



## The Secret in Contemporary Theory, Society, and Culture

**‘The only secret is that there is no secret’: Sense and Nonsense in Deleuze**

Guillaume Collett: *University of Kent*

**Dark Gnostics: Secrets, Mysteries and OCCINT**

Dr. J.K.L. Scott: *De Montfort University, Leicester*

**On the Logic of Secrecy in *À la recherche du temps perdu***

Daniele Garritano: *Università di Siena & Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint Denis*

**Blogging in Private: Telling Two Billion People to ‘Ssshhhhh’**

Emma Deeks: *Edge Hill University, Ormskirk*



COVER IMAGE: 'Whispering Angel' — Agostino Carracci (1557–1602)



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On a personal note, we must say farewell to several of our members. After many years of good and loyal service, Melanie Dilly, Rocío García-Romero and Adina Stroia leave *Skepsi*. They have not only contributed much to this issue but were also very active in the ‘Secrets’ conference, as well as the 2013 and 2015 conferences: *Ghosts in the Flesh* and *Disgust*. We wish them all well. In their place, we welcome David Bremner and Dominique Carlini-Versini, who have both joined the Editorial Board since becoming involved with our 2015 conference. We would also like to thank Ann Kinzer and Mylène Branco who joined the team in 2016 and who have been involved with the publication of this issue.

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## Foreword

This issue had its genesis in *Skepsi*'s seventh annual conference, *The Secret in Contemporary Theory, Society, and Culture*, held on 30 and 31 May 2014 at the University of Kent; indeed, three of the articles that appear in this issue were first presented as papers there. A glance at the Call for Papers indicates the breadth of topics that the organisers anticipated would come within the conference's remit; to select but a few, the following were suggested: what kinds of power relationships can exist between a secret holder and those who do not, or wish to, know it? does interpreting a text reveal its secret(s); the question of surveillance; are secrets logically possible; the role of State secrets in history.

That breadth is reflected not only in the Key-note speaker's, Professor David Vincent, paper 'Prying and Privacy in the Nineteenth Century' which concluded the conference but also in the thirteen papers that were selected and the titles of the panels under which they were presented: Secrets and Philosophy, Public/Private, Dreams and Thresholds, Espionage, and Secrets and Literature. It is further reflected in the four articles contained in this issue, which all discuss widely differing aspects of the secret and secrecy, yet nonetheless complement each other, and between which there are, in fact, links.

Guillaume Collett considers the secret in the terms of Philosophy, with particular reference to Deleuze and the concepts of 'Sense' and 'Nonsense'. Deleuze, argues Guillaume, considered that 'nonsense', far from being in opposition to 'sense', is the bedrock on which sense is founded, and one cannot, therefore, be found without the other. Furthermore, it is an excess of sense that discloses this hidden bedrock; Guillaume gives as examples the repetitious attention to detail in Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* and the cumulative descriptions of the eponymous Snark in Carroll's 'agony in eight fits' that recounts the hunting (and disastrous discovery) of that strange and elusive being.

Our species, asserts Keith Scott in his article, is misnamed: we are not *homo sapiens* but *homo volens sapere*, 'the creature that *wishes* to know, driven by an inherent and irrepressible curiosity'. Herein lies a link between his article and Guillaume's. If *The Hunting of the Snark* is read as a metaphor for our species' seemingly inherent obsession with uncovering that which is hidden, *homo volens sapere* should beware, lest there be revealed not the relatively harmless Snark, which can be 'charm[ed] with smiles and soap' but the altogether more dangerous Boojum, at the first

sight of which the beholder will ‘softly and silently vanish away’, the fate which indeed befell the hapless Baker.

Does not the mysterious disappearance of the Baker lead us to the realms of magic and from there to the arcana of the occult, amongst the adepts of which will be found John Dee, Elizabeth I’s official astrologer, and Aleister Crowley, the occultist and member of The Golden Dawn? Both of these feature in Keith’s article, which intriguingly links two seemingly unconnected phenomena, the occult and espionage, both in fact, official espionage from Tudor times to the present day, and in fiction, the ‘Laundry Files’ of Charles Stross amongst many others.

Searching is also at the heart of Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*, but, argues Daniele Garritano, the real search is, despite what the novel’s title might suggest, a search not for time lost or misspent but for what is still concealed from Marcel, the hero-narrator, and therefore secret. Daniele endorses Deleuze’s interpretation of Recherche as a *roman d’apprentissage* or *Bildungsroman*, in the course of which Marcel becomes a man of letters; learning how to read the signs that betray these ‘secrets’ is part of his *apprentissage*.

In the course of his article, Daniele discusses the phenomenon of the ‘*Segreto di Pulcinella*’ or open secret. This leads us to the modern phenomenon of the blog, which Emma Deeks discusses. Essentially, this examines how and why, despite the fact that this veil is a one that can be drawn aside without too much difficulty, people will make use of the ability afforded by the Internet to hide behind a veil of anonymity, a practice which somewhat changes the traditional concept of a secret.

... Or does it? As Congreve has a character say in *The Double Dealer*: ‘I know that’s a secret, for it’s whispered everywhere’.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From Act III, Scene 3; quoted in *The Penguin Dictionary of Quotations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960, p. 118).

**‘The only secret is that there is no secret’: Sense and Nonsense in Deleuze**

Guillaume Collett

*University of Kent***Abstract**

This article examines the philosophy of ‘sense’ developed in the 1950s and 1960s by two French philosophers, Jean Hyppolite and Gilles Deleuze, and seeks to show that the model of sense they develop seeks to oppose phenomenological and hermeneutical conceptions of meaning, which view sense as pointing to a deeper underlying reality. It will show that for Hyppolite and Deleuze, on the contrary, sense is its own reality, pointing to nothing deeper or outside it. On this basis, it argues that if for Hyppolite, ‘the only secret is that there is no secret’, meaning that there is nothing ‘behind’ sense, then for Deleuze, the only secret is that ‘nonsense’ is the underlying basis *of* sense, and is constantly co-present with it. This framework is then used to explore a Deleuzian post/structuralist theory of the text, in which a text’s ‘secret’ or ultimate signified is nothing else than the production of sense within the text itself, which must be considered as an *excess* of sense. This excess of sense is nonsensical only to the extent that it resists what Deleuze calls ‘good’ and ‘common sense’, and is not simply opposed to sense, being as it is the very basis of sense.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** sense, nonsense, structuralism, secret, Deleuze, Heidegger.



Much of the Anglophone reception of Gilles Deleuze treats his project as alien to Martin Heidegger’s and as espousing either a brand of realist vitalism, or, increasingly, a brand of post-Kantian critique. Both of these readings of Deleuze fail to capture what is at stake in his philosophical project, which is above all, as Knox Peden has recently shown, the development of a post-Heideggerian ontology aimed against phenomenology.<sup>2</sup> At least in regards to Deleuze’s

<sup>1</sup> This article was first presented as a paper presented at the conference *The Secret in Contemporary Theory, Society, and Culture* held at the University of Kent on 30–31 May, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> See Peden 2014. Peden argues in the final two chapters of his book that Deleuze’s project functions as a splicing of a particularly French rationalist reading of Spinoza together with phenomenology and particularly that of Heidegger. If other post-war rationalists of Deleuze’s generation, also known, in part, as ‘structuralists’, sought in Spinoza a way out of what they saw as the humanistic cul-de-sac of the then predominant in France phenomenological

1960s writings, we must understand his ontology in terms of its being channelled through and articulated within the transcendental, but this transcendental is decidedly not that of a finite subject, as some readers of Deleuze still argue.<sup>3</sup> Even Heidegger, who was a self-professed anti-humanist, still speaks in terms of man and man's ontic *being*, even if he considers the human being or human animal as specifically defined by its relation or opening onto ontological *Being*.<sup>4</sup> Deleuze's post-Heideggerianism thus entails the purging of any trace of subjectivism or humanism from the transcendental, even if he seeks to locate ontological Being there.

If Deleuze and others from his generation cannot be understood separately from the post-war French reception of Heidegger, this reception is nonetheless one aimed at marrying Heidegger and logico-linguistic formalisms. The advantage of this union is that the advances made by Heideggerian ontology, in its rejection of what it calls 'onto-theology' and its re-awakening of the question of Being, can be inherited, while jettisoning the phenomenological subject.<sup>5</sup> Heidegger's critique of the classical Husserlian conception of intentionality entails the re-thinking of intentionality in terms of Being's own self-disclosure within finite acts of questioning. But what if we were to replace hermeneutical *interpretation*, as the recovery of a text's true sense waiting to be revealed, with logical structure and the *production* of meaning as surface-effect of this very structure? This structuralist re-working of Heidegger arguably characterises much of 1960s post-structuralism, but I will mainly limit myself in this article to Deleuze, after first turning to Jean Hyppolite.

Hyppolite was possibly the first post-war French philosopher to attempt to marry Heidegger and logico-linguistic formalism, and his 1952 text *Logic and Existence* had a galvanising influence on post-structuralism (Hyppolite 1997). In this text, Hyppolite tries to use Hegel *against* phenomenology, while also *productively* pitting Heidegger against Hegel, by foregrounding

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movement, Peden shows that Deleuze's great coup was to feed Spinozist rationalism back into a now fully anti-humanistic and renewed ('epi-' — see below) phenomenology.

<sup>3</sup> In his *Philosophy after Deleuze*, Joe Hughes uses Deleuze's comments on the importance of Kant's discovery of man's 'constitutive finitude' (which we find throughout Deleuze's work, from his 'On Grounding' lectures, as Hughes notes, right through to and past his *Foucault*) to argue for what appears as a kind of hypostatisation of this finitude as a substantialised subject of some kind in Deleuze (Hughes 2012: 28-31). Rather, as we see in the final chapter of Deleuze's *Foucault*, but also in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze only ever speaks of a 'void' when discussing subjectivity. The importance to his thought of a kind of finitude is limited, arguably, to a dimension of the proposition (specifically that of 'manifestation') together with the forms of 'good' and 'common' sense, in *The Logic of Sense*, or to a function of historically-determinate bodily practices, in *Foucault*. See Deleuze (2006: 99 and 106). See also Deleuze (2004a) and my reading of Deleuze's theory of the subject in this text, in Collett, (forthcoming: Chapter 4).

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Heidegger (2001). See also Heidegger (2010).

<sup>5</sup> See Heidegger (1978).

Hegel's logic and moreover the *difference* between his phenomenology, as found in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and his logic, as found in his *Science of Logic*. In doing so, he offers new conceptual means of treating the theme of 'sense' and the ontology corresponding to it, a theme that had taken on renewed importance since Heidegger.

In Heidegger, for instance in the introduction to *Being and Time*, 'sense' relates to the 'question' of the sense *of* Being [*Sinn des Seins*]. Being for Heidegger is a lost Origin [*Ursprung*] involved in a process of partial self-disclosure necessarily mediated by finite acts of questioning its very sense.<sup>6</sup> Heidegger considered Being to have been largely forgotten since the time of the Greeks and in need of recovery by modern thought. But what is recovered is never Being itself, however, only its sense, as that which exceeds the merely ontical domain of finite things, yet which cannot be understood separately from this domain. This is because what is revealed of Being depends on how we go about disclosing it, which thereby depends on the ontical domain through which, and in which, it is always disclosed. This ontical domain is always singular and hence will offer only a partial viewpoint onto Being. In the same way in which, when something breaks, we come to understand the previously concealed ways in which that thing extended much further and held together much more than we might have expected, so too is ontological being only recoverable within the world of ontic beings. Being is what exceeds the ontic or worldly, yet the sense of Being is inseparable from the singular collections and relations of things in and through which Being's sense is disclosed. As such, sense in Heidegger is the sense of a Being that is fundamentally lost, originary, and only ever partly recoverable. In short, sense is the sense of something else, of something lying behind it and as distinct from it.

Now, Hyppolite writes, *contra* Heidegger,<sup>7</sup> that 'The only secret [...] is that there is no secret' (Hyppolite 1997: 90).<sup>8</sup> This is an explicit allusion to Hegel's famous quote, from the last page of the first section ('Consciousness') of *Phenomenology of Spirit*: 'It is manifest that behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to see' (Hegel 1977: 103 §165). This must be contextualised within Hyppolite's larger interpretative strategy in *Logic*

<sup>6</sup> Hence his constant appeal to the Greeks. See Deleuze 2004a (83–84) for a critique of the notion that sense derives from a lost (and transcendent) 'Origin', which Pierre Montebello argues is an allusion to Heidegger (Montebello 2008: 49–50).

<sup>7</sup> Hyppolite's tacit engagement with Heidegger in *Logic and Existence* was already prepared by Heidegger's own work, when the latter speaks in terms of the 'secret' [*Geheimnis*] of Being (for instance in *Being and Time*).

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze particularly emphasises this quotation and himself also makes this link with Hegel's musing on the 'curtain', in his 1954 review of Hyppolite's book; see Deleuze 2004b as well as in his later *Foucault*, 'behind the curtain there is nothing to see' (2006: 47).

*and Existence*, which involves emphasising the proposition's, and more generally language's, *expressivity* in regards to the Absolute (the dialectical unfolding of Spirit). Spirit cannot unfold or realise itself, overcome contradictory predicates (such as black/white, sensible/intelligible) through dialectical synthesis of opposites, without the proposition, within which such a synthesis of contrary predicates occurs (equally in the mediating interiority of the concept and in the exteriority of being as sense). There is nothing behind the curtain/sense precisely because there is no self-realisation of the Absolute outside this process inside language. Outside sense, the Absolute has no other means by which to fully unfold, so sense is not simply the medium or bearer of the Absolute's self-unfolding, it is also actively involved in expressing it — indeed it is being.

Hence there is nothing behind the curtain, there are not two worlds, the world of phenomenal or ontic beings and the world of ontological or noumenal being. There is only one world, the world of sense. If sense is a curtain, there is nothing to see behind it, meaning that sense is both phenomenal *and* ontological, and furthermore, that there is no ontology, no Being, other than the one expressed as sense.<sup>9</sup> While in Heidegger, Being is disclosed in thought as sense, the sense of Being, in Hyppolite there is no distinction between sense and Being, and, as such, sense is not the sense *of* a Being conceivable as partly separate from that sense and transcendent in regards to it. Instead, Hyppolite claims that by thinking sense as identical to Being, we reach an absolutely *immanent* position, according to which, Being is nothing other than that which can be propositionally expressed by language.<sup>10</sup> Meaning *is* Being; meaning is not the meaning *of* Being. Or to put it another way, Being is footprints in the sand; Being is not the person who left them. Here we have a prototype of the post-structuralist or post-rationalist, if we want to call it that, attempt in post-war French thought to re-conceive Heideggerian ontology and intentionality in terms of formal logico-linguistic principles.

Turning now to Deleuze, we find the same rejection of Heidegger and of his conception of Being as that which is hidden, lost, or concealed, and must be revealed by means of interpretation. In *The Logic of Sense*, a text from 1969, sense is again seen as Being as such, as necessarily expressed by language.<sup>11</sup> More specifically, sense is expressed by what Deleuze calls the 'fourth

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<sup>9</sup> In this way, being becomes, in Deleuzian parlance, a *fold* or pleat: being *is* the curtain, as the very difference between the inside and the outside, between words and things, the noumenon and the phenomenon, being and beings, and so on.

<sup>10</sup> 'Immanence is complete' (Hyppolite 1997: 230).

