

# A Virtual Problem of Nineteenth-Century Culture: Methodological Considerations for Rethinking Realism

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*Using Gilles Deleuze's idea of virtualization, this paper argues that realism should be reconsidered as a collective problematization of an ontology of the everyday. It charts an alternative to the pragmatic critique of post-structuralism, taking up the problem of representation, the history of description, aesthetics, scale, modeling and outlines a counter-model to the concept of the "social imaginary."*

Key words: philosophy of literature / aesthetic experience / realism / virtualization / poststructuralism / Deleuze, Gilles

Honoré de Balzac's second novel, *La Peau de Chagrin*, opens with twin introductions: the first at a gambling house; the second in a mysterious antique shop. The settings are represented in almost diametrical opposition from one another. The gambling parlor is described as the home of a kind of denatured desire, since gambling is the expression of desire empty of any specific content, thus the space of all potential desires. The antique shop is the home of all *specific* desires, both material and existential, the depository of the "bone fragments of twenty worlds." (17) While surveying the vast collection of the shop's items, the protagonist falls into a trance and is suddenly traversed by the flow of universal experience. All of history unfolds before him, after which the flow collapses to represent the stream of life at the scale of individual experience: "when the world at last released him, when he had pondered over many lands, many epochs [...] the young man came back to the life of the individual." (21)<sup>1</sup> In the last stage of his vision the young man is absorbed into the eons of geological time, which leave him feeling like "an intangible speck." The gift of a shagreen's skin, which he accepts despite dire warnings, represents a condensation of all

the possibilities he has just witnessed, since it has the power to grant any desire. In proportion to the intensity and rarity of the desire, however, the skin exacts a price: a share of the owner's lifespan, that is to say, a subtraction of *potential* life-experience. As each desire is fulfilled, the skin shrinks, until skin and desirer are literally extinguished as though the intensity of experience and its duration were inversely proportional.

If I begin with *La Peau de Chagrin*, first published in 1831, during the very early days of French realism, it is to highlight the ways that Balzac was already speculating about what it might mean to live in a world in which the possibilities of experience were already being intensively represented. What conditions, material and historical, would give rise to such an intensive problematization of experience? And would the ontological status of experience be changed given this problematization?

The 1830s should be seen as a critical moment not only in the history of realism, but also of virtualization. The sudden explosion of realist genres during this decade should be understood in terms of virtualization, that is as a wide-ranging problematization of the phenomenon of everyday experience. The rationale for this argument rests on Gilles Deleuze's account of the differential relationship between virtualization and actualization. Deleuze was deeply invested in the dynamic role of the individual that the movement of virtualization always implies (246–254). I borrow from media theorist Pierre Lévy (whose work is built around Deleuzian concepts) to shift the emphasis towards the *collective dimensions* of the realist phenomenon, without, however, losing sight of the role individuals played in the reciprocal relationship between a virtualization and the many instances of its actualization. In what follows what I am *not* proposing is a Deleuzian reading of realist genres (although my project is consonant with such a reading). Rather, I am appropriating Deleuze's central paradigm of virtualization/actualisation as a *method* for reevaluating the cultural significance of realism: to make visible in new ways some of the problems that realism was attempting to express, to consider realism beyond the question of mere representation. And while the highly original temporalities at the heart of Deleuze's descriptions of repetition and virtualization led him to de-emphasize of the historical dimensions of virtual events, I contend that the development of realism as a virtual Idea instantiated an important historical shift in the conditions of possibility for virtualization itself. My approach highlights a different set what Deleuze would call intensities for thinking about realism in an attempt to move beyond the identification of realism with issues of representation (251–256). Instead, I repose the problem of realism by recuperating something of the problem that realism itself was attempting to set in motion at the level of what was clearly a

collective deliberation. In other words, difference in itself is not my chief preoccupation. Rather, my question addresses the problem of conditions and their significance as a function in culture.

