longer in love, because he in fact "taste[s] the joys" of his freedom, whenever he's not in her company.²²⁹ We often think of the pain associated with desire as being a result of not being able to assuage it. And yet, what is rarely discussed in the detail that it merits and that Proust's novel pays considerable attention to, is the actual pain of 'satisfaction'.

²²⁸ Proust, *TF* 921-922

²²⁹ Proust, *TC* 5

With no height, distance and separation from Albertine to perpetuate an intense and ongoing longing for her, new desire assemblages now need to be produced, or at least previous ones need to be altered or further refined. And the author's depiction of this particular phenomenon is an excellent example both of Lévinas explanations of longing and Deleuze's insistence on the importance of imagination, a crucial element in building our desires and a factor always needed to first create, re-awaken, or even to propel our complicated desire aggregates further. Even at this specific point in his relationship with Albertine, where Marcel is uninterested and grows completely bored of her, where he is certain to no longer be in love, or even attracted to the person who had once dominated his every thought and feeling, the author indicates an imaginative process of desire production that visualizes Deleuze's theory, in the same way that Swann's love affair with Odette did. The disenchanted Marcel suddenly finds his passionate longing for Albertine fully re-awakened, as he creates an intense burning desire for her when his involuntary memory connects Albertine's image to that of Elstir's artworks, Vinteuil's sonata and Bergotte's philosophy, all things he deeply values and still has very active desires for: "I would unconsciously summon up from within me the dreams that Albertine had inspired in me long ago before I knew her and that had been quenched by the routine of everyday life".²³⁰ And by now seeing her "in the perspective of imagination and art", Marcel finds himself "suddenly and for an instant capable of passionate feelings for this [otherwise] wearisome girl".²³¹

So while it may appear that we produce desires only to focus on satisfying them, it's necessary to acknowledge that what desire actually strives toward is in fact an "indeterminacy".²³² Our longings can only passionately fixate on what is far enough away to allow for a pleasurable yet also painful ascent towards these desired realms of possibility, yet all-the-while, also maintaining enough distance to ensure that our desires remain 'alive'. And this is exactly what Proust subtly illustrates with his portrayal of Marcel's greatest love affair. Desire is always about people, things and experiences that are out of reach. Not 'absent' per se. Just far enough removed to produce longing and remain unsatisfied, yet also close enough to somehow imagine and believe in.

²³⁰ Proust, *TC* 65-66

²³¹ Proust, *TC* 66

²³² Dalton, "Longing"

There are certain people and 'worlds' that initially appear 'inaccessible' to us, yet also (somehow), possible to enter. Most people find this combination incredibly alluring. And our passionate desires relentlessly aim towards these sublime realms for very good reason. These very special 'worlds' represent to us entire 'landscapes' of highly valued experiences, as Deleuze theorizes, as well as opportunities for the 'transcendence' that Lévinas highlights we all crave as human beings. Our imagination is a crucial facet which helps us to construct both an awareness of these possible 'universes' we might gain entry into, as well as some form of a belief in their distant, yet still attainable nature. But we need to dispel with the notion that what desire is striving towards here is nothing but pure and pleasurable satisfaction. And this is the ultimate challenge Marcel faces in his potent desires for Albertine. Having his desire fulfilled, literally is the demise of it. Although we're not fully aware of this truth, in reality, what we want from our desires isn't successful 'acquisition' of the 'objects' they fixate on, but instead, the profound sensation of experiencing these longings, as well as the intoxicating combination of both the pain and pleasure, all of this entails.

We covet these perceivably impenetrable 'othered worlds', at times with intense obsession: "The belief that a person has a share in an unknown life to which his or her love may win us admission is, of all the prerequisites of love, the one which it values most highly".²³³ And yet, ultimately, metaphysical desire doesn't ever truly seek satisfaction through these realms, no matter what dominant theories tell us or how it may appear. (Either in Proust's captivating novel or in our own real lives). What desire seeks on our behalf and therefore what we ourselves are each in search of, is an ongoing relationship with certain elements that collectively make up these special 'universes'. Not a complete unity with them, but instead, a continuous feeling of awareness, elevation and separation. This 'height and distance' from our passionately longed-for 'worlds' is absolutely crucial when it comes to the activity of desiring. Not only for the initial emergence of the formidable force desire, but also for the sustainability of it. And the intense combination of both pain and pleasure involved in these experiences is, I argue, central to both the 'essence' of desire, as well to its ability to take hold of our lives with such totality.