<sup>11</sup> This text in turn draws some of its central claims from the Hyppolite review, in which we read 'philosophy [...] can only be ontology and an ontology of sense' (1997: 18).

dimension' of the proposition, which is the sum total or differential by-product of the inter-relation of the proposition's other three dimensions, those of designation, signification, and manifestation.<sup>12</sup> Language signifies by means of universal or general concepts, it designates external spatio-temporal states of affairs using nouns or substantives, and it manifests a self which is constituted by the beliefs and desires implied by what he or she says. But expression, the fourth dimension, can only produce sense thanks to the mutual inter-dependence of the other three dimensions.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, since sense is thoroughly ontological for Deleuze, and indeed in this text is synonymous with Being as such, sense for Deleuze is nothing else than the objective ontological corollary of the logically consistent usage of the proposition's three primary dimensions. In short, using language to say things about the world produces that world, which is not only phenomenal, i.e. accessible to the senses, but also ontological, i.e. it is, or has, Being in itself.

Here Deleuze is advancing a realism of the transcendental aimed against any form of idealism, idealism being any position which sees the world as existing for a subject but not in itself, i.e. idealists consider the world to not exist independently of the subject perceiving it.<sup>14</sup> Deleuze's position is different insofar as we do not need a subject in order to express ontological sense, i.e. paradoxically; the perceived world exists in itself and does not depend on a subject. There is a being of perception which exists in itself, independently of a subject, who appears only later as an attempt to organise these perceptions according to the parameters of that secondary process

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<sup>12</sup> See Deleuze 2004a: 16–28.

<sup>13</sup> Deleuze's original French term for that which is expressed is '*l'exprimé*', which he explicitly distinguishes from Husserl's '*l'expression*'. While Deleuze is partly dialoguing with Husserl throughout *The Logic of Sense*, this explicit distancing can largely be put down to Deleuze's continued use of the ontological problematic of expression first developed in his 1968 monograph *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (Deleuze 1992), originally titled *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*. Here he establishes a tri-partition between 'that which expresses itself', 'the expression', and 'the expressed', namely 'sense' (1992: 335). In a complex manner, and partly involving a dialogue with the history of propositional logic, Deleuze's notion of 'the expressed' (qua sense) is to be understood in terms of his lifelong attempt at articulating a notion of incorporeal monism (later called the 'plane of immanence' in Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* (1994)); conceived as the paradoxical bypassing, and not sublation, of an irreducible yet provisional dualism of powers, (namely, thinking/being, but also Being/beings, intelligible/sensible, phenomenon/noumenon, etc.).

<sup>14</sup> In its most extreme form, such as the thought of Bishop Berkeley, this leads to solipsism. However, in Kant's transcendental idealism, inaugurated by his first *Critique*, the world *as it is perceived* is conceptualised by him as knowable qua (purely epistemological) phenomenon, but that is not to say that there is not an ontological reality behind it. Rather, his first critique is aimed at dispelling the pretensions of metaphysicians who believe they can know this ontological reality independently of direct experience of it (this he terms the 'noumenon').

convention enjoins us to call a Self or person.<sup>15</sup> Although we do not need a subject to express sense, for Deleuze, we nonetheless do need language, the structure and consistency of which can be understood and analysed using tools taken from disciplines such as logic, linguistics, and psychoanalysis, and without having to rely on any deep, substantial notion of subjectivity or selfhood to account for its workings.

Sense, which is both meaningful and ontological — indeed it is Being as such for Deleuze — is nothing else than what propositions produce, and propositions must be understood as functioning according to a non-representational theory of language.<sup>16</sup> If there is nothing behind the curtain, then language does not produce sense as that which is accurately representative *of* either the world of physical things or the world of perfect, eternal, and ideal forms. Instead, sense produces the world, the world being nothing other than the sense language produces.

The structuralist notion of production replaces hermeneutical interpretation, because interpreting a text is not a way of recovering something else which leaves its mark on that text, marks which need to be deciphered so as to reconstitute what it was that left these marks. Rather, the ultimate reality of which a text speaks is immanent or fully present within the text, it is nothing less than the meaning the text produces, one that cannot be exhausted since a text is not something bound.

I would now like to add a further feature to this picture being drawn. Deleuze differs from Hyppolite in that *there is*, however, something else other than sense, namely *nonsense*.<sup>17</sup> It is not enough to say that sense is the ultimate reality, because sense for Deleuze is co-present with nonsense, which is arguably the secret that sense tries to conceal. The secret therefore is not so much that there is no secret, but rather that sense is co-present with nonsense. Sense, in the form of what Deleuze calls ‘good’ and ‘common sense’, namely *doxa* or opinion, tries to conceal its inherent nonsense, which is inherently *para*-doxical, on the fringes of or beside *doxa*. This is because for Deleuze paradox is the affirmation of contradictory predicates, such as smaller and larger, hotter and cooler and so on.<sup>18</sup> Deleuze thereby replaces Hyppolite’s logic of sense, as

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<sup>15</sup> Montebello (2008: 213–42) has gone the furthest towards an ontological interpretation of perception in Deleuze’s work.

<sup>16</sup> This axiom derives from the work on language undertaken, in parallel, by the tradition of analytic philosophy, from Frege onwards, and the tradition of structuralism, from Saussure onwards. On this see particularly Livingston (2011).

<sup>17</sup> Deleuze develops his theory of nonsense throughout *The Logic of Sense*, particularly in pp. 78–94.

<sup>18</sup> Drawing on the work of Lewis Carroll, Deleuze writes ‘When I say “Alice becomes larger”, I mean that she becomes larger than she was. By the same token, however, she becomes smaller than she is now’ (2004a: 3).



determined by the synthesis of conceptual opposites, with his own logic of sense, whereby what the proposition expresses is actually, at root, a co-presence of sense and nonsense, in which contradictory predicates are given free reign and allowed a foundational role within the overall definition of sense. Contradiction is affirmed rather than negated, in Deleuze's logic.

For Deleuze, *contra* Hyppolite, this is how sense initially subsists, and what we usually think of as sense is actually sense as constrained by the forms of good and common sense. Good sense requires that sense have only a *single direction*, i.e. it affirms a single predicate, rather than two opposed ones (e.g. 'larger' and not 'smaller', and vice versa). Common sense makes it such that this predicate can be recognised by a synthetic and unified Self, who collects together such predicates in order to build a consistent and unified picture of reality, yet one which I have stated is a fabrication since the Self is merely a convention rather than something with ontological weight.<sup>19</sup> In its pure form, sense is closer to nonsense or paradox. Hence, the secret of sense is that sense is nonsensical; what this means is not only that the sense of a text is nothing other than the meanings it can produce as long as we subscribe to fixed laws of language and of the proposition. The sense of a text is also, at a deeper level, the nonsense of the paradoxes a text produces, its excess of meaning, its ability to affirm contradictory predicates which, *contra* Hegel, do not cancel one another out. This excess of sense is the bedrock underlying all signification and meaning, and it is an excess inherent to any text or collection of signifiers.

We find this excess in such works as Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* and *Le Voyeur*, (Robbe-Grillet 2012; 2013) which Deleuze speaks of positively in a number of his writings.<sup>20</sup> We see in these texts by Robbe-Grillet how the proliferation of viewpoints on a scene fragments that scene so that it loses all self-identity. The text produces an excess of sense and affirms contradictory perspectives, and this excess of sense is the precondition for any sense of the text to be made. While *Le Voyeur*, for instance, appears at first sight as a kind of detective novel centring on a murder, this mystery, which is never fully revealed to the reader, is not the text's forever hidden meaning. Rather, the nonsense the text produces, as we circulate around the never to be revealed mystery and in doing so multiply its senses, is its immanent truth and underlying meaning. Nonsense, as the secret of sense, is hence laid bare in Robbe-Grillet's work, and it is the

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<sup>19</sup> On good and common sense, see Deleuze 2004a (86–94).

<sup>20</sup> See Deleuze 2004a (47–48, 14, n.7); Deleuze discusses Robbe-Grillet throughout *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, (Deleuze 2009).

immanence or immediacy of this revelation that frustrates any reader who resists taking this revelation at face value.

Furthermore, Robbe-Grillet's methodology, his formal descriptions of scenes, are intrinsic to the text's ability to produce its nonsense or excess of sense, since the text's production of nonsense can be said to rely on a rigorous formalism.<sup>21</sup> As Paul Livingston has recently shown, the history of twentieth century formalism, from analytic philosophy, with the exception of Wittgenstein, to the development of set theory, has consisted in an attempt to do away with and thereby conceal language's foundational paradoxes, as first discovered by Russell in the early 1900s (Livingston 2011). For Deleuze, writers such as Robbe-Grillet can provide us with an alternative logic of formal descriptions, one which does not attempt to conceal the paradoxes inherent to the linguistic formalisation of the world, as caused by sense's essential co-presence with nonsense.

As Deleuze writes in *The Logic of Sense*:

In Robbe-Grillet's writing, the series of designations, the more rigorous or rigorously descriptive they become, the more they converge on the expression of indeterminate or overdetermined objects (2004a: 48).

Objects are overdetermined because there is a structural excess of the signifier over the signified, as we are always already within language, within sense, and as such cannot exhaustively account for the totality of the multiple senses any object opens onto without losing touch with that very object. This is why, in *Cinema 2*, Deleuze will write that descriptions in Robbe-Grillet erase concrete objects (2009: 43), since objects are merely propositional attempts to tie sense to reference, and to account for the former in terms of the latter. In other words, the majority of logicians see sense as something objects produce or as in some way secondary to objects; few logicians will speak of sense itself rather than the sense *of* something. Deleuze wishes to reverse this so that we can understand sense as ontologically *prior* to reference, the designation of a

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<sup>21</sup> Deleuze notes in particular how Robbe-Grillet's at times geometrical, and usually detached and analytical descriptions of the typically visible minutiae of scenes and settings — a woman brushing her hair, the layout of a room, etc. — and especially the introduction of small anomalies and changes when such details are repeated in later retellings of the same material, prevent designation from taking on an overriding function within language, as we find for instance in most formal logic. For example, in *La Jalousie* a husband watches his wife (A...) interacting with a neighbour (Franck), obsessing over the perceived and/or misperceived details of their interactions, principally as visually witnessed by the husband. The drama circles around the visual field and the surface of things and encounters, never probing into a psychological depth of the characters. For instance, the presence of the largely absent narrator (the husband) is manifested in such visual clues as the number of plates laid out at meal times or the number of chairs visible. Furthermore, the line between actually perceived and paranoid misperception becomes blurred, such that everything hinges on the smallest change of detail (is the wife having an affair or not?), and ultimately the protagonist cannot know for sure (there is an excess of sense, a lack of concrete designation).

concrete object being merely a halting or freezing of the open flow of pure sense. This pure sense is nonsensical since it does not abide by discrete distinctions between objects and does not have fixed perspectives on objects.

Any signifying use of language already presupposes a decision about which senses to disavow or not recognise, because signification requires that the signified at least attempt to totalise a portion of language's signifiers and their associated senses. Writers like Robbe-Grillet merely demonstrate the perverse dream or phantasm of an immanent usage of language and relation to the world, one which reaches the inconsistent totality of Being by not closing off any of sense's overdetermined avenues.<sup>22</sup>

We also see similar themes playing out particularly strongly in the case of Lewis Carroll, another chief inspiration behind Deleuze's logic of sense. Nonsense in Carroll is often but not only associated with *humour*, which Deleuze gives an ontological status as what is perhaps, within language, closest to Being, as this excess of sense produced by a text.<sup>23</sup> But the hidden meaning of Carroll's work must again be seen as nothing else than its manifest nonsense. This comes across particularly clearly in his story *The Hunting of the Snark* (Carroll 2011). The Snark is the subject of the story and also functions as a secret sustaining it, because we want to know what a Snark is.<sup>24</sup> Carroll keeps deferring its signification, only referring to it in terms of other, equally perplexing names; the 'Snark' itself compounds the nouns *snake* and *shark*. We discover in the final verse that 'the snark *was* a Boojum', without being told, of course, what a 'Boojum' is (Carroll 2011: 41). But at a deeper level, we see again how Carroll is not hiding the Snark's meaning but revealing it as the nonsense which founds the possibility of sense, the excess of sense which is the disavowed bedrock of all signification.

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<sup>22</sup> We can compare this to the perspective of another of the influences on Heidegger, Friedrich Schleiermacher, a founder of hermeneutics, who considers hermeneutics as the art of avoiding *misunderstanding*, which is achieved by means of knowledge of grammatical and psychological laws. But we see precisely the opposite occurring in the work of Deleuze and Robbe-Grillet, amongst others of their generation, for whom understanding a text is precisely to *avoid* a fixed signification, as well as the notion of a deep phenomenological subject or psychological ego as the transcendent source or origin of that meaning. We must therefore oppose structuralist *production* to phenomenological *interpretation* (Schleiermacher 1998).

<sup>23</sup> See particularly the remarks on the concluding pages of *The Logic of Sense*, pp. 285–86.

<sup>24</sup> Deleuze capitalises the Snark, whereas Carroll does not, because he uses it as the example par excellence of what he terms 'conjunctive esoteric words' (Deleuze 2004a: 56).

The Snark is a ‘conjunctive’ portmanteau word combining shark and snake, a logically impossible denotation.<sup>25</sup> Further, it can be hunted with both ‘forks’ and ‘hope’, and so is both a denotable body capable of being physically pierced by a fork, and an expressible meaning capable of signifying the concept of hope to the one who pursues it. Yet the Snark is itself neither a denoted object nor a signified concept, and Deleuze claims it is pure sense, i.e. nonsense, namely sense which is incapable of being entirely tied to one or several objects, and hence which fails to ever be signified by fixed concepts.<sup>26</sup> But this excess or over determination of meaning is precisely what motivates the hunt for the Snark, the hunt itself being the text’s meaning, rather than the signification of the word ‘Snark’. This is because the search for the Snark’s signification is itself what produces the story’s nonsense, since it is by hunting it that we are shown that the Snark allows multiple and contradictory perspectives to subsist within the story.<sup>27</sup>

To finish I will turn to one of Deleuze’s little known writings, entitled ‘How Jarry’s Pataphysics Opened the Way for Phenomenology’ (2004c).<sup>28</sup> As a schoolboy, Deleuze once suggested in a philosophy class that Jarry was an unrecognised precursor to Heidegger, which prompted his teacher to send him out of the classroom for such a facetious remark. But this is actually already Deleuze’s ontology in a nutshell. As Deleuze writes, we must not refuse to take Heidegger seriously, but we need to also introduce into his thought some levity and humour. As

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<sup>25</sup> Although ‘Snark’ appears to be a portmanteau word (combining shark and snake), Deleuze calls portmanteau words proper ‘disjunctive’ esoteric words (2004a: 56), it is only one at the level of ‘content’ not at the level of ‘function’ (2004a: 54). At the level of content, ‘Snark’ combines two heterogeneous nouns, shark and snake, but since these both belong to the order of bodies and not to the order of incorporeal expressions (which Deleuze opposes to bodies, as his primary ontological opposition in *The Logic of Sense*), the heterogeneous is conjoined at the level of bodies and not disjoined between bodies and expressions. ‘Snark’ does not function as one since it can only hold together heterogeneous series by being displaced in relation to them and, as shark and snake, is ultimately bound to the series of denotations or of bodies. On the contrary, ‘Jabberwock’ – the monster from Carroll’s famous poem in *Through the Looking Glass* – both compounds words at the level of content (‘jabber’ = an animated or voluble discussion, ‘wocer’ (an Anglo-Saxon term, so Carroll claimed) = offspring or fruit) and functions as a portmanteau word (2004a: 54). It holds together in tension, without trying to resolve this enveloped paradoxical dual-status, denotable bodies (wocer/wocor) and expressible senses (jabber), which Snark can only do by being *displaced over* bodies rather than *suspended between* bodies and language.