This re-articulation of realism involves substantial theoretical stakes. The past decade has seen efforts to restore some of the material and historical consistency to the problem of realist representation that had largely been dematerialized by post-structuralist criticism. Though some have been tactical in their objections (Brooks, Woloch), a recent generation of critics has leveraged pragmatic philosophy to this end (Kearns). In their mapping of the arbitrary, artificial, and ideological nature of language, some post-structuralist critics came to describe realism as the ideological project of the bourgeoisie *par excellence*, prompting Peter Brooks to object that it had become “a kind of whipping boy, an example of blinded and bourgeois novelizing without any sophisticated critical perspective” (6). The pragmatic argument is an attempt to steer a middle course: in no way repudiating the artificial nature of language, it reclaims language’s normative dimensions, those that curtail the radical arbitrariness of the sign enough so that language could again be seen to function as a collective system of representation. According to the pragmatic reading, then, representation depends on a certain level of *interpretive good faith*, the acknowledgement of a normative range of likely meanings (Kearns 14–22). Thus if realist representation was indeed artificial in many of the ways that post-structuralist criticism claims it was, it *also* referred back to the concrete world in a manner most readers “of good faith” would either recognize or judge implausible. Virtualization, by contrast, provides a way to connect the empirical conditions of realism’s development, including the material and historic contexts that were its most salient conditions of possibility, to the ways in which it was attempting to dramatize the problem of experience—to render it sensible, in other words—while, at the same time, systematically acknowledging the incommensurability and fragmentation of any such dramatization.

I begin with a brief outline of the Deleuzian description of virtualization and of the shifts in emphasis I propose for developing a method for thinking about realism as a collective problem. I then map the ways that virtualization helps us to assess the impact of a simultaneous development of realist genres in an expanding media culture. Since this is a methodological reflection, I go on to describe some of the implications of this move, pointing to a redistribution of categories for thinking about realism not only in terms of representation, but as a means for assessing some of the conditions of realism’s emergence as a historic event. These, I argue, might create a basis for comparing the conditions of the emergence of realism in different regional contexts.

## Virtualization/Actualization

Virtualizations, according to Deleuze, emerge in response to “events that appear in the form of questions” (197). A virtualization is always the ongoing restatement of a problem (which Deleuze also refers to as Ideas), and includes the resources, practices, and experiments that have been creatively mobilized in response to that problem over time (197, 207). The virtual is “real without being actual, ideal without being abstract, and symbolic without being fictional” (207).

When the resources of a virtual category are drawn upon, we say they are made actual. The actual refers to each *specific* attempt to solve a problem, to create a solution (153–163). According to Deleuze, the virtual is not the opposite of the real, but of the actual (208–221). An actualization, by contrast, is always a local, partial, and *creative* response to the problem to which it is responding. It mobilizes only a small part of the resources that are made available by the problem’s virtualization (the here stress on the *creativity, experiment, contingency, selection* is important). In other words, virtualization always implies a movement, since no problem can be identical to its actualization and vice versa. The virtual Idea is potentially modified with each new actualization in the ongoing, though always fragmentary, dialogue between locally implemented solutions and the way the problem is understood more globally (211). As Deleuze puts it, virtualization is real in the sense that it is generative, creating essential conditions for concrete actions as “the element of an infinite ‘learning’” (192).

Deleuze describes the process of virtualization/actualization in terms of the individual (who is always becoming by virtue of being enmeshed in this process) because he is invested in providing a more comprehensive description of what it means to think, which, for Deleuze, means giving sense to, as well as being sensible to, the random intuitions and feelings provoked by experiences and Ideas in a process better captured by the term “apprehension” than “thought.” Virtualization can also refer to larger domains of knowledge, always understood as problems continually being redefined through their actualizations (183–186, 204).<sup>2</sup> The process of creative differentiation that is fostered through actualization is also the process through which new ideas and problems end up being generated.

One of Lévy’s most useful moves is his assimilation of virtualization with the processes of making public and actualization with the process of making private (Lévy, *Qu’est-ce que* 117–131). Thus for Lévy, the move implied by virtualization involves the rendering collective, the rendering public, of an ideal version of what had previously been private or individual (Lévy, *Welcome* 3–6). The reverse is also true, since actualization always

implies an individual appropriation, a making-private, since the improvisation of a solution can only occur when something of the virtual has been interiorized or, in other words, learned locally (though in the open-ended way that Deleuze insisted upon (153–167, 191–221)). According to this scenario, the virtualization that is, for instance, law is understood as the ideal ensemble of tools, concepts, cases, and practices that have been developed over time for addressing the problem of how to mediate conflict. Just like *law*, *linguistics*, or *biology* would count as virtualizations, since each makes collective (and general) a host of locally developed and adapted practices and concepts.

