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Searching for Intimacy, Searching for Deleuze

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Abstract

In this article, the author is in Paris searching for Gilles Deleuze. She wants to become more intimate with him, spending slow time exploring his work. In her search for intimacy with Deleuze, she follows a map that she buys at a bouquiniste, and she chooses to take the roads toward an ontological conception of love, to an intimacy that blurs boundaries between public and private and between love and politics. Through this exploration, she develops an understanding of a diasporic intimacy that leads her further away from the structures of intimacy often found in the Oedipal home, to an intimacy that is more transient but not less significant. She finds that there is intimacy in the passing smile of a child, in the telling of a philosopher's secret and from the offering of a paw from a stray dog. In these intimate gestures, she finds a strange and productive tenderness capable of redirecting becomings.

Keywords

intimacy, tenderness, Deleuze, love

It is Autumn 2017, and she has just submitted her doctoral thesis. She is in Paris, searching. She is not searching for self. A sense of self remained elusive as much now as ever, usually felt only as a fleeting caress or seen as an unrobed sketch, felt mostly at the brink of self or in waking, a momentary flutter of intimacy that could barely lull long enough to be embraced by imperfect recognition.

Proust (1922/2003) may prompt that she is searching for truth, Souriau (1943/2016) may propose that she is chasing reality, and both may agree that she is figuring out how to continue the work, the purpose of which remains unknown and hidden from her in her thesis. Her thesis is simply a stolen vehicle, a getaway car, that behind its claims of significance, eventually runs out of fuel. It is merely the rupture in the middle of an event that means questions of continuity become more central (Massumi, 2017).

Without a vehicle, she walks through the opulent Place Des Victoires, where its grand architecture spills cascades of fruit carved from stone from its rooftops. She has come to Paris alone, to be alone, but the idea proves preferable to reality. The honeyed sound of children, lovers, companions, and neighbors in the Place Des Victoires makes her feel more a single kite, without a flyer, all too easy to float away without some direct involvement with relations that settle her. She stops to think if she knows anybody in Paris. Someone who won't mind if she picks ties back up with them on her whim, someone who she could pick up, use, put down, and walk away from if she becomes confused and

exasperated and needs to return to kite. A dawning, an image of thought that slips through the wide gap in his front teeth. She knows someone in Paris that she already does all these things with and who doesn't seem to mind. Gilles Deleuze.

Gilles Deleuze doesn't necessarily ground her, but he does continue to penetrate thought even from firmly underneath a pile of other books, eventually creating a rhizomatic mapping that guides her work while forcing it always to be produced from the edges of what she can comprehend. But through necessity rather than bad will she rushes his words, manipulating them in ways more instrumental, than practical. Proust (1922/2003) may prompt that the search has been for Deleuze all along and Souriau (1943/2016) may suggest that this relation is the unfinished part of her sketch. If she can find him, she will take the time to read purely for love. Deleuze and Guattari (1972) write that our "loves are symptomatic, revealing our unconscious investments in social, libidinal flows" (p. 352). Love is a sustained apprenticeship, sustained through curiosity and humility in the face of the unknown (Deleuze, 1964).

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She searches the tiny Parisian book shops, the bouquinistes for a map that will bequeath her direction and bestow her signs as to where she may find Deleuze so that when she sees him, he may tell her a secret not for publication (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). What she hopes for is the secret of a truth, a missing piece of the search, of intimacy, not the kind of intimacy that she has at home, although that will haunt this search, but intimacy in exile, a diasporic, foreign intimacy with an inadequate translation (Boym, 1998).

Her phone rings and the voice on the other end demands to know where the hell she has gone. He is hurt and angry. He thought that she had wanted to finish her thesis quickly so she could return to the fold. He doesn't know about the stolen vehicle or the getaway car. Already gone, the unreliable narrator (although Deleuze (1964) writes that there is not so much the narrator as the machine of the search) promises that she will be home soon and that then they can think about "us." The voice on the phone tells her that she is becoming selfish, unreliable, thoughtless, and obsessive. He tells her that despite her passion, from where he is standing, it looks to him like she is dwelling in "Indifference." He tells her that she is delirious, and despite just completing writing her thesis, she has never behaved more like a child.