<sup>26</sup> See Deleuze 2004a (32, 53–54).

<sup>27</sup> Following the basic structuralist principles of language, the word Snark itself signifies nothing in isolation, as is the case for any word within a language, and it is only in combination with other signifiers that its sense is produced. But rather than producing fixed and determinate sense, like most words in a language do when related to others in a particular proposition, the word Snark highlights this differential requirement of language, namely the fact that we can only ever know what a Snark means in relation to the words it combines with in the story, and as such in relation to what will always be more signifiers than one can assign to signifieds. This hunt for meaning, this attempt to snap up all the signifiers in a text using the jaws of the signified, which is what the hunting of the Snark really alludes to, allegorises the production of meaning as such in all texts.

<sup>28</sup> An expanded and modified version of the text appears in Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1998), pp. 91–98.

Deleuze explains, pataphysics is an epi-phenomenology taking the same distance from phenomenology that metaphysics takes from physics and that pataphysics must take from metaphysics. The phenomenon is the object perceived, but the epi-phenomenon is the *sense* of that object, unmoored and floating high above it, like the goatskin which Michel Tournier's re-imagined Robinson flies as a kite near the end of the novel *Vendredi*.<sup>29</sup>

Hence, when Deleuze writes that phenomenology is an epi-phenomenology, he is not actually being derogatory, as some secondary literature has suggested.<sup>30</sup> Phenomenology, if it is to be of use to philosophy, must be a science of the epi-phenomenon, which in Deleuze's terminology from *The Logic of Sense* is to be understood as a 'counter-actualised event'. So, as Deleuze puts it, *Being*, which is this excess of sense, is the epi-phenomenon of all ontic *beings*. As a reversal of Heidegger, Being no longer transcends the beings in which it is disclosed. Rather, Being is now nothing other than the incorporeal cream of pure sense skimmed from particular actualised states of affairs or concrete objects, and it is constituted as the paradoxical sum-total of these contrary perspectives or predicates detached from the states of affairs or ontic beings in which they are initially housed.<sup>31</sup> So, if Being is the paradoxical unity of the excess of meaning within a text, then the text's secret or underlying basis is this paradoxical and fragmented unity it produces in spite of its ineradicable nonsense as excess of sense.

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<sup>29</sup> See Tournier (1993).

<sup>30</sup> See Hughes (2011: 3).

<sup>31</sup> Deleuze makes this point very clearly in *The Logic of Sense* when he writes that sense 'wrests Being from beings in order to bring it to all of them at once, and to make it fall upon them for all times' (2004a: 206).

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## Dark Gnostics: Secrets, Mysteries, and OCCINT

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### Abstract

You know, when I was a kid, I wanted to grow up and find myself living in a sixties spy series.  
Funny how things turn out, isn't it?

King Mob, *The Invisibles*.

The astrologer and magician John Dee worked for Sir Francis Walsingham; Dennis Wheatley worked for the London Controlling Section during World War II; Aleister Crowley may have worked for British intelligence. This should not surprise us; intelligence and espionage are by their very nature exercises in the occult, the investigation and discovery of hidden knowledge, revealed and analysed by a priestly caste of scholars seeking the truth lying behind the veil of 'secrets and mysteries' (specific terms in the lexicon of espionage). Spy stories are always already tales of the occult and, more than that, they are horror stories, whose protagonists are engaged in a struggle against dark powers posing an existential threat to all they believe in. This article examines the idea of secrecy and espionage as a contemporary cultural avatar of the eternal fear of the Other. The spy is an archetype embodying fears of transgression and liminality, whose shifting roles mirror our society's anxiety concerning the concept of a stable self. In an era in which we are ever more defined by our informational footprint, the revelations of Snowden, Manning et al. raise uncomfortable questions about the nature of identity observed, surveilled and interrogated through its online manifestations. As Stross has argued, we are willing participants of a 'Participatory Panopticon'; inhabitants of the global Village, we are choosing to become Number Two, the character who, in the minatory and prophetic series *The Prisoner*, acted as the agent of repression of the individual through perpetual surveillance.<sup>1</sup>

Keywords: Espionage, occult fiction, horror, Stross, cultural studies.




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<sup>1</sup> This article was first presented as a paper presented at the conference *The Secret in Contemporary Theory, Society, and Culture* held at the University of Kent on 30–31 May, 2014.

Our species is perhaps misnamed; we are less *Homo sapiens* than *Homo volens sapere*, the creature that *wishes* to know, driven by an inherent and irrepressible curiosity (as discussed by both D.E. Berlyne (1954: 180–91) and George Loewenstein (1994: 75–98). Judeo-Christian culture rests on the foundation myth of the Fall, the fatal moment when a transgressive desire to *know* leads to a damning enlightenment, and the motif of discovery, revelation (and concomitant destruction) runs through our art and literature, from Oedipus solving the twin riddles of the Sphinx and his own identity, to Prometheus, Faustus and Frankenstein, and even Kipling’s Elephant’s child, ‘full of ’satiabile curiosity’ (Kipling 1912: 64). My aim in this article is to tease out connections and resonances between various forms of ‘hidden knowledge’ as they have appeared in two distinct, but interrelated, domains of human activity, namely occultism and intelligence (in the sense of espionage). What follows shows that these two realms share common ground, and that Blake’s ‘doors of perception’ lead, all-too-often, to the world of Donald Rumsfeld’s (un)known (un)knowns. Just as the realms of the occult and espionage overlap and intertwine, so the mystical, the psychological and the political tap into common cultural wellsprings and manifest a complex of interlinked issues and anxieties. The debates that previous eras have seen about access to religious, ethical and scientific knowledge inform and influence the current arguments over surveillance, privacy and data protection; it is a short journey from Prometheus to Chelsea Manning, and perhaps to Winston Smith. We begin at a time, and a place, where the martial and the mystical met face to face, on the manicured lawns of Washington, D.C., just as the ‘Summer of Love’ was ending.

### 1. They used Dark Forces

On 21 October 1967, a group of approximately fifty thousand protestors, led by Allen Ginsburg, Abbie Hoffmann, and Ed Sanders of the Fugs, converged on the Pentagon; not simply to protest against the war in Vietnam but to perform an exorcism. As Joseph Laycock puts it:

[...] twelve hundred protesters would surround the building and perform a ritual, causing it to levitate three hundred feet in the air. The Pentagon would then turn orange and spin, expelling its demons and ending the Vietnam War (Laycock 2011: 295).

Hoffmann had previously sought official permission for the levitation:

The General Services Administrator consented to an attempt at levitation [on condition that] the Pentagon could be raised only three feet, so as not to damage the foundations (Laycock 2011: 300).

It is easy to read this event as no more than another example of the mixture of Dada, Situationism and guerrilla theatre that marked much of the Yippies’ activities, but it is clear that



for many of the participants, this was a *real* attempt at magical resistance. Laycock argues that the origin of the ceremony was:

*The City in History* by Lewis Mumford. Mumford describes the Pentagon as a sort of architectural throwback to ‘Bronze Age fantasies of absolute power.’ He links the construction of the Pentagon in 1943 to a similar regression towards a government characterized by secrecy and ‘priestcraft.’ He concludes that humanity may not develop further until the building is demolished (Mumford 1997, 432). [...] the exorcism was a polyvalent event: theater for some, the mobilization of literal esoteric forces for others (Laycock 2011: 299).

The key phrase is ‘a government characterized by secrecy and ‘priestcraft.’’. The 1967 protest was not simply a *political* event; it was social, cultural, and epistemological, an attempt to set one model of the world (mystical, magical and human-centred) against another, the mechanistic, data-driven, fundamentally inhuman agenda of the military-Industrial complex.<sup>2</sup> In many ways, it marks an opening engagement in the ideological conflict that has marked our age, and particularly the debates about secrecy, confidentiality and surveillance that have proliferated post-Assange, post-Manning, and post-Snowden. Expressions like ‘surveillance society’ and ‘national security state’ belong to a lexical field which sees government, and particularly those sectors of the state responsible for defence and intelligence, as fundamentally Other, its agents as members of a dark priesthood, zealously guarding forbidden knowledge. The world in which we live has been formed by a confluence of highly specialised scholarship, operating in discrete but interrelated areas, all based on the idea of reducing the human to merely one part of a hugely complex system of command and control; a cybernetic and technocratic system as initially hypothesised by Licklider, Wiener and Taylor. Human beings become mere cogs in the machinery, and the state becomes a vast-self-perpetuating organism in itself, a dark God served by a class of acolytes, sitting at the centre of the temple, all-seeing, all-hearing, and all-knowing. (Consider the symbolic significance of buildings like the Pentagon, the GCHQ ‘Doughnut’, and the MI6/SIS headquarters at Thames House; visible manifestations of power, order, and control). The Yippies’ ‘magic rite to exorcise the spirits of murder, violence and creephood’ (Laycock 2011: 302) from the Pentagon made a direct connection between the world of intelligence and the occult; this connection is both literally and metaphorically resonant. ‘Spook’ is a polyvalent term, both spy and spectre, embodying the links between the various forms of ‘intelligence’ I seek to examine here.

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<sup>2</sup> Gary Lachman presents a thorough discussion of the links between the 60s counterculture and the Western Occult tradition in *The Dedalus Book of The 1960s* (2010).

There has always been a connection between espionage and the occult, in both fiction and reality; my sub-heading, *They Used Dark Forces*, is the title of a novel by Dennis Wheatley, describing a battle between British and Nazi magicians to end World War II. Consider the following series of connections. The founding father of the British intelligence services was Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth I's spymaster. Elizabeth's official astrologer was the linguist, mathematician, and practicing magician John Dee, who travelled widely in Europe as a scholar, semi-official diplomat, and almost certainly spy for Walsingham.<sup>3</sup> Fast forward to the early 20th Century, when Somerset Maugham worked for British Intelligence, basing the 'Ashenden' stories on his experiences. Prior to this, in 1908, he published *The Magician*, the story of Oliver Haddo, who is clearly based on the most famous occultist of the 20th century, Aleister Crowley, himself a student of Dee. More than one author has suggested that Crowley himself worked for British Intelligence during World War I.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the truth may be, he was an infamous figure in British popular culture, the 'wickedest man in London' and the go-to prototype for any author who wanted to create a Satanist. Among such authors is Dennis Wheatley, who published in 1934 *The Devil Rides Out*, featuring Mocata, an occultist clearly based on Crowley.

Wheatley worked during World War II for the London Controlling Section, a secret government department charged with coordinating strategic military deception, and we know that he was involved with advance planning for D-Day; he may also have had a hand in Operation Mincemeat, one of the most famous deceptions in military history.<sup>5</sup> Also during this period, Wheatley became friends with another writer, the travel journalist and explorer Peter Fleming, who often collaborated with the LCS on operations in the Far East. He also came to know Peter Fleming's younger brother Ian, working at that time in Naval Intelligence, whose first novel features a villain who has been seen as another fictional version of Crowley. (There is a probably apocryphal anecdote that Fleming acted in an attempt to involve Crowley in the interrogation of Rudolf Hess, given the latter's known interest in the occult).<sup>6</sup> Fleming fictionalised his own experiences in Naval Intelligence through the persona of James Bond — and we return to our beginning, and the way in which John Dee signed his confidential correspondence to Queen

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<sup>3</sup> Useful background on the Elizabethan intelligence services and Dee's links to Walsingham are to be found in, *inter alia*, Stephen Alford (2012) and Benjamin Woolley (2001).

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Spence (2008).

<sup>5</sup> For details of Operation Mincemeat, see Ewen Montagu (1954) and Ben Macintyre (2010). Wheatley's work with the London Controlling Section is discussed in Phil Baker (2009).

<sup>6</sup> A fictional account of this story is given in Jake Arnott, *The House of Rumour* (2012).

Elizabeth: two circles to signify that he was the Queen's secret eyes, guarded with an elongated seven, a number seen as auspicious both generally and by the mystical school of Qabalah<sup>7</sup>. The original '007' was both spy and sorcerer.

Intelligence and the occult are inextricably linked, and with good reason. The spy is a quintessentially gnostic figure, engaged on a quest to break down the barriers between the known and the unknown and reveal the hidden truth. More than that, spy fiction is deeply concerned with issues of morality, loyalty and identity; in a looking-glass war taking place in a 'wilderness of mirrors'<sup>8</sup>, the spy embodies our concern to establish some form of moral framework in a world of shifting values and changing allegiances. Intelligence, information, and interpretation are the central elements of all spy fiction and of occultism, the art which strives above all for gnosis. As Charles Stross puts it:

The Cold War wasn't about us. It was about the Spies, and the Secret Masters, and the Hidden Knowledge (Stross 2007a: 379).

Stross is one of the most interesting contemporary writers working within genre fiction, and one of the few who is qualified to make informed pronouncements on the growth of an IT-driven security environment. A prolific author across genres, the works of relevance here are his 'Laundry Files', a series of (to date) five novels and related short stories (full details given in the Bibliography).

The 'Laundry Files' are an exercise in mixing genres; spy fiction and the hybrid fictional universe of H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos. In the world of the novels, there are universes next door to ours, whose inhabitants are continually waiting for someone to let them in. Magic is real, a branch of mathematics, and the priests of the Information Age have codified and standardised the rules; sorcery becomes an operating system. The links between technology and theology are laid out by the series' protagonist, Bob Howard:

Back before about 1942, communication with other realms was pretty hit and miss. Unfortunately, Alan Turing partially systematized it – which later led to his unfortunate 'suicide' and a subsequent policy reversal to the effect that it was better to have eminent logicians inside the tent pissing out, rather than outside pissing in. The Laundry is that sub-division of the Second World War-era Special

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<sup>7</sup> An interesting (if possibly less than conclusive) analysis of the symbolism of Dee's '007' signature is given by Henrik Palmgren (2006).

<sup>8</sup> Attributed to James Jesus Angleton, Chief of the CIA's Counter-Intelligence Staff from 1954 to 1975, who lifted it from Eliot's 'Gerontion'; it subsequently became the title of David Martin's study of Angleton and the CIA (Martin 2003).

Operations Executive that exists to protect the United Kingdom from the scum of the multiverse (Stross 2007a: 45).

Stross' hero is both boffin and bureaucrat, battling eldritch horrors, universe-hopping Nazis, media moguls, demon-worshipping televangelists, and the Human Resources department of his own agency. There is humour in the novels, generally at the expense of management culture and the horrors of team-building seminars and budget requisitions (it is hard for any academic to resist a novel which claims that PowerPoint is a Satanic tool designed to suck the souls from anyone exposed to it). However, the series is also a study of the ways in which spy fiction reflects and distils the anxieties of our age. Each novel is a pastiche of a different genre of the spy novel, Deighton, Fleming, Anthony Price and Peter O'Donnell's 'Modesty Blaise' stories, and much of the pleasure of the texts comes from seeing the way in which Stross plays with the conventions of the form to embody his own concerns, constructing a sustained metafictional commentary on spy fiction itself.<sup>9</sup> His hero is a computer geek, because, as Stross puts it;

This is the twentieth (and early twenty-first) century, an age of spooks and wonder, of conspiracies and Cold War, an age in which the horror of the pulp magazines lurched forth onto the world stage in trillion-dollar weapons projects capable of smashing cities and incinerating millions [...] It is the decade of the computer scientist, the fast-thinking designer of abstract machines that float on a Platonic realm of thought and blink in or out of existence with a mouseclick (Stross 2007b: 312).