An important dimension to Lévy's articulation lies, then, in the way that virtualization represents a *movement* (or elevation) from the space of concrete actualization to the status of a generalized question. Or in the reverse case, actualization represents the move towards a concrete interpretation of a problem raised virtually. This movement represents a shift in *identity* between the actual and the virtual (in part because the virtual has no identity), a process of "becoming-other" (this difference is also signaled by Deleuze in his distinction between differentiation "the determination of the virtual content" and differentiation, the "actualization of that virtuality into species and distinguished parts" (207).) The actual is always a problem-solving process: it is local, specific, and concrete, while the virtual always remains general, dynamic and at a remove, which is to say, de-territorialized. Nonetheless the virtual is still invested in each actualization, since it constitutes the problem to which the actual is a partial response (Lévy *Welcome*, 4–5). For example, Adam Smith's observations about supply and demand would be an *actualization* (a creative solution) to the generalized problem of the dynamics of economic exchange. At the same time, when Smith published *Wealth of Nations*, he initiated the process that would launch economics as a virtual Idea, since *Wealth of Nations* helped to constitute the problem of economics as a field of inquiry, including the concepts and theories that attempt to explain the motivations, psychological effects, and material conditions contributing to the cycles of economic activity. Once economics was virtualized, it in turn made possible a host of actualizations: for instance, the increasingly deliberate attempts to conceive and implement economic policies at a national level, or the creation of entities like central and world banks to help regulate the flow of money. These actualizations, including the challenges that arise in the concrete attempts to implement them, then contribute data and experience to the field of economics as a virtual problem.

Lévy's adaptation involves a shift in emphasis from Deleuze's philosophical articulation of difference. Although Lévy is invested in the sub-

jective processes in the translation of the relationship between virtualization and actualization—particularly their creative dynamics—he is much less focused on their ontological implications. Rather, the stress of his analysis lies in the methodological resources that virtualization makes available for tracing the emergence of collective functionalities (the evolving ways for defining problems that become the impetus for intervening in the world) that involve the *transmission* of Ideas. My approach retains Levy’s emphasis on the processes for “making public,” but with the goal of using it as a method for exploring the *ontological issues* raised by the collective problematization of experience thanks to the massive expansion of realism during the 1830s.

### **Realism as Virtualization**

Two factors defined the emergence of realism as a virtualization, while at the same time marking a turning point in the history of virtualization itself. The first involved the new reach of the process for making public. The period in which realist genres really took off in France coincided with the first great expansion of the media in the 1830s. The relaxation of censorship and the advent of industrial printing techniques converged in the 1830s to unleash an explosion in media production. The number of newspapers and periodicals being produced in Paris jumped from 26 in 1830 to more than 250 by the 1840s, with annual subscriptions passing from 50,000 to 200,000 in Paris alone (Adamowitz-Hariasz 161). This was dwarfed, however, by the millions of pages that were sold in Paris on a weekly basis thanks to the introduction of illustrated penny-presses, advertising-financed urban locals, and hundreds of magazines, physiognomies, feuilletons, and pamphlets that circulated in homes, bars, cafés and reading-rooms. As significant as the sheer jump in the volume of the media production, was the change in the media’s configuration. From discrete organs, the media of the 1830s and 1840s expanded horizontally, integrating a host of different platforms, including newsprint, illustration, plays, physiognomies, and panoramic collections to name but a few. Not only did the various branches increasingly show a tendency to represent the *same* curiosities, trends, and happenings across different genres, they increasingly did so against a backdrop that made everyday life their ubiquitous topic. What this added up to was the emergence, during the 1830s and 1840s of the first modern, integrated, mass-media system (Terni 227–233).