She hears him continue with something about people being hungry, wars, Karl Marx, bourgeois subjects, and dead philosophers. He hangs up. She knows he is right but intimacy between them now seems to involve the shrinking of experience, a bind to the homeland rather than to the world (Arendt, 1968), an individualized, privatized, unworlding of intimacy. She senses she will never return to the fold wholeheartedly, and with that thought, she holds her whole heart, and his, in her mouth.

She looks up at the stone fruit waterfalls and wonders why she cannot understand herself as an intimate self with him, who governs herself accordingly. They seem to be two separate points with too "thin an in-between" (Massumi, 2017, p. 44), a couple where one and one always seems to make two, an albeit attached collection of two but with no more-than, nothing else, two busy people executing the action of loving a cared-for-other. Despite their having had been together since they were 19, one could easily be divided from the other without changing the nature of either (Massumi, 2017). Some would see this as healthy and desirable, where a sense of self can stay intact, but she needs a vital math, a "thick in-between" an intimacy-in-immanence, where the insides come out of themselves to come together (Massumi, 2017, p. 45) in a lawless intimacy that cannot be contained, and where the self can disappear, renew, be invisible, indivisible.

A darkness falls over the Place Des Victoires; an overcast sky opens up to wash the stone fruit that sieves the rain before

sending the surplus downward. The children, lovers, companions, and neighbors part ways, separating and running in different directions, out into the world. Their breaking apart creates chaos, but within it, each finds openings to walk through. Diasporic intimacy unsettles order and can often be found where darkness falls, potentially overshadows that of something more private. Boym (1998) writes that

Diasporic intimacy is dystopian by definition; rooted in the suspicion of a single home. It thrives on unpredictable chance encounters, on hope for human understanding. This hope is not utopian. Diasporic intimacy is not limited to the private sphere but reflects collective frameworks of memory that encapsulates even the most personal of dreams. (p. 499)

Her fantasies of intimacy in exodus and escape remind her of her renewed purpose, her personal dream, and her search for Deleuze.

She wanders far from the bouquinistes and is soaked by the rain, by the time she opens her now sodden map and realizes that it is not a map of Paris at all but "The Map of Tenderness" Scudéry (2012) Tenderness, according to Benjamin (1968), is the "revelation of a possibility after the loss of love." (p. 16) For Barthes (1978), in tenderness, need and desire are joined. It is always nonexclusive. He says when you are tender, you speak your plural. Therefore, tenderness, she thinks, may be within reach; it might exist when love is lost, when the illusion of belonging is shattered, yet one discovers there is still a lot to share. She looks closely at the map, but although close, she doesn't very well know her way around Tenderness. There are no recognizable landmarks. She doesn't know how to get there. What about intimacy? She wonders if it is on her map. Boym (1998) writes that intimacy has its own historical topography:

It might appear that intimacy is on the outskirts of the social; it is local and particular, socially superfluous and noninstrumental. Yet, for better or for worse, each romance with intimacy is adulterated by a specific culture and society . . . While intimate experiences are personal and singular, the maps of intimate sites are socially recognizable; they are encoded as refuges of the individual. Intimacy is not solely a private matter; it may be protected, manipulated, or besieged by the state, framed by art, embellished by memory, or estranged by critique. (p. 500)

Although she finds that she is standing on the outskirts of the social, when she traces her fingers on the map and sees the words, "You are here," she finds that she is not in the center of the town Intimacy but of "Indifference." Disappointed, she takes this as a sign, as evidence, that her partner is right because in the privacy of their intimacy he knows her better than she knows herself. Now, more certain

of his knowledge than that of her own, she wavers. She thinks that maybe she should respond to her partner's call back home to the familiarity of the oedipal bedroom. She can feel the glow of the lamp-lit room, the weight of his leg that would habitually fall over hers, and his heavy breathing that can be heard moments before he sleeps. She waits and then secretly slips away from under him every night but she keeps a hand touching, to stay in contact, afraid of slipping away entirely. Protevi (2003) writes,