The hero can be seen as the embodiment of certain unchanging aspects of human experience (cf., *inter alia*, Propp, Campbell, and Jung), but he or she, like the narratives containing them, is also always a reflection of his or her times. In an age of pervasive technology, it is no surprise that Stross' hero is a high priest in the church of the computer. Similarly, it is entirely fitting that his spies investigate OCCINT, rather than HUMINT or SIGINT<sup>10</sup>; his monstrous, apocalyptic horrors are metaphors for the era whence they spring. If we want to understand the nature of the current debates over surveillance and security, we should always remember the adage that 'generals always fight the last war, especially if they have won it' (Kemp 1988: 14). The contemporary security and intelligence mind-set was forged at a time when the potential result of failure to preserve the nations' secrets could have led to a literal apocalypse. Here, indeed, be monsters.

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<sup>9</sup> The series is evolving as Stross writes it; from *The Rhesus Chart* onwards, he has moved to creating pastiches of the tropes of urban fantasy, with the Laundry facing down vampires (*The Rhesus Chart*), superheroes (*The Annihilation Score*) and an invasion by the forces of Faerie (*The Nightmare Stacks*; this last will be published in 2016). These new genre explorations are still grounded within an examination of the Secret State and surveillance culture.

<sup>10</sup> HUMINT: Human Intelligence. SIGINT: Signals Intelligence. OCCINT: Occult Intelligence. Only the last is Stross' invention.

## 2. The Wrath of Kahn.

Stross' protagonist is both exceptional and mundane, sorcerer and bureaucrat, threatened by both unimaginable external threats and the petty terrors of office life. In this, he is a perfect fit for the template of the hero that we find throughout post-War spy fiction. Smiley, Deighton's initially anonymous Harry Palmer, and even Bond are all spies and civil servants, their actions bound within regulations, hierarchies and legislation; it should always be remembered that Bond is *licensed* to kill, and only in certain set situations. As Stross says:

Far from being men of action, the majority of intelligence community staff are office workers, a narrow majority of them female, and they almost certainly never handle weapons in the line of duty (Stross 2007a: 305).

The idea of the world of espionage as a mirror image of the everyday realm of committees, matrix management and office, rather than international politics runs through the spy fiction of our age, and in this it is almost certainly an accurate picture of reality. The Second World War was not won by individual genius, but by an industrialised bureaucracy. The foundations of the modern IT-driven surveillance society were laid in the huts of Bletchley Park and Operation MAGIC, as a secret priesthood of engineers, mathematicians, logicians and linguists began to create what we know as computer science.<sup>11</sup> There is a regrettable tendency in the popular mind to see the War as a struggle between Anglophone individualism and Nazi totalitarianism; such a reading is nonsensical. Both sides were bureaucracies, and the Allies were simply more efficient than the Axis powers and more willing to make the jump from mechanical to electronic calculation as a means of waging war. Konrad Zuse had built a working Turing-complete machine in Berlin in 1943; if the Nazis had realised the significance of Zuse's discoveries, the history of the world could have been very different.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time as Turing and his colleagues were at work, another group of techno-priests were engaged on another deeply secret, deeply complex project, involving over one hundred and thirty thousand people and a budget of two billion US\$. On the 16th of July, 1945, J. Robert Oppenheimer watched the first successful detonation of an atomic bomb, and realised the extent to which the game had changed:

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<sup>11</sup> In June 2013, the NSA declassified and made available (albeit in redacted form) Colin Burke's history of American cryptography from the 1930s to the 1960s. Of interest in itself, its very title is relevant in the context I am sketching out here: *It Wasn't All Magic: The Early Struggle to Automate Cryptanalysis, 1930s-1960s* (Burke 2002).

<sup>12</sup> See Konrad Zuse, *The Computer — My Life* (1993).

I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavad Gita*, Vishnu ... is trying to persuade the prince that he should do his duty, and to impress him takes on his multi-armed form, and says, 'Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds' ... I suppose we all thought that, one way or another (Oppenheimer 1965).<sup>13</sup>

In Grant Morrison's *The Invisibles*, the Trinity detonation is presented as an occult act, an action of utter *wrongness* which marks the true Fall of humanity, in which the explosion lets a being through from another realm, to fall prey to 'black scientists, black science':

Its vivisection began almost immediately. Scalpels opened the Seals and everything went wrong everywhere simultaneously. This secret lies behind all the wars, and the holocausts, the assassinations, the slavery, the power of governors and Governments over people (Morrison: 21).

Barely a month after Trinity came Hiroshima, and the World learnt what human ingenuity and 'black science' could do; a single bomb lay waste to an entire city, reducing its inhabitants to shadows, the perfect expression of the concept of the empty signifier; the Bomb did not just kill, it *erased* its targets. And what it did to Hiroshima or Nagasaki, it could do to anyone, anywhere. Of course, as Tom Lehrer put it in 'Who's Next?', 'First we got the Bomb, and that was good / Cos' we love peace and motherhood' (Lehrer 2010). Then, on August 29, 1949, the Soviets detonated RDS1, 'First Lightning', and the nightmare of a world destroyed by nuclear cataclysm arose. The Cold War appeared to run the risk of becoming all too hot.

Into this world came Herman Kahn, one of the central figures in the creation of US nuclear strategic planning and one of the inspirations, along with Teller, von Neumann and Werner von Braun, of *Doctor Strangelove*. In his updating of von Clausewitz, *On Thermonuclear War* (Kahn 1960), he argued that a nuclear conflict was both feasible and in theory winnable; such a reading of the various scenarios did little to calm the minds of the general public or tame the imaginations of writers and filmmakers.

If we examine the cultural artefacts of the post-War years, from *Planet of The Apes* (1968) to *Godzilla* (1954), from *Seven Days to Noon* (1950) to *Threads* (1984) or *Edge of Darkness* (1985), what comes across is a sense of truly existential dread, the idea that what was at stake was not the survival of a country or a political system, but of our species, and spy fiction is no exception. As Stross puts it:

Cold War spy fiction was in some respects the ultimate expression of horror fiction, for the nightmare was real. There's no need to hint darkly about forbidden knowledge and elder gods, sleeping in drowned cities, who might inflict unspeakable horrors, when you live in an age when the

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<sup>13</sup> For an excellent investigation of Oppenheimer's words, their origins and resonances, see James Hijiya (2000).

wrong coded message can leave you blinded with your skin half-burned away in the wreckage of a dead city barely an hour later (Stross 2007b: 303).

Even Bond, who is essentially a relic of the era of wartime SOE derring-do, finds himself in a world where the threats are on an infinitely larger scale: consider *Moonraker*, where Bond imagines the result of Hugo Drax's plan to annihilate London:

The thin needle of the rocket. Dropping fast as light out of a clear sky. The crowds in the streets. The Palace. The nursemaids in the park. The birds in the trees. The great bloom of flame a mile wide. And then the mushroom cloud. And nothing left. Nothing. Nothing, Nothing (Fleming 2012: 178–79).

There is a profound shift in the focus of interest in the spy novels of the post-War era, from *The Great Game* to *Game Theory*, from the discovery of 'secrets' to the vatic interpretation of 'mysteries'; arguably the emblematic spy is no longer Bond, the martini-swilling club-land hero, but George Smiley, the professional civil servant, seeking to weave a path between what Sir Michael Quinlan (Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Defence from 1988–92) describes as the:

difference between finding out existing but concealed facts and divining the likely course of future events amid the caprices and uncertainties of world affairs (Hennessy 2010: xix).

Consider how spy fiction, and indeed the activities of the intelligence services in Britain and America post-World War II is influenced by the knowledge of the activities of the Cambridge spies and Klaus Fuchs; a novel like *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* is informed by the degree to which James Angleton's paranoia about Russian penetration of the CIA all but crippled the Agency's activities for decades.

In a world post-Hiroshima, where the disclosure of confidential information can have literally apocalyptic results, the spy novel shows the intelligence services as seeking, not so much to *discover* secrets, but to *protect* them; when knowledge is power, the need to withhold that knowledge becomes paramount, and the idea of the threat within, the double agent or the mole, becomes the new Big Bad. In a mind-set forged during the Cold War, when disclosure of information ran the risk of sparking a global conflagration, the worst possible thing that can happen is for knowledge to spread; Manning and Snowden are seen as dangerous not just for the nature of the information they release, but for the very act of distribution itself. The actions of Snowden and Manning have a quasi-mythological resonance, a contemporary dramatisation of the tale of Prometheus, the bringer of knowledge/fire to mankind; the response to Snowden in particular seems to me to be driven in large part, not just by the perceived enormity of his 'betrayal', but by

the fact that he chose to make the knowledge available to all. In a world where such activity is theoretically possible by anyone with a USB stick loaded with TAILS<sup>14</sup>, a smartphone, or even just an iPod to carry confidential files, what happens to the spies? The answer, in fiction at least, appears to be a *repli sur soi*, or rather, as I have argued, to tales of espionage directed, not against an external threat but against the population supposedly under the spy's protection.

The dominant theme of much contemporary spy fiction is not *espionage* but *surveillance*; popular culture presents the idea of the state's intelligence agencies constructing, in Barry Eisler's words, a society 'where the government knows more and more about the citizenry and the citizenry is permitted to know less and less about the government' (Eisler 2014). There has been a proliferation of paranoid narratives, from *The X-files* to *Person of Interest*, from *American Tabloid* to *Spooks*; the overriding sense is of a world in which the citizen is observed, monitored, and evaluated for any sign of potential threat to the status quo. From the idea of Her Majesty's Secret Servant fighting for the defence of the realm, we have entered an era where the spy is no longer the *investigator* of occult knowledge but its *guardian*. The technology that was supposed to liberate and unite us instead enslaves us; Neal Stephenson's observations during a visit to China seem all-too applicable to the West as well:

I was carrying an issue of *Wired* [...] In one corner were three characters in Hanzi. Before I'd left the States, I'd heard that they formed the Chinese word for 'network'. Whenever I showed the magazine to a Chinese person they were baffled. 'It means network, doesn't it?' I said, thinking all the warm and fuzzy thoughts that we think about networks. 'Yes,' they said, 'this is the term used by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution for the network of spies and informers that they spread across every village and neighborhood to snare enemies of the regime' (Stephenson 2014).

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan argued that the coming revolution in information technology would lead to the uniting of the world:

As electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village. Electric speed at bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree (McLuhan 1964: 5).

The spy story of today shows us the flipside of this vision; a recent tweet puts it nicely:

Yearly reminder: unless you're over 60, you weren't promised flying cars. You were promised an oppressive cyberpunk dystopia. Here you go (Marquis 2013).

For many, it seems as if the village we are living in is not McLuhan's, but McGoohan's.

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<sup>14</sup> TAILS (The Amnesiac Incognito Live System) is an open source operating system which can be carried on a USB drive, and allows a user to operate online anonymously and privately. Edward Snowden has recommended it; see Klint Finley (2014).



### 3. Escaping the Village

Like the Laundry Files, *The Prisoner* (1967–68) reworks the traditional form of the spy fiction to comment on contemporary anxieties; the series can (and arguably should) be read as jumping off from McGoohan's earlier *Danger Man* (1960–62, 1964–68), the spy series that catapulted the actor to fame. Just as McGoohan turned down the role of James Bond, so *The Prisoner* is the story of an agent who seeks to resign and finds himself unable to escape his profession. However, as with Stross' work, so *The Prisoner* resists any attempt to read it as a straightforward spy story; Stross because of his use of the occult as a metaphor for the Cold War, and *The Prisoner* because it rapidly moves from SF-tinged, heightened realism into deeply philosophical realms. The title sequence tells us all we need to know about the real themes of the series:

What do you want?  
Information.  
Whose side are you on?  
That would be telling.... We want information. Information! INFORMATION!  
You won't get it.  
By hook or by crook, we will (*The Prisoner*: opening titles).

And

Who is Number One?  
You are Number Six (Ibid).

A game of mutual concealment and investigation is played out over the series, culminating in the final revelation of the identity of Number One; the solution to the mystery should come as no surprise, for as the theologian Peter Rollins points out:

Every episode tells us that Number six is the one who is really running the Village, and yet no-one ever sees it [...] we hear the words, 'You are number six', in response to the question, 'who is number one'. Here it is as if Number two is changing the subject, refusing to answer the question. However, is number two not really answering the question, saying, 'YOU ARE, number 6'?

[...] it is we who create the Big Other that controls us. That while we experience this Big Other as separate from us, existing independently of us, and baring [*sic*] over us, it is nonetheless our own creation. We are oppressed by a foreign power that is our own. We are both number six and number one, oppressor and the one being oppressed (Rollins 2009).

This is both political allegory and philosophical parable; the gnosis we seek is always already within us, but we refuse to recognise it and, in fact, ourselves construct our own prison. Big Brother, Big Other; no more than our own 'mind-forg'd manacles'. Ultimately, like Stross' work, *The Prisoner* is both spy story and existential horror tale; both Stross and McGoohan seek to lay bare the risks of what they see as a surrender to non-humanocentric forms of governance, mediated and maintained by technology. It is a very short step from the Village to the world Stross outlines

in his essay ‘The Panopticon Singularity’, where he argues that current technological developments (mere fiction at the time of *The Prisoner*) may permit

the construction of a Panopticon society — a police state characterised by omniscient surveillance and mechanical law enforcement (Stross 2014b).

And

the emergence of a situation in which human behaviour is deterministically governed by processes outside human control (Ibid).

Our ‘village’ is built on the models of information architecture and security that emerged from ENIGMA and the Manhattan Project. How we choose to respond to this is as yet uncertain, but as ever fiction is one step ahead; for one possible response, consider Cory Doctorow’s *Little Brother* (Doctorow 2008), a young adult novel by a writer who has collaborated with Stross in the past. This work explicitly encourages its readers to learn how to subvert the technology of control and hack the system

#### **4. Conclusion**

I conclude as I began, by arguing that whatever else they may be, spies are fundamentally creatures of the occult, explorers of the liminal realms where dwell the ‘known knowns’, the ‘unknown unknowns’, and their kin. Gnostics and scientists of the truest kind, their task in fiction and reality is to seek after knowledge, in ways which the general public will always fear and mistrust. John Dee was spy, sorcerer, and scientist; today’s intelligencers use satellites not scrying stones, keyboards not wands, programming rather than angelic languages — but, if *The Guardian* is to be believed, they, too, are in the magic business:

Hidden among the avalanche of documents leaked by Edward Snowden were images from a Power Point presentation [...] beneath a shot of hands shuffling a deck of cards [appeared the words] ‘We want to build Cyber *Magicians*’ (Rose 2014).

From our world to the Village and the Laundry may be a much shorter journey than we think.

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## On The Logic of Secrecy in *À la recherche du temps perdu*

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### Abstract

In this article, the author links what he terms ‘logic of secrecy’ to Proust’s best known and celebrated work, *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The article explores the way in which the ‘holder’ and the ‘addressee’ of a secret can relate one to the other despite a fundamental state of separation and finds that the *Recherche* contains a great variety of examples in which different kinds of secrets are kept or exhibited. The article argues that, in the logic sustaining the relationships between *holders* and *addressees*, secrets are always taken as dynamic principles moving the narrative gears of Proust’s construction. Referring to Gilles Deleuze’s notion of ‘temporal apprenticeship’, as opposed to ‘abstract knowledge’, the article investigates what is, in effect, a search for a secret in Proust’s novel. While the article highlights two main kinds of secrets, deliberate and involuntary, it also considers Proust’s notion of ‘*livre intérieur aux signes inconnus*’ as a key point in the novel’s architecture. Finally, the article discusses the potentialities of the logic of secrecy in the alternation between the states of being closed or open in what the author, following the terminology of physiology and András Zempléni’s reflection on secret in communication, calls ‘secretion’.