²³³ Proust, *SW* 139

If the 'worlds' Marcel associates with each of his longed-for living 'objects' wasn't in some way highly revered, as well as sensed by him as essentially removed from his immediate 'grasp', desire for these females could never even begin to emerge. That which is easily 'knowable', 'reachable' or 'attainable', can never produce the powerful longings witnessed all through this work of literature. Similar as well to the profound, once-in-a-lifetime desire experienced by Charles Swann, the narrator Marcel's personal story highlights for us how desire is in reality, powerfully intensified by the perpetual distance between ourselves and those captivating individuals who remain "separated from us by an enormous gulf".²³⁴

The volumes of *In Search of Lost Time* unfold the story of (among other things) Marcel's desperate and lifelong ambition to become a talented, successful and well respected writer—along with the torturous self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy this creative and philosophical journey involves.²³⁵ His desires for Albertine, as well as his earlier desires for Gilberte and the Duchess (and for others who follow) are inseparable from this one overarching longing that defines Marcel's greatest life endeavour. But this writing ambition is driven by an overwhelming curiosity about the world that extends beyond only literary goals. What we learn early on about Proust's narrator Marcel is that he doesn't ever just want to "regard [...] thing[s] as spectacle[s]", but instead strives to get at their innermost "unique essence".²³⁶ He embraces every single element of life this way, with his approach to human 'objects' being no different.

In the mind of Proust's narrator, penetrating the mysterious unknown 'worlds' of the 'Other' is the only possible way of gaining access to this important 'essence'. (Of them or of anything else in life). It's the only path for getting to truly 'know' any of the 'objects' of his desires, at the profoundly intimate level he so eagerly yearns for. Proust's novel shows us how in the end, even this methodical strategy proves insufficient, both for Marcel as well as for the other deeply tormented characters within this multi-volume story, all of whom attempt with perseverance but ultimate futility, to better understand the human 'objects' they construct such powerful desires for. We learn from Marcel Proust, that none of us can ever really 'know' another as genuinely as we strive for. People have

²³⁴ Proust, *SW* 137

²³⁵ O'Brien 91; Proust *SW* 97

²³⁶ Proust, *SW* 90

multiple 'selves'. And a part of them will always remain hidden, even from those they're closest to. Yet, this search for meaningful 'truths' and for the essential nature (of virtually everyone and everything he encounters), is nonetheless a constant driving force of Marcel's personality. And is absolutely central to all the desires he produces for Gilberte, the Duchess and Albertine, as well as for other enticing living 'objects' he's drawn to.

What keeps his life-altering love and sexual desire for Albertine Simonet alive, is the inquisitive journey he goes on trying to get to know her, as well as the perpetual distance that he feels from this mysterious, secretive 'object' of affection. And this sense of separation is consistently amplified as he begins to suspect and learn of her attractions and sexual affairs with women, in a whole other 'secret life' that both torments him, but also feeds into his intense need to discover 'truth' and the 'essence' of everything and everyone. So not unlike his other loves, Marcel's desires are fuelled by the mystery of everything she represents for him, as well as an agitating distance he feels from not only her, but also everything encompassed in the desirous 'landscape' surrounding her. And as both Deleuze and Lévinas break down for us, it's really the flow or trajectory towards this mystifying realm of 'Otherness' and the constant striving for something far more 'othered' and complex, than just an 'object', that we should equate the powerful activity of desiring to.

Although Marcel is completely unaware of this throughout his painfully pleasurable journey with Albertine Simonet, not unlike Swann's experience with Odette, Albertine in fact comes to represent the most vital form of personal transcendence Marcel ever experiences. It is due to her, as well as his highly complicated desirous journey to 'possess' her, that Marcel ultimately commences the one thing that was in fact his truest, most heartfelt, life-long desire, that of becoming a writer.²³⁷ His intense love and his once insatiable, life-altering desire for Albertine eventually fades, not from her initial absence from him though, or even from her death. But from the concentrated effort of developing a repetitive habit to forget this impossible-to-know lover, or more accurately, forget the part of him that loved Albertine.²³⁸ What remains though, even after the love affair is long

²³⁷ Proust, *TR* 304-328

²³⁸ Proust, *WBG* 338-341, *TF* 642-650, 746, 754

over, is a sentiment within him that Proust presents as a nod to the value of suffering, as well as to the intense experience, of both pain and pleasure:

“[...] for a woman is of greater utility to our life if, instead of being an element of happiness in it, she is an instrument of suffering, and there is not a woman in the world the possession of whom is as precious as that of the truths which she reveals to us by causing us to suffer”.²³⁹

Ultimately, the entire experience of loving and desiring Albertine, was a bridge into Marcel's most coveted 'world', where Albertine Simonet, while gone, nonetheless still has a permanent impact on him, allowing Marcel to draw on all of these profound and life-altering experiences, both intensely painful and pleasurable, to commence and fully carry out, his life's most important and desired quest.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Proust, *TF* 669

²⁴⁰ Proust, *TR* 260

Re-thinking Desire / Concluding Remarks

The story we've been told, one that's deeply engrained in the collective Western consciousness, is that humanity is inherently 'wounded'. That we came into this world with a perpetual 'hole' inside us needing to be filled. And that desire emerges from this wound, from this inescapable lack all of us perpetually contend with, as we live a life of continuously seeking out all of the right 'objects' to satisfy this relentless void and ease any suffering we experience. This widespread perception of 'acquisition' being a lasting solution to all of our many and varied pains, as well as a consistently reliable path to our most blissfully enjoyed pleasures, is simply the historical and cultural legacy we've been left with. And these inaccurate and ill-conceived beliefs extend to every facet of life, but most notably to our highly valued personal relationships.

As we see throughout Proust's novel, in the numerous depictions of desire meant to connect us with our own experiences and misunderstandings on some level, all of our important bonds and personal interactions with others, are considered to be an antidote of sorts. But deeply fulfilling romantic love, as well as intensely satisfying consensual sexual relationships, with personally coveted individuals, are both perceived and felt by many people to be some of, if not 'the' best solution, to the allegedly inherent pain of being human. Charles Swann finds himself forging a once-in-a-lifetime desire around a woman he'd least expect, once he connects her with an opportunity to overcome the anguish of living a life many would in fact envy, but one that to him is painfully uncreative and missing the intensity that he suddenly learns is possible. Proust's narrator Marcel spends his entire fictional life seeking out some form of soothing love, comfort and respite from pain, specifically though any of the female figures that he fixates on. And even M de Charlus, with his attraction to physical pain and a penchant for all things 'wicked', nonetheless seeks a loving relationship and refuge from his own version of life's other cruelties, through his obsessive and one-and-only love interest, Morel.

Throughout Proust's fictional tale, just as in real life, establishing these intense connections with others is a remedy many actively and passionately pursue, arguably, often above all other quests also deemed important. And at the heart of this behaviour, is a tradition of misconceptions regarding all of our desires so central to these vital relationships, with desire and the living 'object' we fixate on repeatedly being blamed as

being both the source of much of our pain and suffering that we try so hard to heal, as well as being viewed by many of us as the medium capable of helping us ease these very pains we're told that we'll always contend with. We have much to learn from Proust, who depicts all of his complex characters, to behave in a manner consistent with the same misunderstandings about desire that the rest of us commonly share as well. He illustrates these figures to be like so many of us, as focusing their attentions on the individuals at the centre of their intense desires, as well as on the void they themselves interpret. One they sense a need to overcome without ever being aware of just how deceptively complex their aggregates of desire truly are. Or how they have in fact produced all of these distressing 'needs', desires or feelings, themselves.

These figures consistently pursue living 'objects', with the misguided notion that all of their passionate quests will bring them the most intense and long-lasting pleasures possible, as well as ultimately solve any of their pain and sufferings. Pains they interpret as a consistently inherent facet of being human, rather than as a result of their own productive desires. And in their desperate chase towards 'satisfaction' and the alluring living 'objects' of their undeniable attraction, like most of us, what they completely seem unaware of, is that the intensity of the 'hunt' towards perceived 'acquisition' itself, is likely the very experience of combined sensations which they actually want to keep 'alive'.

Despite efforts made in the Western Tradition to define, portray and comprehend the essential characteristics and specific mechanics of desire, we're still lacking a common grasp on how desire functions within us. As well as an accurate appreciation of why it has such ineffable power on our lives. What remains obvious is that we are both inescapably connected to desire—and yet continue to misunderstand how it functions within us. All of these related concepts, ideas and misunderstandings, together result in a never-ending collective perception of the profound and ongoing 'problem' we identify and refer to, simply as 'desire'.