The expansion of the media into the production of millions of pages per week and spectators per year could only be sustained by consumer

demand. As of the 1830s, the nineteenth-century market for media products continued to increase exponentially. Fiction played a well-documented role in this expansion. By the mid-1830s most of the period's fiction did double-duty as promotional material for Paris' major dailies. In 1836, Emile de Girardin transformed newspaper publishing in France by combining industrial printing with a new model of financing and distribution. By pushing up advertising revenue, subscription costs were halved. This only proved viable, however, if a certain economy of scale were reached, which meant dramatically expanding readership (Adamowitz-Hariasz 160–167). Newspaper editors turned to the best-known writers of the day to attract a new generation of readers, publishing stories as serials in order to keep subscribers coming back for more. Balzac was the first writer commissioned by de Girardin in this capacity, and he published *An Old Maid*, later incorporated into *The Human Comedy*, in the inaugural run of de Girardin's relaunch of his newspaper, *La Presse*. In the following years, Balzac would go on to establish himself as one of the most prolific pulp-fiction writers of his day, publishing many parts of *The Human Comedy* in newspapers, before its various components were reassemble and sold separately in book or pamphlet form (Vachon, Chollet).

And indeed, it seemed that contemporaries could not get enough of seeing their own world reflected back at them. Beyond the realist novel, the demand for representations of everyday experience helped stoke the development a host of ancillary realist genres.<sup>3</sup> In its dramatization of everyday life, realism made the messiness and indeterminacy of an ontological understanding of experience available to an unprecedented number of people as second order observation. What is more, the mapping of ordinary experience was constantly pushing new boundaries—even extraordinary experiences were increasingly depicted against a background of the ordinary—fueled in part by the incessant demand for new materials. So if virtualization describes the process of making a problem visible and public, what all this adds up to is that everyday life became accessible to people as a problem in proportions that had never been attained before. The combination of new levels of dissemination, the variety of its forms, and the fact that *what was being virtualized*—an ontology of the everyday—*was within grasp of just about anyone*, not only expanded the reach of virtualization, it also helped to democratize it fairly radically. We can say, then, that the ability to “make public” was deeply transformed during the 1830s and 1840s.

The lived, contextualized, experience of ordinary life and of ordinary people—that is, experience shorn of the conventions of idealization or stereotype—that was being virtualized on a mass scale by realism was reminiscent of Deleuze's account of ontology in many ways: in its stress

on apprehension through sensing, in its depiction of the passive syntheses of habit, expectation, and forgetting, in its dramatization of fluctuating intensities, in the evolving scales of distinct-obscurity and clear-confusion and varying envelopments of Ideas, and of course, in its representations of the conditions that lead people to make choices, both consciously and unconsciously, in light of all these factors (222–240, 250–261). The very fact of realism’s cultural resonance during this time helped to transform ordinary experience into something important. Further, it announced the development of a new cultural priority—a complicated, deeply textured problematization, in the cultural sphere, of the question of personhood that had already been announced in the political sphere in the lead-up to the French Revolution.

One of the critical moves in thinking of realism as a virtual category is the way it helps us break through the one-to-one relationship between reader and text or representation and referent, which has tended to cast the problem of realism in terms of the adequacy of representation. By highlighting the impact of the realist Idea at a collective level, the density of the public conversation represented by the production and consumption of realist forms is transformed into one of its most salient features. What is more, it makes the problematization of everyday experience that realism described its most central fact. It thus de-centralizes the importance of individual texts—and the question of the adequacy of their representation—and interprets these texts as particular solutions or ways of articulating the problem of everyday experience. It is not as though the problem of representation disappears. Rather, the problem of everyday life which realism attempted to address is given back its consistency within the representational dynamic.

What is more, thinking about realism in terms of virtuality illuminates the importance of realist modes as a subset of techniques for describing the real. This applies on two fronts: first, in the way realist fiction fits into a much broader field of contemporary description, one that transcended fiction, and even text. The emphasis on experience as a realist Idea may suggest that the time has come for a reconsideration of classic works of realist criticism as for instance those of Raymond Williams, Ian Watt, and Mikael Bakhtin. However, the virtualization of the Idea of an ontology of the everyday across a variety of realist genres reminds us that we cannot limit our reconsideration to the novel, since as Deleuze observed, “even the most mechanical, the most banal, the most habitual [...] repetition finds its place in the work of art” (293). Rather, the novel, restored to its actual conditions of emergence should properly be recognized as one of a *series* of realist media forms. Second, realism can be understood, and, in-

deed, understood itself to be, a response to several generations of increasingly precise scientific description of the real in the physical and life sciences. Realism can be seen as a reaction to the inadequacy of the sciences to address the kinds of reality that were actually shaping people's lives. But it was just as much a rejection of the Romantic investment in subjective experience as the answer to the materialist bias the Romantics had repudiated. What we can say is that realism recuperated the scientific imperative to describe the world as it was on the one hand, and Romanticism's stress on subjective experience on the other, to develop a mode of representation that was less a scale-model of ordinary life, as Peter Brooks and Philippe Hammond have described it, than as a *modeling* of experience, and this in the sense of simulation.