Keywords: separation, communication, inversion, closed spaces, inner being, outward experience, signs, acts of reading, desire to know, experience of time, deliberate and involuntary secrets, secretion



At first sight, Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–1927) is concerned with two *côtés* or sides, those of Swann and Guermantes, whose ‘Ways’ feature in the titles of two of the seven volumes comprised in the novel.<sup>1</sup> However, and more importantly, Swann and Guermantes also represent a radical separation and their ‘Ways’, two alternative directions for the walks in the countryside taken by Marcel, the hero, during his childhood, can be seen as a metaphor

<sup>1</sup> *Du côté de chez Swann* (Swann’s Way) and *Le côté de Guermantes* (Guermantes’ Way).

for the hero's itineraries in his *recherche*, or search, for art, love and knowledge of the world. If Swann represents the way to a knowledge of the arts through literature, music, paintings, and architecture, Guermantes is principally the route to the hero's initiation into Faubourg Saint-Germain high society. We can say, therefore, that a great part of the novel is based on this visible opposition between art and high society, a separation that the hero, throughout the narrative, perceives as a real incompatibility.

This is an unusual kind of separation in that, although both Swann's Way and Guermantes' Way diverge from the same point, the house of the hero's great-aunt in Combray, there is another connection between them, the significance of which is only discovered in the novel's last volume, when, during a conversation between Marcel and his friend Gilberte, the latter mentions a curious link between the two different walks, curious because previously unknown to the hero:<sup>2</sup>

“Si vous voulez, nous pourrions tout de même sortir un après-midi et nous pourrions aller à Guermantes, en prenant par Méséglise, c'est la plus jolie façon,” — phrase qui, en bouleversant toutes les idées de mon enfance, m'apprit que les deux côtés n'étaient pas aussi inconciliables que j'avais cru (Proust 1987–89: IV, 268).<sup>3</sup>

[‘If you like, we could still go out one afternoon to walk towards Guermantes, but we could walk past Méséglise, it's the prettiest route,’ a sentence which overturned all the ideas of my childhood by revealing that the two ways were not as irreconcilable as I had thought (Proust 2002: V, 1633).]

What had been experienced as radically separated is actually unseparated. This is very close to what Roland Barthes called ‘the law of inversion’, or play between opposites, in the architecture of Proust's fiction (Barthes 1994: 1218–21). But we can go a step further than Barthes' ‘law’ as we explore this ambiguous relationship between two sides, starting from what Louis Marin calls the ‘logic of secrecy’, by which he means the effect of secrecy on a particular relationship (Marin 1984), that shapes Proust's entire novel.

A state of separation informs all the secrets to be found in the *Recherche*, secrecy being at the very heart of the work.<sup>4</sup> This is no great wonder, when we consider, as Arnaud Lévy does, the etymology of the term ‘secret’.<sup>5</sup> However, the term has also inherited the spatial connotations to

<sup>2</sup> Both the French and English versions of Proust's novel from which quotations are taken are published in several volumes, as listed in the Bibliography. References will therefore include the volume number, as well as the page number(s). Individual books are referred to in the text by their titles in the French edition.

<sup>3</sup> The route called ‘Swann's Way’ by the hero-narrator is known locally as ‘Méséglise’.

<sup>4</sup> In this article, I shall, following convention, refer to the novel as ‘the *Recherche*’, with upper case first letter, and to the hero's personal search as his ‘*recherche*’.

<sup>5</sup> The origin of the term ‘secret’ is the Latin *secretus*, the past participle of the composite verb *secernere* (*se+cernere*), which means ‘to separate’ in the sense of ‘to distinguish between’. The root verb *cernere* means to separate in the sense of to sift or sieve, as, for exemplifying, sifting wheat from chaff.

be found in the Medieval Latin *secretarium* [shelter], in that a consistent characteristic of the secret is that it is conceived as being contained, enclosed. The ‘logic of secrecy’ is, in fact, a spatial disposition which necessarily requires a border between ‘Inside’ and ‘Outside’ (Lévy 1976: 117–29).

The secret that drives the *Recherche* is represented by the concept of ‘Lost Time’, which is the radical separation from Time by the person who has ‘lost’ it. The degree of separation is such that the loss is forgotten, unless something suddenly occurs to remind the loser of this separation; an example of this is the *madeleine* which Marcel suddenly remembers from his childhood: until that moment, he had forgotten not only his experiences in Combray but also their very loss.

This is a construction peculiar to Proust: losses and secrets are often paired in a reflexive process involving the hero’s capability to recognise them. Proust represents the hero as the *addressee*, or person from whom certain information is to be withheld, of several secrets;<sup>6</sup> some are *deliberate*, that is, intentionally created by the *holder*, the person who initiates a secret, to deceive his *addressee*; others are *involuntary*, that is, created as the result of an unconscious separation within the self. From the hero’s point of view, this distance created by separation generates a desire to know and finally write about something absent. While Lost Time represents the main object of this desire; we can easily find signs of this pursuit in the hero’s experiences of love or in his social life.

In this article, I shall identify some of the possibilities for there to be a secret in general terms by using examples from Proust’s work. Such a reading implies that not only are secrets logically possible but also that there is a logic of secrecy which informs Proust’s fiction. My purpose is, therefore, to describe how this logic works in the novel, why *À la recherche du temps perdu* is actually a search for secrets and, finally, why we can read this novel as a huge work of what Zempléni terms ‘secretion’ accomplished by its author.

### 1. Reading Proust through the lens of secrecy

The *Recherche*, insists Deleuze in the first chapter of his *Proust and Signs*, has little to do with ‘recollection, memory, even involuntary memory’ (2000: 3). It is, he continues, ‘not an exposition

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<sup>6</sup> In his discussion of the secret, Zempléni uses the terms ‘*contenu*’ to denote the information which is to be kept secret, ‘*détenteur*’ to denote the person who initiates the secret and ‘*déstinataire*’ to denote the person from whom the *contenu* is to be hidden (1976: *passim*); these are rendered as ‘*content*’, ‘*holder*’ and ‘*addressee*’ respectively in this article.

of involuntary memory but the narrative of an apprenticeship: more precisely, the apprenticeship of a man of letters' (2000: 3), the 'apprentice' being Marcel, the hero-narrator, who, in the course of his *apprentissage* learns how to read, interpret, and finally translate many different kind of signs, acts of discovery that are as vital to the progress of Proust's eponymous search as are the recollections conjured by involuntary memory. From start to finish, the *Recherche* is a work of reading, interpreting and translating the signs that betray secrets, a multitude of secrets. Every such sign implies a sense, which the hero can understand only as 'the content of a temporal apprenticeship, not of an 'abstract knowledge' (Deleuze 2000: 4).

In the Introduction we saw how the link between Swann's Way and Guermantes' Way, of which Marcel had been unaware throughout his childhood and which was revealed by Gilberte Swann in *Le temps retrouvé*, illustrates how two things that the hero had experienced as radically separated, are, he discovers much later, connected. This separation and connection is both physical, the two Ways and the link between exist geographically, and symbolical, they can be read as a metaphor for the hero's itineraries in his *recherche* and the opposition between art and high society, the link between which is Gilberte herself. This episode also serves to illustrate the effect of his *apprentissage*: time and again, the infinite work of interpretation carried out in *Recherche* reveals a link between a *holder* and an *addressee* of a secret. Marcel's *apprentissage* plays on his fascination with unknown *contents* by forcing him into a relationship with them.

A powerful example of this fascination with an unknown *content* is the way Marcel is captivated by the Guermantes' aristocratic charm. This has not so much to do with their material wealth but something less tangible — the family's history and style; Guermantes becomes a sort of password for an exclusive dimension from which Marcel is excluded, and the more the hero appreciates this exclusive quality, the more he feels that, by virtue of his being excluded, he is an *addressee* of a secret of which the family is the *holder*:

J'avais entendu parler des célèbres tapisseries de Guermantes et je les voyais, médiévales et bleues, un peu grosses, se détacher comme un nuage sur le nom amarante et légendaire, au pied de l'antique forêt où chassa si souvent Chilbert et ce fin fond mystérieux des terres, ce lointain des siècles, il me semblait qu'aussi bien que par un voyage je pénétrerais dans leurs secrets, rien qu'en approchant un instant à Paris Mme de Guermantes, suzeraine du lieu et dame du lac, comme si son visage et ses paroles eussent dû posséder le charme local des futaies et des rives et les mêmes particularités séculaires que le vieux coutumier de ses archives (Proust 1987–89: II, 314).

[I had heard of the famous Guermantes tapestries and could see them, medieval and blue, somewhat coarse, standing out like a cloud against the amaranth, legendary name beneath the ancient forest where Chilbert so often went hunting, and it seemed to me that, without making a journey to see them, I might just as easily penetrate the secrets of the mysterious corners of these lands, this



*remoteness of the centuries, simply by coming into contact for a moment, in Paris, with Mme de Guermantes, the suzerain of the place and lady of the lake, as if her face and her words must possess the local charm of forests and streams and the same age-old characteristics as those recorded in the book of ancient customs in her archives* (Proust 2002: III, 37.)]

In his *rêveries* about the Middle Ages, Marcel adumbrates the distance between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy; he imagines the members of this family to be hiding something legendary and mysterious behind their name, secrets of ‘mysterious corners of [those] lands’ and ‘remoteness of centuries’ that he might penetrate by coming into contact with Mme de Guermantes ‘for a moment’. The endless work of interpretation carried out in the *Recherche* repeatedly reveals links between a *holder* and an *addressee* of a secret.

Furthermore, such a chain of secrets attracts not only the hero: if we follow some of the main male characters of the novel (Swann, Charlus, Saint-Loup), we recognise the recurring features of reading, deciphering, and translating secrets. On the other hand, if the male characters are often associated with the role of the *addressee* of a secret, female characters (Odette, Rachel, Albertine) correspond just as often to the role of the *holder*. However, Proust’s genius also consists in constructing characters such as Charlus and Saint-Loup, who are at the same time *addressees* and *holders* of different sexual secrets; we cannot invariably apply a simple gender rule to the *holder/addressee* opposition.

This is because the logic of secrecy itself cannot easily accommodate such a rule; rather it allows the possibility of an exchange of roles between *holder* and *addressee*. This can have a significant effect on the fictional action, as we find in the *Recherche*: secrets are not present as static substances but rather as dynamic principles leading a game of *mimesis*. In this sense, the final discovery of the non-incompatibility of the two Ways (that of Guermantes and that of Méséglise) becomes the symbol of the radical impossibility to separate a pair of ‘sides’ in social statuses (aristocracy and bourgeoisie), in genders (male and female) and in sexual orientations (Sodom and Gomorrah).

The principle behind this role-play goes by the name of ‘transitivity’ and produces the same inversions that Barthes noticed as the keys of the novel’s development.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the *Recherche*’s surprises are very often the result of a macro-movement governed by a superior force

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<sup>7</sup> The term ‘transitivity’ in this context can be defined, following Barthes’ concept of a ‘law of inversion’ as the principal play of opposites in Proust’s work. The expression also embraces a reference to Donald Winnicott’s ‘transitional object’, the term by which he defines the passage from ‘me’ to ‘not me’ in a child’s *apprentissage*; see also his concept of ‘potential space’ (Winnicott 2005: 141–48).

that Proust calls ‘Time’, in which contingency finally coincides with necessity. All this temporal dynamism takes place in ‘potential spaces’ constituted by secrets, in which separation is not a permanent state, but the very condition of Marcel’s ‘temporal apprenticeship’<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, the combination between time effects and the hero’s learning produces several overturning effects in the *Recherche*. We have but to consider Mme Verdurin, the ‘Mistress’ of the enlightened bourgeoisie, who becomes, at the end of *Le Temps retrouvé*, the Princess of Guermantes. This kind of inversion belongs to the secrets of ‘Time’, which the hero will only understand at the end of the novel. This is more a rule than an exception in the Proustian logic of secrecy: what has been experienced in one way (Mme Verdurin as a proud bourgeois) will be at last revealed in another way (Mme Verdurin as the princess of Guermantes).

Certes, s’il s’agit uniquement de nos cœurs, le poète a eu raison de parler des fils mystérieux que la vie brise. Mais il est encore plus vrai qu’elle en tisse sans cesse entre les êtres, entre les événements, qu’elle entrecroise ces fils, qu’elle les redouble pour épaissir la trame, si bien qu’entre le moindre point de notre passé et tous les autres, un riche réseau de souvenirs ne laisse que le choix des communications (Proust 1987–89: IV, 607).<sup>9</sup>

[If it were only a matter of our hearts, the poet would have been right to speak of the ‘mysterious threads’ that are broken by life. But it is even more true to say that life is ceaselessly weaving these threads between individuals and between events, that it interweaves them, doubles them, to make the weave thicker, to such an extent finally that between the least significant point in our past and all the others a rich network of memories gives us in fact a choice about which connection to make (Proust 2002: VI, 770).]

The search for secrets in which the hero is engaged is a search for ‘truth’; however, as Deleuze demonstrates, there is not one great Secret hidden at the culmination of the apprenticeship; at the heart of all signs/secrets there is a truth that resists all attempts to read translate and interpret it. This truth is Time or the temporal relationship between the *addressee* of the secret and that which is unknown to him.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Potential space’ is a psychoanalytic notion indicating an intermediate area of experiencing that lies between the inner world and the external reality; see Donald Winnicott (2005: 144–48).

<sup>9</sup> By ‘fils mystérieux [*mysterious threads*]’, the author is referring to Victor Hugo’s poem ‘Tristesse d’Olympio’ from his collection *Les Rayons et les Ombres*, first published in 1840:

Que peu de temps suffit pour changer toutes choses!  
Nature au front serein, comme vous oubliez!  
Et comme vous brisez dans vos métamorphoses  
Les fils mystérieux où nos cœurs sont liés (Hugo 1957: 76).

[How little time is needed for everything to change!  
Serene-browed Nature, how you forget!  
And how, in your transformations, you break  
The mysterious threads in which our hearts are bound (author’s translation).]

To seek the truth is to interpret, decipher, explicate. But this “explication” is identified with the development of the sign in itself. This is why the Search is always temporal, and the truth always a truth of time. The final systematization reminds us that time itself (*le Temps*) is plural. (Deleuze 2000: 17)

This essential truth, which Deleuze defines as a ‘truth of time’, is a force, hidden behind the secrets, that drives the *Recherche* by challenging the hero to discover it. The eventual revelation, which concludes *Le temps retrouvé* and the entire novel, is only achieved through the hero-narrator’s previous, and apparently, worthless efforts *during his apprenticeship*.

In everyday experience, ‘secret’ means a lack of open communication, but in the *Recherche* this lack represents the very condition of a deep and sudden communication between past and present. It is the same for all hidden contents enclosed in a container, that is the classical situation of a secret, as discussed by Deleuze & Guattari (2004: 316–30): the contents could always become a container for other contents, while the container could reveal itself as an empty space. Despite the infinite variability of contents and actors, we can recognise the effects of a strict logic working between separated sides and places. In these terms, the dynamic of the secret can produce, by way of its recurrent movements, a complex narrative plot that contains not only an entire world but also infinite worlds contained in potential containers (just like the *madeleine* from Marcel’s forgotten and so hidden childhood). For Proust, a secret is never a static substance but rather a medium whereby some fundamental hidden parts of the self can be discovered, just like the ‘mysterious threads’ that life weaves between beings and events and breaks.

