

— SCHIZOANALYTIC APPLICATIONS —

DELEUZE AND THE  
SCHIZOANALYSIS  
OF LITERATURE

EDITED BY  
IAN BUCHANAN,  
TIM MATTS AND  
AIDAN TYNAN

B L O O M S B U R Y

In 1972, the French theorists Deleuze and Guattari unleashed their collaborative project—which they termed schizoanalysis—upon the world. Today, few disciplines in the humanities and social sciences have been left untouched by its influence. Through a series of groundbreaking applications of Deleuze and Guattari's work to a diverse range of literary contexts, from Shakespeare to science fiction, this collection demonstrates how schizoanalysis has transformed and is transforming literary scholarship. Intended for upper-level undergraduates, postgraduates and scholars with an interest in continental philosophy, literary theory and critical and cultural theory, *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Literature* is a cutting edge volume, featuring some of the most original voices in the field, setting the agenda for future research.

**IAN BUCHANAN** is Director of the Institute for Social Transformation Research, Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong, Australia. He is the author of *Deleuzism* (2000) and the editor of *Deleuze Studies*.

**TIM MATTS** is Research Associate with the Department of Decay at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, UK.

**AIDAN TYNAN** teaches English literature and critical and cultural theory at Cardiff University, UK. He is the author of *Deleuze's Literary Clinic: Criticism and the Politics of Symptoms*.

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PHILOSOPHY

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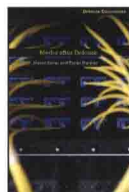
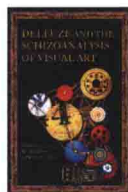


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# Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Literature

Edited by Ian Buchanan, Tim Matts  
and Aidan Tynan

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# Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Literature

## Schizoanalytic Applications

Our goal with this series is to broaden the base of scholars interested in Deleuze and Guattari's work. But beyond that we want to change how their work is read. While their work is already widely known and used, its use tends not to be systematic, and this is both its strength and its weakness. It is a strength because it has enabled people to pick up their work from a wide variety of perspectives, but it is also a weakness because it makes it difficult to say with any clarity what exactly a 'Deleuzian-and-Guattarian' approach is. This has inhibited the uptake of Deleuze and Guattari's thinking in the more 'hard-headed' disciplines such as history, politics and even philosophy. Without this methodological core, Deleuze and Guattari studies risks being simply another intellectual fashion that will soon be superseded by newer figures. Our goal here is to create that methodological core and build a sustainable model of schizoanalysis that will attract new scholars to the field. In saying this, we also aim to be at the forefront of the field by starting a discussion about the nature of Deleuze and Guattari's methodology.

Editors: Ian Buchanan, David Savat and Marcelo Svirsky

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*Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema,*  
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*Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Literature,*  
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edited by Ian Buchanan and Lorna Collins



## List of Contributors

Ian Buchanan  
Institute for Social Transformation  
Research  
University of Wollongong  
New South Wales  
Australia

Tim Matts  
Research Associate  
Department of Decay  
Bartlett School of Architecture  
University College London  
UK

Aidan Tynan  
School of English, Communication  
and Philosophy  
Cardiff University  
Cardiff  
UK

Robert Porter  
Media Studies Research Institute  
University of Ulster  
Co. Londonderry  
N. Ireland

Iain Mackenzie  
Department of Politics and  
International Relations  
University of Kent  
Canterbury  
UK

Joe Hughes  
School of Culture and Communication  
University of Melbourne  
Parkville  
Australia

Donald Cross  
Comparative Literature  
University at Buffalo  
New York  
USA

Ruben Borg  
Department of Culture and Literature  
University of Tromsø  
Norway

Garin Dowd  
Ealing School of Art, Design and Media  
University of West London  
London  
UK

Alan Bourassa  
Department of English  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec  
Canada

Lorna Burns  
School of English  
University of St Andrews  
Fife  
UK



Benjamin Noys  
Department of English and  
Creative Writing  
University of Chichester  
West Sussex  
UK

Ben Woodard  
Centre for the Study of Theory  
and Criticism  
Western University  
London, Ontario  
Canada

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# Introduction: Towards a Schizoanalytic Criticism