Far more accurate and enlightening explanations on both the nature and the inner workings of desire, have been offered to us. Ones that enhance our understandings, by not only providing philosophically sound argument, but also by describing the process of human desiring in such a way that it finally explains so many of the mysteries and confusing perceptions, around our most important lived experiences. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, along with Emmanuel Lévinas, each help demystify so much about these

intensely powerful and largely bewildering longings that we all form on a regular basis. And Marcel Proust, skillfully introduces us to such in-depth exploration of human desire within his fictional work, that it in fact brings clarity to these firm theoretical assertions, in a relatable and uniquely elucidating way.

All of the desires explored throughout Proust's novel exemplify the characteristics of desire that both Deleuze and Lévinas outline. They're each longings produced in response to a perceived relationship between multiple distanced 'things', people and experiences. And are dramatically intensified because of the subjects' separation from all of these wished-for 'othered' realities they desperately long to step into. Like all great works of art, Proust's novel can be helpful by provoking us to explore desire in a much different light than popular understandings default to. His intense examination offers us vivid examples of not only how desiring actually functions within us, but also the grave consequences and unnecessary torment that come largely from our overall lack of understanding on desire's essence and workings. And Deleuze and Lévinas provide us with relatable theoretical understandings on desire, which can in fact address so many of the confusions and unnecessarily distressing experiences related to our misconceptions surrounding desire. Collectively, these authors paint a portrait of desire that can in fact be used to decipher not only our most mystifying desires within the amorous or erotic realms, but in fact can be applied to virtually any kind of desires we encounter.

When it comes to the crucially important activity of human desire, in most Western cultures, many of the popular misconceptions clearly still prevail. Yet there are helpful explanations which deserve further attention. Enlightening theories on how each and every one of us produce and assemble desire, through a highly complex and ongoing constructive process of associating a multi-element context, with a primary distanced 'object'. Each of these writers surveyed indeed have something valuable to offer to the discussion. But Proust, Deleuze and Lévinas, especially in a collective manner, are capable of yielding extremely constructive and illuminating results on the perpetual 'problem' of desire.

Every one of the remarkably intense desires examined in this fictional story, while conveyed to us as highly unique for each imaginary person Marcel Proust introduces us to, nonetheless can still be further elucidated through these philosophical explanations surveyed. Ultimately what we find throughout the novel, are consistent representations

of desire that align with Deleuze's assertions and can be even more fully illuminated, by both he and Lévinas combined. Fictional literary depictions that while uniquely personal in detail, still all collectively share the same creative and constructive activity. One of assembling potent desires through imagination, repetition and elaborate associations made around a significant variety of elements. And in each and every case, this activity collaboratively leads to the emergence of profoundly complex and life-consuming desires, intensely romantic or sexual longings that initially appear only to be focused on a special, distanced 'Other', but in fact all include an elaborate and very specific landscape associated to them as well.

The valuable understandings we can take from both Deleuze's work and the creative fictional narrative by Proust which so profoundly influenced it, is that the 'problem' of desire isn't one of all the inherent dangers it entails, nor our inability to protect ourselves from any inevitable hazards it elicits. The vital trouble with human desire, is that just as the perpetually distressed characters throughout Proust's novel do, we ourselves also conduct our lives based on a series of false beliefs and misunderstandings around virtually every aspect of desire. The value of applying the lessons from Proust, Deleuze and Lévinas is not going to be equally worthwhile for all scenarios and every example of desire of course. The benefits are largely dependent on how mysterious, vital or complex the desires being examined through these lenses actually are, in the first place. And it's imperative to note that while we do produce desires, we nonetheless do so within the evolutionary realities of drives that also co-exist. But this insistence on remaining true to our inherited beliefs surrounding desire is the 'problem' we need to confront, because these misconceptions aren't just unfortunate realities that we have no control over. They can have very concrete and negative consequences on our entire lived experiences.

The constructive act of imaginatively and repetitively assembling longings through a flow of associated ideas, built around any number of distinct elements including a seemingly out-of-reach 'Other' and a related context, can much better explain to us how powerful longing emerges, expands and finally transforms, or is extinguished. But this process has instead been gravely misunderstood, as has the truth regarding our active productive role in creating the highly individualized desires that we all experience. We seem to continue pay homage to many of the great thinkers of our Western Tradition and their explanations on this monumental experience, 'desire', somehow ignoring all the contradictions within these messages that have been passed down to us, as well as the

paradoxical nature of desire itself. We accept the idea that desire is and always will be, a 'problem' we have no control over. All the while largely ignoring alternate explanations such as what Proust, Deleuze and Lévinas share with. Explanations and explorations that actually shed light on how we can understand some of our most important thoughts, feelings, behaviours and experiences, in a much more accurate and rewarding way. As well as how we can likely better manage all of our expectations related to all that we desire—and overall, just live a 'better' life.