The influence of this logic can be analysed in the novel only at the price of a sacrifice. We must abandon the notion that the *content* of the secret behind the novel can be discovered. In the *Recherche*, the only real secret is, in fact, a paradoxical one: there is no secret. In other words, in Proust’s writing there are multiple effects of secrecy, but it looks as though there is not, prevailing over the others, a single secret prevailing over the others, what we might call the Prime Secret, the Secret of Secrets, the Secret, or as Derrida puts it the secret having ‘the clarity of divine lucidity [that] penetrates everything yet keeps within itself the most secret of secrets’ (Derrida 1995: 108). On the contrary, the novel’s secrets compose a chain that rolls in the narrative gear, increasing the dynamic effects of overturn between one side and its opposite. In order to find an image drawing the role of the logic of secrecy in Proust’s novel, we can think about a transparent lift that carries the reader to different levels of the book and shows its inner workings while it is moving from one floor to another. The lift is actually a good representation of the secret because it is a closed and

protected space (a *claustrum* in Latin), in which the inside does not communicate with the outside. But sometimes doors open and let the passenger out. The relationship between these two dimensions, Inside and Outside (identity and otherness, inner being and outward appearance), is the most powerful example of the secret's productivity in the *Recherche*: a shifting combination between protection and exposition leads the role-play of the hero's 'temporal apprenticeship'.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Deliberate secrets

Innumerable *contents* can pass through the secret, provided that they are placed in a closed space that makes the *content* invisible or unknown to its *addressee*. The separation instituting the secret must satisfy a fundamental condition: keeping its *content* safe, that is, maintaining the secret in a state of being unknown, by excluding the sharing of it or at least regulating such sharing according to some restrictive principles. The closed space of a secret is instituted by the *holder*, who consequently holds its knowledge. Scenes in which the presence of his *addressee* requires the *holder* to act in such a way that the secret is kept from the *addressee* abound in Proust's novel, as in the following example, one of the most important, concerning Marcel's relationship with Albertine:

Parfois l'écriture où je déchiffrais les mensonges d'Albertine, sans être idéographique, avait simplement besoin d'être lue à rebours; c'est ainsi que ce soir elle m'avait lancé d'un air négligent ce message destiné à passer presque inaperçu: "Il serait possible que j'aille demain chez les Verdurin, je ne sais pas du tout si j'irai, je n'en ai guère envie." Anagramme enfantin de cet aveu: "J'irai demain chez les Verdurin, c'est absolument certain, car j'y attache une extrême importance." Cette hésitation apparente signifiait une volonté arrêtée et avait pour but de diminuer l'importance de la visite tout en me l'annonçant. Albertine employait toujours le ton dubitatif pour les résolutions irrévocables (Proust 1987–89: III, 598).

[Sometimes the script in which I deciphered Albertine's lies was not ideographic, but simply had to be read backwards; thus, on this particular evening she had thrown out in my direction the message, designed to pass almost unnoticed: 'I might perhaps go to the Verdurins' tomorrow, I don't really know, I don't much feel like going.' A childish anagram of the admission, 'I'm going to the Verdurins tomorrow, I simply must go, it's really important.' This apparent hesitation was the sign of a firm resolve and was designed to reduce the importance of the visit in the very moment of telling me about it. Albertine always used a tentative tone for irrevocable decisions (Proust 2002: V, 237–38).]

The character of Albertine is the perfect example for the role of the *holder*: in order to keep her lesbianism secret from him, she is obliged to fabricate a chain of lies addressed to the hero. But Marcel's frantic passion for this girl is actually a passion for her secrets, in so far as he is

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<sup>10</sup> See Louis Marin's article 'Logiques du secret', in which he says: 'Le secret — répétons-le — n'est pas une chose ou un être mis à part, mais l'effet — négatif — d'un jeu de relations et d'interactions [*The secret, I repeat, is not some thing or some being set apart, but the effect, the negative effect, of a play between relationships and interactions*]' (1984: 64; editor's translation).

seduced only by the unknown signs that make Albertine's character an unsolvable puzzle.<sup>11</sup> In the hero's perspective, the experience of love is actually a desire to know the real identity of the beloved. On the other hand, if the beloved is familiar with his lover's jealousy, the logic of secrecy produces a mirror effect in which *holder* and *addressee* change their roles. In this way, if the hero's jealousy basically consists in a passion for Albertine's secrets, it is very often also a secret passion because the lover does not want the beloved to discover his jealousy. This kind of mirror game ends with the victory of the character who outdoes the other in keeping his/her secret:

[L]es paroles elles-mêmes ne me renseignaient qu'à la condition d'être interprétées à la façon d'un afflux de sang à la figure d'une personne qui se trouble, à la façon encore d'un silence subit. Tel adjectif [...] jailli dans une conflagration par le rapprochement involontaire, parfois périlleux, de deux idées que l'interlocuteur n'exprimait pas et duquel, par telles méthodes d'analyse ou d'électrolyse appropriées, je pouvais les extraire, m'en disait plus qu'un discours (Proust 1987–89: III, 596).

*[I relied on words only when I could read them like the rush of blood to the face of a person who is unsettled, or like a sudden silence. A certain phrase [...] flaring up, sparked by the unintended, sometimes dangerous proximity of two ideas unexpressed by the speaker, from whose discourse I could, by appropriate methods of analysis or electrolysis, extract them, told me more than a whole speech. Albertine sometimes left such loose ends trailing in her speech, precious compounds which I hastened to 'process' so as to turn them into clear ideas (Proust 2002: V, 232).]*

This process entails a long phase of surveillance, during which the tools for protection, silence, lies, tricks, etc., are employed to ensure the exclusion of the *addressee*.

Clearly, for there to be a secret, there has to be a *holder*, the person who has created the secret's closed space, and there has to be an *addressee*, the person who is being excluded from knowledge of the secret; each, whether *holder* or *addressee*, only exists in relation to the other, therefore. These positions represent two sides of the logic of secrecy: they are, if you will, like two troops deployed against each other or two dancers twirling round each other in a silent ballet. The existence of a secret is a game which needs at least two actors, two roles, two sides, even though, as in the Hegelian master-slave dialectic,<sup>12</sup> it is possible for there to be a change in the relationship between *holder* and *addressee*, so that their roles become inverted or reversed.

However, a third person can occupy the space between the two principal participants, even if his presence is not necessary for the institution of a secret space. I refer here to the role of what

<sup>11</sup> 'The need to become familiar with Albertine's desires is so intense that the activity of loving turns out to be something like a compulsive intellectual investigation' (Bersani 1969: 61). See also Malcolm Bowie in *Freud, Proust, Lacan: Theory as Fiction*: 'But over and against these emotional and moral penalties, the jealous lover hears, and heeds, an imperious call to *know*' (1987: 49; original emphasis).

<sup>12</sup> Hegel discusses this in the chapter on Self-consciousness in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [The Phenomenology of Spirit (or Mind)].

Zempléni calls the '*dépositaire* [depository]': someone who is included in the secret according to the *holder's* will. The depository is thus able to benefit from the rights of this confidential relationship but, at the same time, has to observe all the obligations it demands. The most universally known obligation is represented by the command: 'don't speak'. The principal condition for all kinds of relationships concerning the communication of a secret is silence;<sup>13</sup> indeed, a secret is most commonly constituted by the communication of confidential information that has to be protected. State secrets, professional and banking confidentiality, the seal of the confessional, and the arcana of the Masonic orders all fall into this category of secrets, their common feature being that they concern information of any kind which cannot be disclosed to anyone who is not privy to the confidence and which is therefore kept hidden by any depository according to the *holder's* will.

Every secret based on confidential information can be gathered in a great subcategory: the *deliberate secret*. In Proust's novel we find some indications of this kind of secret in the interaction between social groups (the aristocratic milieu of Guermantes and the bourgeois Verdurin family).

Mais comme le voyageur, déçu par le premier aspect d'une ville, se dit qu'il en pénétrera peut-être le charme en visitant les musées, en liant connaissance avec le peuple, en travaillant dans les bibliothèques, je me disais que si j'avais été reçu chez Mme de Guermantes, si j'étais de ses amis, si je pénétrais dans son existence, je connaîtrais ce que sous son enveloppe orangée et brillante son nom enfermaient réellement, objectivement, pour les autres, puisque enfin l'ami de mon père avait dit que le milieu des Guermantes était quelque chose d'à part dans le faubourg Saint-Germain (Proust 1987–89: II, 329–30).

[But like a traveller who is disappointed by his first impression of a city and who tells himself that he might perhaps penetrate its charm by visiting its museums, getting to know its inhabitants and working in its libraries, I assured myself that, had I been a regular visitor to Mme de Guermantes's house, were I one of her circle, were I to enter into her life, I should then know what was really enclosed within the brilliant orange-coloured envelope of her name, know it objectively, through the eyes of others, since, after all, my father's friend had said that the Guermantes were an exclusive set in the Faubourg Saint-Germain (Proust 2002: III, 73–74).]

But the real kingdom of the deliberate secret in the *Recherche* is sexuality. The clearest evidence for this can be found throughout the first part of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* with its references to the frequency with which the novel's *race maudite* [accursed race], the extensive homosexual community, has to preserve its secret;<sup>14</sup> for example:

Le vice (on parle ainsi pour la commodité du langage), le vice de chacun l'accompagne à la façon de ce génie qui était invisible pour les hommes tant qu'ils ignoraient sa présence. La bonté, la

<sup>13</sup> In his analysis from a rhetorical perspective of different types of silence, which is also concerned with the topic of the secret, Paolo Valesio distinguishes between a 'transitive silence' and an 'intransitive silence' (Valesio 1986: 356–65). See also his *Novantiqua: Rhetorics as a Contemporary Theory* (Valesio 1980).

<sup>14</sup> See, in particular, Proust 1987–89: III, 3–33\* and Proust 2002: IV, 22–98.

fourberie, le nom, les relations mondaines, ne se laissent pas découvrir, et on les porte cachés (Proust 1987–89: III, 15).

*[Vice (I put it thus for the sake of linguistic convenience), each person's vice accompanies him in the same fashion as the genie who was invisible to men for as long as they were unaware of his presence. Kindness, double-dealing, reputation, our social relations do not let themselves be discovered, we carry them concealed (Proust 2002: IV, 51)].*

The condition of separation and coexistence with the enemy forces the member of the subgroup to adopt coded messages. Baron Charlus, who maintains a strict aristocratic code while, at the same time, concealing a 'natural' homosexual attitude behind his very manly way of talking, is an exemplar of such a person, the perfect box of secrets concerning society and sexuality (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1998: 213–51).

### 3. Involuntary secrets

As well as deliberate secrets that are instituted as a result of the *holder's intention* to keep the *content* of the secret from the *addressee*, perhaps by disguising the information in some way, as do Albertine and Charlus, there are secrets in the *Recherche* in respect of which the separation that, as discussed in the Introduction, is an essential feature of the secret is unintentional. I call this second category of secret the 'involuntary secret'.

As I indicated in the Introduction, the separation found in the case of the involuntary secret is a separation within the space of the self. How this can occur can be explained in terms of the 'crypt', as Abraham and Torok term part of the closed space within the self in their analysis of the dialectics between introjection and incorporation within the process of mourning. Within this 'crypt' are stored experiences which only become settle and become clear over a considerable lapse of time. In the subjective space of inner experience there is, therefore, a boundary separating the knowable and the unknowable, the visible from the invisible, the speakable from the unspeakable (Abraham & Torok 1996: 252–58).

From this it will be appreciated that another feature that distinguishes the involuntary secret from the deliberate secret is the identity of the *holder* and the *addressee*: they are one and the same person. This paradox is well expressed by Masud Khan in his work on hidden selves:

The location of a secret of this type in psychic topography is neither inside nor outside a person. A person cannot say 'I have a secret inside me'. They are the secret, yet their ongoing life does not partake of it (Masud Khan 1989: 106).

Although he does not use the term 'involuntary secret', Khan's observation that '[the person is] the secret, yet [his] ongoing life does not partake of it' exactly describes the phenomenon that is

the involuntary secret: the person concerned is keeping something that he has experienced hidden from himself; he is, therefore, at one and the same time both *holder* and *addressee*.

Rather than ‘do not speak’, the phrase which defines the constitution of the involuntary secret is an inversion of the Socratic paradox: ‘I know that I do not know’ becomes ‘I do not know that I know’. The inner space of the self is divided; the ‘crypt’ is the part in which are stored all those experiences which the subject, that is, the person who ‘[is] the secret’, ‘does not know that he knows’; the relationship between two actors, a *holder* and an *addressee* who are one and the same, is thus created and the logic of secrecy respected.

This second category of secret is elevated to a position of prime importance in the field of literature, given that it informs the entire narrative of the *Recherche*. Secrets force what Proust terms *intelligence*, that is, a character’s capacity for understanding, to cross the divide between the conscious and the unconscious discussed above, and Marcel, the hero, is a perfect example of a *holder* separated from his own secret or, to put it another way, the roles of both *holder* and *addressee* are combined in the person of the hero. Furthermore, the first person pronoun — *je* (I) —, which dictates the narration and denotes both the hero and the narrator, is actually a secret space. The hero is separated from his own experience, so ‘does not know that he knows’, while the narrator, who appropriates his own secret and finally ‘knows that he knows’, can write and share the entire story with the readers.

The difference between the hero and the narrator is that the former does not know what the latter knows. This point corresponds to Deleuze’s ‘temporal apprenticeship’ (Deleuze 2000: 4). Unlike the hero, the narrator has learned how to read, interpret and translate his own experience of ‘Time’. All manner of processes which Proust includes in the definition of ‘self-reading’ are involved in this double-sided relationship within the involuntary space of the self:

Quant au livre intérieur de signes inconnus (de signes en relief, semblait-il, que mon attention explorant mon inconscient allait chercher, heurtait, contournait, comme un plongeur qui sonde), pour la lecture desquels personne ne pouvait m’aider d’aucune règle, cette lecture consistait en un acte de création où nul ne peut nous suppléer, ni même collaborer avec nous (Proust 1987–89: IV, 458).

[As for the inner book of unknown signs (signs which seemed to stand out, as it were, in relief, and which my attention, exploring my unconscious, cast around for, stumbled over, and traced the shapes of, like a diver feeling his way underwater), for the reading of which nobody else could provide me with any rules, reading them becomes one of those acts of creation in which nobody can take our place or even collaborate with us (Proust 202: VI, 473).]

As discussed in the first section, the *Recherche* develops the concept of reading acts in the broad sense that includes interpretation and translation. Secrets of any kind involve the *addressee* in



reading in one way or another, but involuntary secrets represent the chapters of the *inner book*, that is, his own story, that the hero must learn to decipher, in order to become its narrator. This connection between reading and writing puts the logic of secrecy at the heart of the novel. Indeed, learning to read the signs of *Lost Time* is essential prerequisite for the possibility of both regaining time and writing about this search. Further, reading — that means also knowing through interpretations — is the original act of creation, something like the secret of Proustian art.

#### 4. Open secrets and ‘secretion’

Having discussed the two principal categories of secret, deliberate and involuntary, I now turn to a feature of the secret that has particular relevance to the *Recherche* but is one that seems to contradict the concept of the closed space. Despite being, one would suppose, ‘hermetically sealed’, this closed space can open at any time and let the secret escape; a phenomenon which Zempléni, borrowing a term from the vocabulary of physiology, calls ‘secretion’:

Appelons *sécrétion* le processus – ou plutôt l’ensemble de processus plus ou moins involontaires – par lequel le secret *s’exhibe* devant ses destinataires sans être, pour autant, ni communiqué ni révélé (1976: 318).