Ian Buchanan, Tim Matts and Aidan Tynan

This book is an attempt to put schizoanalysis to work in the field of literary studies and map out new ways of thinking the theory and practice of literature inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's work. In their final collaboration, *What Is Philosophy?* (1994), Deleuze and Guattari argue that the specific job of philosophy is to create concepts – which they rigorously distinguish from scientific 'functions' – while the job of artists is to create 'blocs of sensation' made up of 'affects and percepts' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164). These are not the same as affections and perceptions, which always belong to a particular person, but are the impersonal rendering of these in the materiality of the art works themselves. This is a radically autonomous conception of art that compels us to think the radical *heteronomy* of sensations. The scream of Bacon's popes is a scream of line and colour, the tumult of Turner's skies the tumult of oil and watercolour. As Sartre writes, 'Tintoretto did not choose that yellow rift in the sky above Golgotha to *signify* anguish or to *provoke* it. It is anguish and yellow sky at the same time. . . . it is an anguish become thing' (2001: 3). The affect achieves autonomy – thingness – in the material, while the distance between the perceiver and the perceived disappears in this moment of autonomy that is also a moment of heteronomy. Deleuze and Guattari wish to avoid the impasses of representation and signification in their approach to aesthetics but this is a necessary corollary to their vision of the universe as a monistic multiplicity, a single infinitely modified substance in continuous variation.

Deleuze's article on Melville's famous story *Bartleby, the Scrivener* demonstrates the stakes of what we might call a schizoanalytic reading. Bartleby's formulation 'I would prefer not to' – which he gives in answer to his employer's increasingly reasonable requests – is a bloc of words that fascinates with its impenetrability, its inscrutability, its implacable deflection of meaning. The formula, as Deleuze calls it, seems a perfect embodiment of Bartleby himself or of the white wall that faces

his window: without particularities, without references, a sheer blank where the powers of interpretation break down (Buchanan 2000: 94–5). Through his very serenity, Bartleby can inspire riots and Melville's story is nothing if not a story of the limits of legal rationality (embodied in the narrative voice of the attorney). Bartleby himself is less a character than a 'man without qualities', a 'Figure that exceeds any explicable form: it projects flamboyant traits of expression that mark the stubbornness of a thought without image, a question without response, an extreme and nonrational logic' (Deleuze 1997: 82–3). The affect captured in the formula is the solemnity of a desire that has detached itself from normal laws of preference and particularity to discover a 'negativism beyond negation' (Deleuze 1997: 71).

Rancière observes that the focus on the materiality of the linguistic formula situates Deleuze's reading in opposition to the traditional literary categories of story and symbol: 'Bartleby is not the story of the quirks and misfortunes of a poor clerk. Nor is it a symbol for the human condition. It is a formula, a performance' (2004: 146). But the nature of this materiality is difficult to pin down (which is what leads Rancière to suspect a contradiction in Deleuze's method). Deleuze identifies the formula as a 'limit-function', since it marks a point where articulate speech merges with the agrammatical (Deleuze 1997: 68). 'I would prefer not to,' though grammatical, tells us apparently nothing since the 'not to' defines no particular preference while the 'I would prefer' suggests one. Does Bartleby prefer or does he not? The undecidability of the object of the formula's 'to' carries us to a place where we can no longer distinguish thought and action, statement and intention. The formula attains a pure performativity or 'practicality' in the schizoanalytic sense, and immunizes itself against interpretation. This is the source of the story's strange comedy, suggesting that the contradiction of a preference that wants not to prefer can only be resolved through laughter or can only laugh at its irresolution. The problem is the same as a symbol that does not symbolize, a meaning that does not mean. This is the fulcrum of schizoanalytic poetics, which dispenses with the empire of signs and the idea of the text as a tissue of signifiers in favour of a vision of the literary work as a machine or practical object composed of asignifying or non-representational particles discernible in blocs, traits and figures.