Deleuze and Guattari break with the Oedipal notion of desire as a continuous reproduction of family "theatre." Desiring-machines denote the production of intensities on all levels and in all modes of being. Sexuality is transformed from a "dirty little secret" into a productive energy. (p. 88)

She wants to respond to the call of the virtual and to the wide-open spaces that lie ahead and the new roads that the map opens. Yet, she has something of what Deleuze (1964) may call a "sick desire" to belong to somebody and to be claimed, part of a love that is about him and her, a fixed and private entity. She feels a constant pull outside of this too, outside of a love which Arendt (1968) describes as not only apolitical but anti-political. For Deleuze and Guattari (1972), love is a generative movement, following lines, that when appropriately pursued can quickly lead outside the heteronormative norms of the familial couple.

She arrives at the crossroads between continuing the search and going back home. Deleuze and Guattari (1972) write, "our choices in matters of love are at the 'crossroads' of vibrations which is to say that they express connections, disjunctions and conjunctions of flows that cross through a society" (p. 352). There may be more than these two roads, but irritable writing only wants to burst forth these two, for it is already struggling to reconcile this decision point's relation to continuity. It seems that continuity necessarily makes cuts in intimacies, developing some and demolishing others. She thinks hard. Deleuze is perhaps a continuity for her but only if she follows one path. If she is to be guided by him, if she continues the search, she will follow the path that takes her further away from ideological love, and away from love as seen through a heteronormative lens, taking the road out of the "Love Plot" (Berlant, 2012) that Berlant writes to be "a temporal sequence in which erotic antagonism or anxiety is overcome by events that lead to fulfilment" (p. 24). So, she does this. She takes this path. She takes the road toward an ontological conception of love, to love that blurs boundaries between public and private and between love and politics. And she leaves the town of "Indifference" behind.

On the edges of the next town, there is a book shop. Despite its inviting window seats and roaring fire, it turns out to be rather disappointing. Deleuze is completely

imperceptible. His name is handwritten on a label on a shelf, between Descartes and Derrida, but it is smudged, and the label is squint. There is only one book assigned to his name. It seems that her search for Deleuze is characterized by disappointment. As Deleuze (1964) writes, "The search is given its rhythm . . . by a series of discontinuous disappointments and also the means employed to overcome them" (p. 18). She picks up his only book that lies on the shelf, "Proust and Signs." She wonders who Proust is as she isn't searching for him. But since it is the only book the shop had of his, she takes it to read on a park bench.

Once there, she is distracted by a group of men or "a mixture, a conglomeration of essences" (Deleuze, 1964, p. 49) standing by the railings in the distance, talking. She looks closer. She is sure one of them is Deleuze, and it seems as though he is leaning in to tell someone else a secret, not for publication. The one he is meant to say to her only and not to this stranger.

With the map in front of her eyes, she finds the words, "You are here," and gathers that now she is in the town of Jealousy. As she continues to read Deleuze on Proust, she finds that the search for truth produces jealousy and it is a necessary part of the search. For a moment, within jealousy, she finds joy because after all a truth has been betrayed; a truth is never revealed but always betrayed by lovers' lies, whose guilt we assume. But the joy is short-lived. She wants it to be her name that he says so that she can feel herself held naked in his mouth (Deleuze, 1964) and so she doesn't have to recognize herself as an object among other objects. Once again, when comfort is needed, she feels the pull back home to a love that is personal and "exclusively differentiated" (Protevi, 2003, p. 188). But, the pull is weaker, fainter. She has now taken too many paths that lead away from home, and now it feels as though she may be using her partner rather than Deleuze, picking him up on her whim, to be with someone who may not tell their secret to someone else. Now, she is stuck, feeling she has gone too far to be able to go back yet unsure how to move forward. She doesn't know how to move through Jealousy; she doesn't recognize Tenderness; the gates have closed to Indifference, and Intimacy is out of reach.