[Let us call secretion the process, or rather all the more or less involuntary processes, whereby the secret manifests itself to those to whom it is addressed, without being, for all that, either communicated or revealed’ (editor’s translation).]

Like ‘secret’, the term ‘secretion’ is derived from the Latin ‘*secernere*’, so the process of secretion has at its root the phenomenon of separation. However, in the case of secretion, the separation is accomplished by a movement that is the reverse of that by which a secret is instituted. Whilst a movement from the Outside to the Inside is necessary in the first stage of a secret’s life, in its final phase the opposite obtains: what has been guarded and protected in a safe space is ejected, expelled, ‘secreted’. However, although it is based on the concepts of closure and protection, the logic of secrecy accommodates this moment when the closed space opens to manifest the *content* of the secret.

Secretion proves that relationships of whatever kind based on a secret are basically transient, prone to be overturned and plunged in what Proust calls ‘Time’. In short, the enclosing of a secret is rarely final: the closed space containing the secret is subjected to a pressure from the Inside to the Outside equal to force whereby the *content* was sealed up. The separation on which a secret is

based embraces the possibility that the two parts of whatever has been separated may be reunited.<sup>15</sup> The series of tell-tale signs during Marcel's *apprentissage* — 'madeleine, steeples, trees, cobblestones, napkin, noise of a spoon or a pipe' (Deleuze 2000: 11) — shows that involuntary secrets do not last forever. Secretion is, therefore, a process which is crucial to the Proustian logic of secrecy.

Zempléni describes secretion as a process that is 'plus ou moins involontaires' [*more or less involuntary*]; in other words, it happens despite both the *holder's* efforts to keep and the *addressee's* to discover the secret. And there is no uniform way in which secretion takes place: sometimes it can happen in a slow and measured flow: at others, it is gradual but intermittent; yet again, the secret kept inside for so long can suddenly burst out.

A character that epitomises this involuntary 'coming-out' of secrets is Baron de Charlus, who, in order to keep his sexuality secret, has constructed surveillance system so paranoid that Marcel often takes what he does and says to be signs of madness (Deleuze 2000: 170–82). The Baron is an enigma, the solution to which Marcel discovers by a chance at the beginning of *Sodom et Gomorrhe*, when the Baron unwittingly betrays himself. From this moment until the end of the novel, Charlus' secret will be completely transparent, as it were a '*Segreto di Pulcinella*' or open secret, obvious to all.

Albertine, whose secret also concerns her sexuality, is another 'secretor', a character whose secret 'comes out' despite his/her intentions otherwise. In Albertine's case, this as a result of her tendency to display her lesbianism while trying to conceal it. Consequently, her discourse lets slip

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<sup>15</sup> Even if it is not directly related to an interpretation of Proust's work, it is useful to mention Jacques Derrida's investigation about the processes of separation and reunification within the space of the secret. In a seminar from 1991 (*Répondre du secret*), Derrida considered some aporetic aspects of the secret in the inner space of the self:

[I]l faut bien qu'il y ait là non seulement une division, mais une radicale non-identité à soi pour que le secret soit possible: le secret déterminé que je peux librement garder par-devers moi [...]. Mais aussi le secret qui, avant que je ne le partage avec tel ou tel ou avec personne, me partage radicalement, au point que ce qui ne dépend que de moi, ma liberté et ma responsabilité, ma capacité de secret, me vienne on ne sait d'où, d'un autre, d'un autre moi, d'un non-soi, me "tombe dessus" selon la formule de l'auto-hétéronomie que nous avons déjà commenté (Quoted in Michaud 2006: 29–30).

[There must be not only a split but a radical non-identity with self for the secret, the specific secret that I can freely keep to myself, to be possible. [...] But also the secret which, before I share it with this person or that or with no one, radically divides me, to the point that what only depends on me, my freedom and my responsibility, my capacity for secrecy, may come from who knows where, from someone else, from another me, from a non-self, may just 'happen' in the manner of auto-heteronomy that we have already discussed (editor's translation)].

See also: Jacques Derrida & Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret* (2001).

so many clues that Marcel's jealousy is automatically rekindled, whenever he seems to have subdued it. And to this group of 'secretors' we can also add Legrandin, the 'saint Sébastien du snobisme [*Saint Sebastian of snobbishness*]' (Proust 1987–80: I, 127; 2002: I, 342). Just like homosexual love, snobbism is regarded in the *Recherche* as being disgraceful because it concerns another unmentionable desire: an aspiration to be associated with a higher social class. Legrandin is a snob because he longs to be accepted into the aristocratic circle of the Guermantes, a desire he keeps secret by affecting to despise them. In all these cases, the dynamics of the 'coming-out' concerns uncontrolled 'secretions': a deliberate secret is revealed, perhaps through the *holder's* discourse or mannerisms, despite his/her intentions to keep it hidden.

As regards the novel's structure, however, the most important secretion involves Marcel, the hero-narrator encapsulated in 'je [*I*]' and his experience of 'Time regained' during the final Guermantes matinée. Only in this moment of solitude does he understand that he has found the right lens with which to read the 'inner book of unknown signs' written by 'Time'. This episode describes the crucial moment when Marcel's metamorphosis from the novel's hero into its narrator is finally accomplished. In other words, the separation inherent in the principal involuntary secret is turned into an act of repair on a grand scale. If we look at the *Recherche* from the point of view of secrecy, the entire novel can be read as a huge work of sedimentation, as outlined in section 3, a work whose material has been assembled by the hero and then, despite his intentions, released by the only artist Proust considers as such, namely 'Time', a dual synthesis, as it were, of Life and Death.

Secretion is the definitive moment in the *Recherche's* logic of secrecy, because all the narration supposes both distances and contacts between a subject and his inner experience of Time. In fact, in the last page of the novel, the narrator asserts that:

[...] tout ce temps si long non seulement avait, sans une interruption, été vécu, pensé, sécrété par moi, qu'il était ma vie, qu'il était moi-même, mais encore que j'avais à toute minute à le maintenir attaché à moi, qu'il me supportait, moi, juché à son sommet vertigineux, que je ne pouvais me mouvoir sans le déplacer comme je le pouvais avec lui (Proust 1987–89: IV, 624).

[...] *all this length of time had not only uninterruptedly been lived, thought, secreted by me, that it was my life, that it was myself, but also that I had to keep it attached to me at every moment, that it supported me, that I was perched on its vertiginous summit, and that I was unable to move without its collaboration, without taking it with me* (Proust 2002: VI, 886–87).]

This final observation corroborates the importance of secrecy as a way of interpreting the work of 'Time' in the novel. The strict logic of secrecy is inherent in the relation between the hero-narrator

and the great force governing his history. Both the first stage of closure and the final moment of secretion make the secret essential to the possibility of writing about lost and regained Time. The duality governing this logic is the key point in the *Recherche's* architecture. The process of secretion represents the crowning achievement for a logic founded on 'Time's' transitivity and resistance. The boundaries between the secret's container and contents are finally overtaken: past life is suddenly recovered from the domain of oblivion. But it should be recognised that the final revelation in *Le temps retrouvé* is also the moment when the hero perceives his imminent death.

The entire work of writing takes shape while the author is beset by illness and crumbling forces. The triumphal revelation also represents the last act of a life that, in the imminence of death, turns into art — thus accomplishing the 'temporal apprenticeship'. Once again, and for the last time, we are facing an irreducible ambiguity. For this same reason we can recognise in Proust's art the signs of a deep movement accomplished by 'Time' in what we call 'Life'. At the end of the novel, secretion makes clearly visible the oscillation that Proust's writing has been endeavouring to translate since the novel's first pages, as it combines two dimensions (inside and outside), two states (being opened and being closed), two laws (separation and non-separation) of an uninterrupted dual movement.

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# **Blogging in Private: Telling Two Billion People to ‘Ssshhhhh’**

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## **Abstract**

The action of confessing a secret is a long standing tradition in society, perceived as a way of relieving oneself of the burden of information. However, the act of sharing a secret converts the information from private to public and therefore renders the secret something different from what it was before. The very notion of secrecy implies a reluctance to share the information, which in turn raises the question why so many people choose to share their private thoughts, feelings or experiences through confessional discourse. In the technology-fuelled atmosphere of contemporary society, one of the key platforms for the exchange of confessional narratives is the Internet, as it allows the everyday user to access and share knowledge with the online world in all its magnitude. Yet despite this opportunity for visibility and openness, the Internet is also a place where people choose to hide under the veil of anonymity. This juxtaposition between public and private spheres is highlighted by the production of anonymous self-representative narratives, such as blogs, in which users utilise the perceived anonymity to discuss secretly their private thoughts, feelings and experiences in an open online space that has the potential to be viewed by anyone with access to the Internet. This article looks at the blogging platform and examines why such a public medium has become the home for so many private confessional narratives, and what it is about the platform itself that facilitates and encourages users to share their private lives with each other. The article will also discuss how the concept of secrecy relates to the idea that an individual’s online narrative could be more than just a revelation of a hidden self, but rather part of a wider social performance of self.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** blogging, public, private, anonymity, self-representation, truth.



The action of confessing a secret is a longstanding tradition in society; from childhood friendship to religion, it is perceived as a way of relieving oneself of the burden of

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first presented as a paper presented at the conference *The Secret in Contemporary Theory, Society, and Culture* held at the University of Kent on 30–31 May, 2014.

information. Although the term ‘secret’ or ‘secrecy’ can be used to denote many things, within the context of this article it is considered to be a piece of private, unknown information, and the sharing of this information with others is considered to be an act of confession. The act of sharing a secret converts the information from private to public, as it is no longer confined to the original holder of the secret. This renders the secret something different from what it was before, as it becomes a piece of knowledge that is accessible to, and may have implications on, a wider audience. Although the sharing of secrets is common, the notion of secrecy actually implies a reluctance to share the information, given that a secret is by definition something that is concealed. This article therefore examines what may motivate so many people to share these private thoughts, feelings and experiences with others.

The sharing of secrets can be expressed through numerous media channels, but one of the most common methods is through the writing and telling of confessional stories. In the technology-fuelled atmosphere of contemporary society, one of the key platforms for the exchange of these narratives is the Internet. The information-sharing platforms online allow the everyday user to access and share knowledge, stories, and experiences with a myriad of other users, who are freed from the time, social, and geographical constraints of the offline world. However, the computer mediated nature of this communication means that the presentation of a person online can be separated from the offline life of the individual; for example, users can choose to write anonymously or under a pseudonym. The opportunities for anonymity can create a complicated juxtaposition between the public and private lives of the user and their different contextual representations of themselves. This is highlighted by the production of the anonymous self-representative narratives on personal journal style blogs. On these blogs, users can utilise the perceived anonymity to discuss their private thoughts, feelings, and experiences in an open online space that has the potential to be viewed by anyone with access to the Internet. This article looks specifically at the blogging platform and examines for what reasons this very public medium has become the home for so many private confessional narratives, and what it is about the platform itself that facilitates and encourages users to share their private lives with each other. It will also discuss how the concept of secrecy relates to the idea that an individual’s online narrative represents more than just a revelation of a hidden self but actually exposes the opportunities available for users to perform a self that is completely removed from their embodied offline reality and therefore represents a new way for individual voices, opinions, and secrets to be heard.

In the early 1990s there were only a few sites online that would now be considered as blogs; a contraction of the original term web log. However, over the following two decades the technology has developed rapidly and blogging is now one of the most popular mediums of online communication in the world. The majority of the original blogs were known as ‘filter blogs’, as their presentation of content acted as a filter between the enormous amount of information on the World Wide Web and the individual user. Then in July 1999 the first free ‘build your own’ weblog tool was launched, which meant that even those with no knowledge of HTML (Hypertext Mark-up Language) or web design were able to construct a blog, and the numbers of people blogging increased dramatically. Later that year came the introduction of host site *Blogger*, which was the first company to introduce the flexible blogging format we recognise today. Promoting itself as ‘pushbutton publishing for the people’, *Blogger* instantly began a shift in the way blogs were generated, arranged, and understood, and *Blogger* is still to this day the most popular blog hosting site in the world (Nardi et al 2004: 222). Rebecca Blood highlights one of the key appeals of the platform in her analysis of *Blogger*:

Blogger itself places no restrictions on the form of content being posted. Its web interface, accessible from any browser, consists of an empty form box into which the blogger can type ... anything: a passing thought, an extended essay, or a childhood recollection. With a click, Blogger will post the... whatever... on the writer’s website, archive it in the proper place, and present the writer with another empty box, just waiting to be filled (2000).

Blood’s analysis highlights the potential freedom that the format provides users: to produce and publish content entirely of their own choice. The possibilities that this empty box offered the first users of *Blogger*, and the subsequent blogging community, is what made blogging the popular, multifaceted platform that it is today. It is also indicative of why blogging became so popular, as the medium encourages users to get involved and offers a space in which they can have complete creative freedom. What is apparent from studies into the blogosphere is that a large proportion of bloggers are using this free space to write and share confessional narratives and choosing to share their secrets with the online world. This is predominately seen in the genre of personal journal style blogs, which are generally individually authored and focus on the life of the blogger, discussing their own ideas and experiences.

As discussed above, one of the unique elements of online narratives is the potential anonymity that the computer-mediated environment allows users. Anonymity, the condition of being anonymous or, according to the Oxford Dictionary, ‘of unknown name’, is the classification which precedes all forms of publication. This broad definition focuses on a lack of acknowledgement and therefore includes all forms of hidden identity from pseudonyms to masks. The tradition of attributing ‘Anonymous’ as the source of unaccountable works is why



author Cole Stryker states, ‘the most prolific creator in human experience, in every artistic field, was and is Anonymous’ (2012: 19). This attribution of anonymity has changed over time, but the element of disassociation evident in traditional ‘anonymous’ material is still apparent in the use of anonymity online. Although computer-mediated communication is not the only mode of communication where anonymity is possible, research by Hua Qian and Craig R. Scott notes that ‘computer technology has greatly facilitated anonymity by providing many channels for communication between people separated in time and space’ (2007: 1429). The fact that the interactions are computer-mediated also plays a key role in the user’s perception of their own anonymity, as the sense of separation increases their ability to disassociate their online activities from their offline lived reality, so a blog author who chooses to write anonymously may be empowered to express themselves more openly, without the fear of their narrative affecting their offline life. As John Suler notes:

When people have the opportunity to separate their actions online from their in-person lifestyle and identity, they feel less vulnerable about self-disclosing and acting out. Whatever they say or do can’t be directly linked to the rest of their lives. In a process of dissociation, they don’t have to own their behaviour by acknowledging it within the full context of an integrated online/offline identity (2004: 322).

Here Suler highlights how the possibilities of anonymity may allow users to say or do things they would not feel able or entitled to do offline, which may allow for greater creative freedom. He particularly refers to the idea of a user ‘self-disclosing’, indicating a sharing of private information, and ‘acting out’ which implies a behaviour that may be considered inappropriate in the user’s offline domain, both of which suggest an increased level of agency when the user is writing anonymously.