Longing for the human 'Other', is for most people, a complex combination of what is most painful, but also most pleasurable. And we have no hope of discovering the true essence and mechanics of desire without first acknowledging that in fact, desire doesn't want to be satisfied. Our dominant understandings of desire focus on the 'acquisition' of an 'object', but this comes at the detriment of greater knowledge about what it really means to actively desire. As Deleuze makes evidently clear, 'acquisition' is a highly problematic idea. It forces into the discourse the concept of a lack, presumably needed to initially generate this need to 'acquire' something or someone, in the first place. And it demands we look for a void which is presumed to be inherently and perpetually painful. When in fact, what we can see within these dramatic fictional scenarios in Proust's work, are desiring subjects incessantly producing and also further refining, imaginatively constructed and intoxicating aggregates of desire. Most of us think, just as Proust's characters are portrayed to believe, that we're all pursuing 'objects' and 'acquisition', in a quest for pleasure and happiness. But in fact, the experience we often want, the one that makes us feel most alive, is the complicated and powerful mixture of pleasure and pain, that only an active desire can generate.

What a collective review of these three authors insightfully helps us understand is that we don't find the greatest pleasure in the satiation of desire—but much more so in engaging with the constructive process and the actual pursuit. At times we experience both unbearable pains, but also exquisite pleasures, just in the activity of desiring itself. And because of this, desires 'achieved' rarely provide us with the kind of fulfillment we anticipate, because their 'satisfaction' essentially puts an end to the very thing that we experience profound levels of pleasure from. I believe that this feeling of 'lack' many can relate to, is actually the inevitable sensation we experience when certain desires demise, through their fulfillment. In re-thinking human desire, it's paramount we appreciate the fact that in our engagement with desiring: 'The hunt is always sweeter than the kill'.

Collectively, these authors offer us a deeply insightful opportunity to reflect more accurately on this reality and on the complex nature and mechanics of human longing, as well as to actively change the way we approach desire. Once we understand our personal and very active role in creating desires around distant 'Others', we can better manage our expectations and responses to desire. Anything that affects our lived experiences with such intensity and frequency, should matter to us a great deal more than the level of contemporary investigation on this particular topic currently conveys.

An accurate theory of desire isn't valuable only because it can meet the requirements of formal philosophical or psychological discourse, but even more so because we find it relatable. It speaks directly to our real lived experiences, providing useful explanations on things that are most important to us. The great 'problem' and 'danger' of desire isn't that desire is inherently hazardous. Desire can be both beautiful and destructive. But it's dangerous that we don't comprehend it—and that we treat desire as a phenomenon that just naturally 'happens' to us. Especially the intensely magnetic longings felt for a very special desirous 'Other'. Just as the characters in Proust's novel are depicted, we too, are endlessly confused about why desire affects us the way that it does.

The dangers of these misunderstandings are carefully examined by Gilles Deleuze and Emmanuel Lévinas, as well as in a more diaphanous way, explored by Proust. All of whom detail the ways in which equating desire with inaccurate concepts such as 'lack' searching for an 'object' and 'satisfaction', through 'acquisition', only sends us on a distressing and perpetual chase throughout our entire lifetime. A roller-coaster of quests and let downs, or at least a mix of unnecessary confusions. Not fully grasping how desire operates causes us real-life struggle, life-consuming challenges and heartache, as well as many the unnecessary disappointment, on a regular basis. And it also deeply affects our ability to pursue and maintain the very best version of our relationships with 'Others' possible. Deleuze and Lévinas both argue the gravity of these concerns over the desire paradigm, each in their own unique and convincing ways. And all of these hazards related to our misconceptions about the essence and the workings of desire, are also vividly illustrated by Proust. As exploratory as his literary work and final stance on desire may be, Marcel Proust does nonetheless demonstrate through his colourful fictional characters, the sheer complexities of human desire. As well as the significant level of pain and confusion—that these misunderstandings force all of humanity to contend with.

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