An object among other objects, she heads toward the only other possibility, straight into the town of "Disappearance," and takes refuge in its bookshop. This book shop is different to the previous one in that it is less inviting but does hold all of Deleuze's books. The shelf holds an indiscriminate Deleuze whose secrets fall out the gap between his teeth and are given away too easily according to a jealous heart. She swaps her book about Proust for *A Thousand Plateaus*. She reads,

To become imperceptible to oneself, to have dismantled love in order to become capable of loving. To have dismantled oneself

in order finally to be alone and to meet the true double at the other end of the line. A clandestine passenger on a motionless voyage. To become like everybody else; but this, precisely, is a becoming only for one who knows how to be nobody, to no longer be anybody. To paint oneself grey on grey. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 218)

She leaves the bookshop, now less confident, not of what she is searching for but in who is doing the searching. Hardt says that “we lose ourselves in love, or, in love we become different . . . that we can think of love as an act of creation in a field of difference or even as an act of differentiation” (cited in Davis & Sarlin, 2011). This loss of self is what she wants, isn’t it? A vital mathematics, an intimacy that changes her nature? And for Deleuze (1964), disappearance may be when we are “ourselves, caught in the unknown world expressed by the beloved, emptied of ourselves and taken up in this unknown universe” (p. 79). And this too is what she wanted, wants. Love that feels destructive not to the body but to the organism itself:

For Deleuze, desire is the process of life itself, so that death is that by which one desires, for it is only by breaking down old patterns, by dying to an old subjectivity, by killing the organism that one creates a new body. (Stengers & Latour, 2016, p. 4)

She takes her new book and keeps walking, through the town of Disappearance, further out of the City of Paris, further away from the majestic stone fruit fountains. The wide-open spaces begin to get narrower and more crowded, smokier, and harsher. She keeps walking, to an architecture outside of architecture (Moten, 2016), to unsightly places permeated by darkness where the need for art manifests itself. Lapoujade (2017, p.32) writes that the best that can be hoped for (in a dystopian, intimate, love tale) is a “desire for creation” and a “will to art in the world” (Manning, 2019). In this town, animals drink from overflowing drains; inhaling hurts the back of her throat, darkness spreads. Children, lovers, companions, neighbors here living and loving, showing her that artfulness and the search becomes the same thing (Manning, 2019). She sits down next to another graying body on a concrete step, gray on gray. There is nowhere left to go. She resigns herself to this spot for a while. A dog sniffs at her hands. It lies down next to her and puts her head on her knee. A child runs past, pauses, and smiles a toothless smile and hums a vaguely familiar tune. The graying person on the step turns to ask where they are now. She feels for her crumpled map in her pocket. She unfolds it and looks for the words, “You are here.” She looks around. Confused, she looks around again. “We’re in Tenderness,” she whispers. It is not what she thought it may look like, yet somehow its possibility is felt in the toothless smile.

Deleuze (1964) writes,

It is the spider body of the narrator, the spy, the policeman, the jealous lover, the interpreter—the madman—who will send out a thread in order to make so many marionettes of her own delirium, profiles of her own madness. (p. 117)

The becoming-spider narrator gets up from the concrete step and walks up the city wall, the city where intimacy is lawless, where love is a political force, based on difference, not based on a politics of phenomenological love. Love that for better or for worse, till death do us part, is a prepersonal encounter. The mobile phone rings as it lies vibrating on the concrete step. Tenderness answers and speaks its plural to the confused voice on the other end of the phone.

In the opulent Place Des Victoires, the honeyed sound of children, lovers, companions, and neighbors could still be heard among the grand architecture that spills cascades of fruit carved from stone from its rooftops.

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