However, the laws and the technology surrounding accountability for online behaviour are constantly developing, and this is changing the landscape of the online world for users regardless of their anonymous status. It has therefore become imperative to challenge and problematise the traditional understanding of anonymity and render it more complex. Previous definitions have had a tendency to treat anonymity as something that is either present or absent without any consideration for the intermediate area between being fully anonymous and fully identifiable; this creates particular complications when it comes to accountability for online behaviour. In the case of blog narratives, a user’s online persona will not necessarily conform to a binary of anonymous or non-anonymous but may inhabit a grey area in between. For example, a user may not include any identifying information within the narrative but have a clear or distorted photo of themselves on their blog. They may purport to use their ‘real’ name and provide information about their location but not include images or explicitly acknowledge

their offline persona. They may represent themselves as anonymous but have online interactions with someone from their offline life, who may or may not be anonymous. Or they may share private information about themselves that would identify their offline persona if read by people they knew. Although to an outside user many of these blogs would still appear anonymous, and the users themselves may believe their blog is anonymous, these examples demonstrate that there are various ways in which the authors can potentially undermine their own anonymity.

The anonymity of bloggers can also be undermined by external influences, for example, a blog's email could be tracked by its header, or a user's online activity could be used to trace their computer's location through its IP (Internet Protocol) address. This type of research could be done on any blog, but many examples have been focused on anonymous blogs that have discussed the author's work, and therefore the content has had wider implications. One high-profile example of this is the political blog *NightJack*, written anonymously by a serving police officer about his experiences in the emergency services, which having started in February 2008 quickly gained a large online following. The following year *The Times* wrote an article about the blog and within it revealed the identity of the author as Richard Horton (Hirsch 2009). As a result, Horton attracted intense media scrutiny and was disciplined by his employers, Lancashire Constabulary; he subsequently sued the paper after he discovered it had traced him by hacking his email account.

Although there is a risk factor in the production of all blogs, as someone may react negatively to whatever you write, it is influenced by the topic of the posts and level of anonymity for which the author is striving. The risk factor inherent in the use of anonymous confessional narratives is particularly high as their content is presented as being private or secret, and, by being placed in the public arena, the element of secrecy becomes vulnerable. However, as the case of Brooke Magnanti demonstrates, anonymity is still possible, and a secret can still be kept, even when there are several people attempting to undermine your adopted persona. Magnanti, a research scientist and blog writing call girl who began writing in 2003 under the pseudonym *Belle de Jour*, managed to keep her offline identity separate from her online narrative for six years. It was only in November 2009 that, fearing that she was about to be exposed by a journalist, she revealed herself in an interview for *The Sunday Times* (Ungoed-Thomas 2009). Her revelation came as a shock to many, as her anonymity had led to conjecture over her authenticity as both a call girl and as a female writer. Many journalists had postulated that the blog must be a work of fiction, written by an individual or team of male

writers, mainly because of the attitudes the blog represented towards sex and eroticism (Moir 2007; Hoggart 2007).

Despite the possibilities of revelation represented by these examples, it appears many bloggers still choose to utilise the computer-mediated platform to conceal their offline identity. What is key to the popularity of this, as a facilitator of confessional secret sharing, is that the author perceives himself or herself to be anonymous and therefore protected from the implications of their offline identity being revealed. As Stefanone and Jang note in their 2007 study:

It seems that [to bloggers] the benefits of using blogs as an interpersonal communication channel outweigh the perceived costs of abdicating ownership or control of one's personal information (2007: 137).

What this suggests is that although users have an awareness of the risks of exposure, they consciously choose to be anonymous and share private information on their blogs anyway, as the benefits of this communication outweigh the potential repercussions. Although their study highlights the dilemma that many authors face, the language employed within Stefanone and Jang's analysis, for example the concept of users 'abdicating ownership' of their information, represents a negative characterisation of the online world as a potentially dangerous place for users. This narrow view only serves to encourage sensationalist media accounts of the online world rather than acknowledging the benefits and possibilities that go alongside the element of risk faced by users.

The intended audience often influences the level of anonymity a user chooses, or attempts to maintain. Qian and Scott's research notes that:

When a blog is targeted at an audience its author does not know offline, the level of discursive anonymity tends to be stronger and the blogger less likely to provide identifying information. When a blogger has a target audience of online others, the blog can serve as an emotional outlet; thus, it can be important to keep one's blog or one's identity hidden from one's family/friends (2007: 1441).

What they highlight is how blog authors often write with their potential audience in mind and edit their self-representation and level of confession accordingly. Many other studies into blogging behaviour, for example by Erin Hollenbaugh and Marcia Everett, support this and continue to demonstrate that there is an increased level of personal information sharing, or confession, when the blogger is representing their online persona as anonymous (2013: 283–302). Qian and Scott note that self-disclosure is always risky, because 'it may invite ridicule or even rejection, thereby placing the discloser in a socially awkward or vulnerable position' (2007: 1431). However, they conclude that:

People are more likely to disclose to a stranger because they feel secure in that whatever is shared under such circumstances is unlikely to be shared with actual friends and acquaintances who may have some material impact on the discloser's life (2007: 1431).

It appears that this relatively simple premise is what has led to the blogosphere's becoming a platform not just for self-representative narratives that tell the author's story but for confessional narratives, in which users go beyond descriptions of their everyday life and choose to share private and secret information with their readers.

The sharing of private information is the reason many people consider blogs to be an online version of the traditional diary, despite the assertion of researchers such as Lena Karlsson that 'The "private" diary publically available on the web seems oxymoronic' (2007: 138). However, the presence of audience and the potential readership of the platform elevate the self-representation and confession of blogs to a different level from that of its textual predecessors. Unlike the isolated act of writing in a diary, a blog author is sharing their narrative within a public space and therefore elevating the narrative to a platform with a potential readership of millions. As highlighted above, this prospective audience is not an inhibitor of confession; on the contrary, the presence of readers and, particularly, the concept of community have been shown to be key factors in encouraging users to share their problems online. As Sarah Pedersen and Janet Smithson note in their research on 'mummy blogging', 'Users feel they are able to confide in anonymous but empathetic "listeners" who share their problem' (2013: 100). In this example, they use the term 'anonymous' to represent the detachment of the reader from the author's offline life and show how this position therefore renders them a 'safe' audience for the author to confide in, as the author is able to accept or dismiss their opinions more readily than if they were involved with them offline. It also highlights the concept of users who 'share' problems, and how a sense of commonality can play a key role in online confession. As noted by Karlsson, 'The lure of diary blog self-representation, for both readers and writers, seems to be the possibility of recognition/ identification' (2007: 150). What this research proposes is that rather than representing a daunting level of visibility, the audience of the online world is perceived by some users as an assembly of potential sympathetic and empathetic listeners, listeners in whom they can trust and find support for their secrets. Although the stereotypical trope of secret telling describes those who have a close physical and/ or emotional bond, such as that between best friends, brothers and sisters, parents and children, or even therapist and patient, the concept of sharing secrets with a stranger is not a new phenomenon. However, the physical distance over which online narratives transport secrets, subverts existing practices, and represents a completely new way of communicating confessions. It is the distance of

computer-mediated anonymous communication that makes the audience a viable outlet for the author's secrets, representing an intimacy beyond the spatial definition of closeness, which cannot be replicated with the characters in their offline life.

However, the distance between the author and the reader of the online confessional narrative can complicate the notion of truth with regard to the secret being shared. The understanding of the blog as representing a 'secret' rather than a fictitious story relies on the perceived authenticity of the author. Although many studies assume anonymity to be a feature that would undermine the authenticity of a blog, research such as Thomas Chesney and Daniel Su's 2010 study found that there was 'no difference in perceived credibility when the blogger was identifiable and when they were anonymous' (2012: 715). The concept of authenticity is therefore not directly related to the level of anonymity, but the credibility of the blog. Karlsson's research instead found that, 'Consistency over time emerges as the most important check-up point for measuring the authenticity of the autobiographical self' (2007: 149). The element of consistency that Karlsson highlights is rooted in the continued representation of self being mediated through the narrative, often judged on the long-term engagement with a blog. The long-term engagement with a narrative can also establish a level of investment from the reader, as the increased familiarity means a higher level of identification and affinity with a blog author, and therefore a higher inclination to accept their narrative as the truth. Karlsson also believes that the tendency to assume that online narratives are authentic is partly due to the way in which users consume the material, stating:

At a time when invocations to the real are abundant in reality TV and other "reality" venues suggesting the ultimate collapse between the real and the fictional, the temporal proximity in the production/ consumption of blogs reinforces the autobiographical contract online (2007: 147).

Her research outlines the way in which the immediacy of online sharing, i.e. the ability to communicate with readers instantaneously, reinforces the idea that the online narrative is representative of the author's offline lived reality. The earlier example of *Belle de Jour* highlights these objective complications of anonymity, as her long-term hidden persona led to conjecture over the authenticity of her online narrative. The desire on the part of some to undermine her anonymity also demonstrates the perception, often based on a small amount of information and a large amount of interpretation, that beneath the anonymous narrative lies an original 'truth' about the individual's choosing to mediate themselves through this form of textual construction. This reflects a narrow-minded understanding of anonymity, which characterises it as a method of deception. Consequently, because Magnanti chose to create an

online identity, which was removed from her offline identity, *Belle de Jour's* online confessional narrative was not accepted as fact by some readers and was instead scrutinised and analysed in an attempt to discover the 'reality' or 'truth' of the story. As highlighted earlier, this separation of online and offline behaviour does not always prevent the narrative from being read as authentic, as many readers are able to rationalise the desire to remain anonymous; however, the notion of revealing the 'truth' behind the text remains a constant pressure on anonymous blog authors.

Although many traditional conceptualisations of self-representative narratives, and the blogosphere, still rely on the concept of an original 'truth', other research has found the concept of a performative self more accurately depicts the opportunities presented by the medium. The idea of performativity was first used by philosopher John Langshaw Austin who described how a performative speech utterance could *do* something, as well as *say* something (1962). The linguistic element of performance that Austin highlights, is one of the many ways in which individuals perform their selves in everyday life, and which theorists have outlined. As the renowned sociologist Erving Goffman stated:

The self [...] as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue (1959: 245).

Through the work of theorists such as Judith Butler, the concepts of performativity and performing a self have taken on an interdisciplinary meaning, now denoting all non-verbal forms of expressive acts that combine to construct identity (Butler 1999).

This understanding of how individuals are routinely performing a self, and the implications this has on the search of a 'true' self, challenges the characterisation of anonymous online narratives as unauthentic. The blogging platform could instead represent another social sphere in which individuals could perform themselves. In the last twenty years, the idea of using modern technology as a platform for performance has, in Chiel Kattenbelt's opinion, become widely acknowledged within the field of performance studies. As Kattenbelt states:

A parallel world of bits and bytes has emerged adjacent to the world of atoms [...] with new possibilities and opportunities of constructing one's identity and presenting or staging oneself in front of others, albeit under different conditions (2010: 36).

Here he acknowledges the rise of an area of performance studies that is both strange and familiar, constructing traditional performances within a new and developing context. In his book *Digital Performance*, Steve Dixon argues that not only do new media and Internet technology allow for the creation of an 'immense interactive database' of performance art, they can also function as a platform for performance collaboration and as a medium of performance

distribution (2007: 3). He highlights two aspects of social media that contribute to the creation of digital performance: the use of Internet technology to facilitate computer mediated communication and the use of self-representational media such as blogs and home pages, which have been theorised as a ‘virtual performance of the self’ (2007: 3). The research demonstrates how home pages and blogs constitute a digital re-imagining of Goffman’s notions of performative presentations of the self, with ‘the subject being progressively erased, redefined, and re-inscribed as a persona or performer within the computer monitor’ (2007: 3–4).

This use of Goffman’s framework indicates the capacity for online self-representations to change and develop over time, enabling users to present different and multiple selves that may bear no resemblance to each other or to the lived reality of the user. As Marie-Laure Ryan describes:

Other body images are operated by the physical body, but the gestures of the physical body do not correspond to those of the virtual one: while one body slays dragons, flirts with a used-car salesman who poses as a hooker, or explores an enchanted forest, the other one types on a keyboard or squeezes a joystick (2001: 306–07).

She describes the possibilities offered by online performances of the self to extend the experiences of a user beyond their lived reality. This also represents the problem of making assumptions of ‘truth’ based on the textual constructions of reality depicted in an online narrative. If we move away from the assumption that personal journal blogs are merely ‘online dairies’, and instead view the blog narratives as the disembodied performances of self that are outlined by Dixon and Ryan, the blogging platform can be seen as manifesting the opportunities available for users to perform a self that could be completely removed from their embodied offline reality.

The complexity of this relationship between online and offline experiences challenges the understanding of confessional narratives as representing a private or secret side of the author. The merging of a public and private self is epitomised in the proliferation of confessional narratives, and the secrets they seem to reveal complicate the intrinsic understanding of secrecy. However, as discussed above and as suggested by John Suler in his work on online disinhibition, the online persona of an individual may appear to represent a sense of self that is not evident in their offline life; he describes how:

When a person is shy in person while outgoing online, neither self-presentation is more true. They are two dimensions of that person, each revealed within a different situational context (2004: 325).

This concept of multiple dimensions reflects the ideas discussed in this article about how confessional narratives do not necessarily reflect a more or less ‘true’ version of the individual.

Although we consider them part of a private self, our secrets may not represent a hidden truth at all but merely another dimension of our performative self. Oscar Wilde famously said: ‘A man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth’, a concept which is still widely attributed to the online world (2011: 71). However, what this article suggests is that instead of one single reality or ‘truth’, there may in fact be a series of *truths* that are part of an individual’s self-representation, or a series of different performances of self. Consequently, the purported ‘secrets’ that are being shared, may not actually be secrets in the traditional sense of the word, but a merging of the internal and external performance of an individual, and of their public and private spheres. The blogosphere, therefore, represents a unique stage for users on which to perform their private selves and could provide a platform for voices that are not heard by the offline world.

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Guillaume Collett received his PhD from the University of Kent-l'Université Paris-Diderot in 2014 for a thesis on Deleuze's ontology of sense. He is the author of *The Psychoanalysis of Sense: Deleuze and the Lacanian School* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016 forthcoming), and co-editor of a special issue of *Deleuze Studies* on Deleuze and philosophical practice. He is currently Research Fellow in the Centre for Critical Thought, University of Kent, and on the editorial board of the journal *La Deleuziana*.

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Keith Scott is Programme Leader for the English Language Programme at De Montfort University, Leicester, where he is also a researcher within the Cyber Security Centre. His research is concerned with the intersections between culture and communication, with particular interests in the language of influence and persuasion, and popular cultural manifestations of Information Technology and 'cyber' in general. He is also interested in blending the methodologies of Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics as a means of better understanding the processes by which online identities are constructed and maintained. Recent research has been on subjects as diverse as the graphic novels of Alan Moore and Grant Morrison, and lexical analysis of online communication as a means of sentiment analysis.

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Having studied philosophy in Naples, Daniele Garritano obtained a co-tutorship PhD between the universities of Siena and Paris 8 Vincennes – St. Denis in aesthetics and comparative literatures in 2014. The subject of his thesis (*Esperienze di lettura. Letture dell'esperienza. Gli spazi del segreto in 'À la recherche du temps perdu'*) is the interaction of the logic of secrecy with the main themes of Proust's novel: reading, society, sexuality, mourning, jealousy, and self-writing. He is the author of *Il senso del segreto* (Mimesis 2016, forthcoming) and several articles, which have been published in Italian and international journals, and has taken part in international conferences concerning Proust's work and his influence on contemporary philosophy. As a translator, he has published Italian versions of works by Cixous, Derrida, Rogozinski, and Žižek. He is a member of the *Pôle Proust* (École des hautes études en sciences sociales/Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris).

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