A simulation is defined as "the imitation of the operation of a real-world process or system over time" (Banks *et al* 3). Modeling involves the imagining of problems not so much in terms of contexts, but *as context*, as the ability to interpret conditions and marshal resources to creatively respond to conditions as they evolve. But since it is the condition of realism to eschew idealization, its dramatizations are more often about how its protagonists *fail* to marshal resources in the key situations that move the narrative forward. The ability to evoke the instability of situations and the perspectives that structure them allowed the best realist writers to stage scenes that not only told us what happened, but bristled with the tension of alternative potentialities. The reader was invited to see the contingency of situations as characters tangled with different agendas, levels of power, talent, and ruthlessness even as they navigated the maze of force-fields that texture socially determined spaces. This way of staging confrontations among characters, and also *within* characters, signaled the development of an aesthetics especially suited to describing the encounters between people and environments, one of realism's most important aesthetic and epistemological engagements.

## **Virtuality as Method**

In what follows I will briefly describe some of the major methodological implications of rethinking realism in terms of Deleuzian virtuality.

1) **The ontology of everyday experience as second-order observation.** This is both the simplest and most important implication of describing realism as virtuality. The virtualization of everyday experience made it visible as a problem. It thus transformed its status from a representation of

ontology (Brooks 5), to an issue for debate and discussion—in fact, one of the central debates and discussions of nineteenth-century life and culture.

2) **Style.** By transforming everyday experience it into a second-order resource, or to put it another way, by virtualizing endless varieties of different kinds of experience, it became possible to see all that variety in terms of “style,” or styles-of-living, and thus to see that there might be choices about different ways of being. But because realism also modeled material and social boundedness, it simultaneously dramatized the constraints that narrowed the very horizons of possibility that it seemed to keep opening up. The impact of recognizing a multiplicity of stylistic distinctions helped reinforce the sense that the value of experience should be judged in terms of its *quality*, or in other words, that life itself was being redefined according to the tensions between personhood and material and social constraint. An *aesthetics of experience* thus began to condition the rhetoric of personal and social morality.

3) **An aesthetics of non-delimitation.** Joana Stalnaker and Hugues Marchal have shown how the problem of scientific description led to a progressive split between scientific writing and literature by the turn of the nineteenth century. Realism marks a further distinction within aesthetics, by being the first textual form whose aesthetic logic was *not* one of delimitation. What I mean by this is that every aesthetic system until realism was aimed at creating a privileged space of representation that distinguished it from life, marking a boundary. Since reality, in any case, can never be located even within lived experience, we can say that realist forms nonetheless positioned themselves in relation to experience, as a kind of representational buffer zone. They aimed to create an illusion of reflected experience—setting the terms for how experience was described and understood, and engaging in a critical discourse with respect to lived experience—in what Elizabeth Goodstein has termed the “rhetoric of reflection on subjective experience” (11). What set realism apart as an Idea (and this is what virtuality highlights) was its project of making lived experience available and visible as a problem—as something upon which one might *work*. This meant that realism had to play down its aesthetic difference. It thus staged itself as background in a bid to make the lived experience it represented as visible as possible. Another way of putting this might be to say that realism involved an aesthetics of double articulation: marking itself as an aesthetic space on the one hand (notably through what Roland Barthes called style (55–64)), while consistently pointing to its aesthetic erasure on the other, in a bid to lay claim to being in continuity with the non-fictional world (Kearns 5–14, 28–29). I would argue that the mission of problematizing something as open-ended as lived experi-

ence, while also presenting it as an aesthetic form, has everything to do with realism's persistence as an indispensable mode of representation.