Language for Deleuze, as for his post-Saussurian colleagues, is a system of signs referring to other signs. For this reason, within linguistic representation 'we can never formulate simultaneously both a proposition and its sense; we can never say what is the sense of what we say' (Deleuze 1994: 155). Language

for this reason traps within itself an unsayable and an unreadable. Words refer to other words, not to the referent, as Saussure pointed out. Language cannot get outside of itself to speak about itself, to say its sense. What Deleuze calls sense, then, is precisely what language cannot say but which language alone can bring about as its very own outside. The outside of language is reachable only via language, even if by a nonsense of the kind Bartleby or one of Lewis Carroll's creatures might produce:

There is only one kind of word which expresses both itself and its sense – precisely the nonsense word: abraxas, snark or blituri. If sense is necessarily a nonsense for the empirical function of the faculties, then conversely, the nonsenses so frequent in the empirical operation are like the secret of sense for the conscientious observer, all of whose faculties point towards a transcendent limit. (Deleuze 1994: 155)

Nonsense and esoteric words are part of what Deleuze calls 'refrains' (1994: 123). These are linguistic blocs stripped of meaning as such and whose importance lies entirely in their performative element – this being the 'secret' of sense. Throughout Deleuze's writings on literature, he comes back again and again to blocs such as these, which he calls by different names: the procedure, the formula, the combinatorial, the refrain, the *ritornello*. In each case, the goal is to identify how a literary text breaks with the 'empirical' deployment of language, that is, language as representation, which consists in identifying predicates attributed to subjects. Sense is indifferent to predication in this way. When Alice grows larger and smaller in Wonderland, she is involved in becomings that 'elude the present' (Deleuze 1990: 1). Alice is neither large nor small; she becomes larger and smaller. These 'events' are 'sense-events' precisely because they also evade the 'good sense' of saying whether someone is large or small. The realm of sense, which Deleuze explores meticulously in *The Logic of Sense* – an important precursor of the schizoanalysis books – is one in which language and event, word and world, are no longer distinguishable. Sense is identifiable via nonsense or similarly 'anomalous' points in language where meaning is stripped away. Deleuze could be accused of a kind of linguistic idealism here perhaps, but it would be very different from the one demonstrated by Derrida, for example, or by the linguistic turn generally imputed to poststructuralism.

Even as we respect Deleuze's insistence on the specificity of the philosophical practice, we cannot avoid the fact that literature, of all the arts, comes closest to philosophy. When asked in an interview if *A Thousand Plateaus* could be

described as 'a work of literature', Deleuze peremptorily replied that it is 'philosophy, plain old philosophy' (Deleuze 2007: 176). And yet, he suggests a special kinship between literary and philosophical discourse; for example, when he writes that 'a book of philosophy should be in part a very particular species of detective novel, in part a kind of science fiction' (Deleuze 1994: xx). In this respect, Deleuze's work in general, and his schizoanalytic interventions in particular, can be read as incorporating what he calls a 'literary-speculative' mode (Deleuze 1990: 273). If schizoanalysis can be considered philosophy and nothing more, it nevertheless presupposes a crucial shift in the relation between literature and forms of writing normally called theoretical. Deleuze's pre-schizoanalytic work on Carroll had already intimated such a transformation: in *The Logic of Sense*, Alice's adventures are treated as insights into language, logic and sexuality which, in turn, give philosophy access to the domains of linguistics, mathematics and psychoanalysis. This approach reaches its peak in the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, where the 'aesthetic figures' of fiction – from Büchner's Lenz and Beckett's Molloy to Melville's Ahab and Lovecraft's Randolph Carter – appear as so many attractors, carriers and repellers of thought, which Deleuze and Guattari call 'conceptual personae' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 2).

Schizoanalysis disturbs the division of labour separating author, critic and theorist, insisting on their differences in regime but not on their difference in nature. Schizoanalytic criticism – if we can speak of such a thing – exhorts us towards a traversal of these generic and disciplinary classifications, making possible perhaps new kinds of hybrid discourse. It would thus be inappropriate to describe the pieces collected in this volume as schizoanalysis applied to literature. Schizoanalysis is itself a practice, but one that operates alongside other practices in order to help us better understand – and in some cases to challenge and transform – the relations between theory and practice in any given field. When Deleuze and Guattari write that 'meaning is use', they are saying that whenever we find ourselves pondering the meaning of something we are in fact 'using' it in some way. In this sense, there can be no theory that is not already a practice. In *Anti-Oedipus*, they suggest that the hermeneutic question – what does it mean? – is in general a poor one, not because meanings are not important but because they arise from uses or practices:

The unconscious poses no problem of meaning, solely problems of use. The question posed by desire is not 'What does it mean?' but rather 'How does it work?' How do these machines, these desiring-machines, work – yours and mine? . . . Desire makes its entry with the general collapse of the question 'What



does it mean?’ No one has been able to pose the problem of language except to the extent that linguists and logicians have first eliminated meaning; and the greatest force of language was only discovered once a *work* was viewed as a machine, producing certain effects, amenable to a certain use. Malcolm Lowry says of his work: it’s anything you want it to be, so long as it works – ‘It works too, believe me, as I have found out’ – a machinery. But on condition that meaning be nothing other than use. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 109)

This is an important passage for two key reasons. First, it suggests that a schizoanalytic reading of a text should be oriented around those ‘pragmatic’ moments – embodied in linguistic blocs, refrains, formulae and so on – when meaning swings over to use, where something ‘occurs’ in the text rather than being signified or narrated. The Consul’s drinking in *Under the Volcano* does not ‘mean’ anything, but it functions to maintain the novel’s alchemical consistency, catalysing Lowry’s complex of references whose meanings only function in relation to the figure of Geoffrey Firmin drinking himself to death. The scene in Beckett’s *Molloy*, in which Molloy arranges stones in the pockets of his coat in order to suck them in a particular fashion, would be another example of such a moment.

Second, the passage helps us to situate schizoanalytic criticism more broadly. Jonathan Culler insists on a ‘basic distinction’ in literary studies between two different kinds of projects: one based on a linguistic model ‘takes meanings as what have to be accounted for and tries to work out how they are possible. The other, by contrast, starts with forms and seeks to interpret them, to tell us what they really mean. In literary studies, this is a contrast between *poetics* and *hermeneutics*’ (Culler 1997: 61). Poetics aligns with linguistics and theories of literary competence – it asks, for example, how readers take certain sentences in certain contexts to mean certain things, how we recognize the conventions of different styles and genres via an implicit cultural knowledge, how meanings are constructed from codes.

## Beyond oedipal form

The key premise of schizoanalysis is that desire is productive, that the world as it exists is literally a product of desire, that desire composes the material infrastructure and not just the ideologico-cultural superstructure of society, even if ideology tends to work by trying to convince us that this is not so,

that our desires are only ‘representations’. Given the role of desire in the material composition of society, schizoanalysis thus wants to know why we tolerate things as they are, especially when one considers how disadvantageous things tend to be for the majority of people. Tolerate is too polite a word. Most of us do not merely tolerate ‘things’ as they are, we actively contrive to ensure that things remain exactly as they are. And the more ‘well-off’ we are, the more likely this is to be true, either because it fits in our perceived interest to do so, or else we fear that to change the status quo would mean losing the few privileges we already have or somehow expect to gain.

This is despite the fact that income distribution is becoming increasingly unequal – not just on a global level, which has been manifestly obvious since the earliest days of colonization, but also on a country by country basis. In the United States, for example, the net wealth of the richest few (the top 0.1 per cent) continues to grow apace even as the net wealth and, more importantly, the net income of the majority of the people (i.e., the other 99.99 per cent) either stagnates or shrinks. The escalating costs of the middle-class ‘lifestyle’ once enjoyed by a solid proportion of Americans in the post-World War II boom years can now only barely be met by resorting to extensive and, in many instances, crippling borrowing that begins with student loans and ends with funeral plans (Celine’s nightmare vision of death on credit is already upon us). Many of us would, of course, like things to be different, but the trouble is we do not know how to make that fantasy a reality. There is no button we can click that will instantly change things for us. And for many of us that is as much as we are prepared to do. So the situation persists, the downward slide continues, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, and still we do nothing. We might share the odd angry meme on Facebook to register our discontent, but we do not march on parliament and demand change. That thought does not even occur to us.

To the extent that we do nothing to change our situation then it must be said that we desire it. This is not an exercise in victim-blaming. It is rather the first step in staking out a complex problematic. In view of the fact that we do not demand change, despite the many provocations our situation puts before us, Deleuze and Guattari are prompted to say that the fundamental problem of political philosophy is ‘still precisely’ the one that Spinoza saw so clearly, and that Wilhelm Reich rediscovered: “Why do men fight *for* their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?” And they continue (drawing directly on Reich):

the astonishing thing is not that some people steal or that others occasionally go out on strike, but rather that all those who are starving do not steal as a regular