4) **Scale and meaning.** In assigning meaning to everything and everyone, at a collective level realism reproduced the very crisis of meaning that it tended to dramatize on a work-by-work basis. Alex Woloch has shown how realist fiction structures the representation of the almost limitless depth of the protagonists' interior life against the flatter and more concentrated description of other characters and the expansiveness of the social and material worlds (12–42). The sheer proliferation of realist production, however, projected that expansiveness as itself a field of almost unlimited possibility and depth. At both levels then, one of the central problems raised by realism is the problem of scale as it is experienced from an individual perspective, and, the way it structures that perspective in critical ways. For what is the status of meaning, or even of an individual, in a world made up of large numbers (Woloch 254)? And even perhaps more urgently, what is the status of belief—in love, honor, art, or spiritual connection and the crises these provoke—in a world in which the most dependable mechanisms for social reproduction suggest that such beliefs are, at best, beside-the-point?

5) **The epistemology of modeling.** The shift from model to modeling, brought with it a shift from an aesthetics of emulation to a cognitive-sensible mode of engagement. This entailed a new epistemology and as well as a new didactic model, and this on two levels. The situational logic that modeling promotes asks us to imagine what we might do confronted by a similar situation. The multiplication of situations in realist representations highlighted the importance of situational competence, but also the necessity of acquiring the acumen to improvise successfully that can only really come from the accumulation of experience, akin to a kind of *practicing*. At the same time, the intellectual demands involved in modeling privilege the idea of understanding over truth, of embodied knowledge over what Deleuze would call the image of thought (129–167). As a logic, modeling highlights multiplicity and contradiction, different ways of understanding and thus an understanding of difference, including the understanding needed to identify with often very flawed characters. It asks the reader to assess the global situation being portrayed, whether on the order of an individual event or within the broader framework of the narrative. Modeling tends to move beyond the question “what does this mean?” or “is this right,” to the genetic question of “how does this work?”

Two further points about virtuality should be made as they relate specifically to scholarly research. The first is to argue for a periodization of realism that is organized through the history of virtualization or even simple

media development, rather than in terms of national or aesthetic histories. For one, this approach would extend the rationale of the kinds of lateral comparisons across genres, disciplines, and discourses that have characterized a great deal of research over the past twenty years. It would also suggest new coordinates for systematic historical and geographical comparison that would use media development and virtuality as yardsticks for comparing the contexts in which realism has developed across the globe, which might open new avenues for evaluating how realism is adopted to local circumstances and why it appears when it does.

The second point can be made by taking up the multiple temporalities in the virtualization/actualization relationship, even at level of realism's concrete dissemination: the time invested in the creation of each work of realism (its actualization); the temporality of the process of publishing that work (a step in its virtualization); the shelf-life of a work's circulation both as a product and as a resource, for instance in a library; time as it is portrayed *in* the work of representation; the duration of reading time (another form of actualization); the time absorbed in thinking about and debating the work, both publicly and privately (the movement between actualization and virtualization); and finally the layered temporality of the virtuality represented by realism in itself, that is to say, Deleuze's three syntheses of time, an encompassing everything; a forgetting everything; and the selection among everything implied in his concept of eternal return (220, 293). All these pools of time underscore the thickness of the practices that transform a series of local representations into a widely accessible public resource—or second order observation. And the more virtual, the more accessible this resource becomes. Virtuality thus suggests a surprisingly concrete model of cultural generation, which should replace looser concepts like "*cultural imaginary*" which reify the very cultural processes on which they stands.

If we follow the practical implications of Deleuze's conceptualization of virtuality, then we can begin to appreciate the depth of the cultural transformation that occurred at the intersection of the rise of the media and the realist preoccupation with ordinary experience. It also gives us a more direct way to interpret the importance of sustained public demand in its own right, since demand reflects an active cultural process that helped to transform the ontology of the everyday into a collective problem. Conversely, each time representations of experience were consumed—in each one of their actualizations, in other words—it also implied an internalization and privatization of the virtualization that was ordinary experience.

The emphasis on all possible realms of experience that are thematized in the opening of *The Wild Ass's Skin* acquires a whole new resonance when

it is considered in this context. When Balzac depicts Raphaël traversed by the vast flows of all historical, individual, and geological experience, he is in fact representing experience as already being virtualized. What is more, we could read *The Wild Ass's Skin* as an explicit dramatization of the problem of experience in a world in which virtualization was already reshaping consciousness. Against the flow of experience, Raphaël's is left feeling like an "intangible speck", marooned by the sheer scope of possibilities—their materiality and impersonality giving rise to a profound crisis in meaning (21). As Raphaël becomes conscious about the way that desire is eroding his lifespan, the fulfillment of each desire is transformed into a living nightmare. What is more, during the early part of the novel, when the consciousness of the price he would have to pay had not yet burrowed into his consciousness, Raphaël nonetheless makes another disconcerting discovery: that though his wishes are realized, their experience fails to live up to what he had imagined when he wished them. In this way, Balzac portrays the costs born by Raphaël—but also by his readers—for living in a world in which experience was already being virtualized: everything seems possible, but only so long as reality remains an abstraction.

This cleavage points to the paradox at the heart of lived experience as a virtual category. Although experience was being virtualized as an Idea, in its actualization, lived experience is always singular; it is particular *because* embedded in a context—different in the way that Deleuze describes *différence*. Balzac and his contemporaries reacted to this conundrum by constantly expanding the repertoire of characters, situations, and settings that might add to the total inventory of potential experiences. On the one hand, the expansion of the boundaries of representation, the assigning of significance to more and more kinds of people, no doubt helped expand personhood in directions towards which the concept of universal rights was already gesturing. On the other hand, as it attempted to objectify the patterns, repetitions, and predictability of interests that this vast survey of experience laid bare, it continually rediscovered the *singularity* that experience always instantiated and, in the last instance, epitomized.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> My translation.

<sup>2</sup> Deleuze invokes the atomist model of physics, linguistics, biology, and the development of social ideas like Marxism as examples of virtualizations understood as fields or disciplines.

<sup>3</sup> Everyday genres include caricature, physiognomies, panoramic description, *feuilletons*, vaudeville and illustrated press.

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## Virtualni problem kulture devetnajstega stoletja: metodološki vidiki drugačnega pogleda na realizem

Ključne besede: filozofija literature / estetska izkušnja / realizem / realistični roman / virtualizacija / poststrukturalizem / Deleuze, Gilles

Na 30. leta 19. stoletja bi bilo treba gledati kot na kritični trenutek ne samo v zgodovini realizma, temveč tudi virtualizacije. Z dramtizacijo vsakdanjega življenja je realizem do takrat največjemu številu ljudi omogočil dostop do ontologije izkušenj v obliki opazovanja drugega reda. S preoblikovanjem navadnih življenj v predmete primerjave je zgodnji realizem odprl številna vprašanja, kot so ekspanzivnost, življenjski slogi, estetika opisa in epistemologija, ki temelji na improvizacijski kompetenci, pridobljeni z modeliranjem situacij.

Avtorica na podlagi paradigme Gillesa Deleuza o virtualizaciji oziroma aktualizaciji zagovarja dejstvo, da bi morali nenadno eksplozijo realističnih žanrov v 30. letih 19. stoletja razumeti z vidika virtualizacije, se pravi kot daljnosežno problematizacijo pojava vsakdanje izkušnje. Avtorica si sposodi prirejeni Deleuzov koncept medijskega teoretika Pierra Lévyja in poudarek premakne h kolektivnim razsežnostim realizma. S poudarjanjem vpliva realistične ideje na kolektivni ravni je kot ena izmed njenih najopaznejših značilnosti resno obravnavan velik obseg javne izmenjave, ki jo predstavljata produkcija in potrošnja realističnih oblik. Še več, zaradi tega postane problematizacija vsakdanje izkušnje, ki jo je opisoval realizem, njeno osrednje dejstvo. S tem se decentralizira pomen posameznih besedil – in s tem vprašanje primernosti njihove reprezentacije, pri čemer se ta besedila interpretirajo kot posebni načini ubeseditve problema vsakdanje izkušnje. Avtorica *ne* predlaga branja realističnih žanrov z Deleuzovega vidika. Virtualizacijo uporablja kot *metodo* ponovnega ovrednotenja kulturnega pomena realizma in s tem oblikovanja alternativnega in bolj radikalnega izziva poststrukturalističnemu pristopu k realizmu, kot je bila to pragmatična kritika.

S to metodo ustvari sredstvo, s katerim lahko ovrednoti okoliščine pojava realizma kot zgodovinskega dogodka. To pa je podlaga za primerjavo okoliščin pojava realizma v različnih regionalnih in zgodovinskih kontekstih. Poleg tega nudi tudi metodo za konkretnjši opis pojava tistih vrst kolektivne problematizacije, ki se trenutno opisujejo z nejasnim pojmom »kulturni imaginarij«.