



## **Toward a Zeroth Voice: Theorizing Voice in Children's Literature with Deleuze**

—Jane Newland

[The] voice that speaks the text is what brings life to literature, and it is this voice that children lose as they learn to read privately. Private reading is silent reading. The reader loses the ability to hear a voice that speaks the text or the ability to call that voice out. (McGillis, "Calling" 24)

Roderick McGillis remarks in his paper, "Calling a Voice Out of Silence: Hearing What We Read," that the concept of voice is inherently linked with narrative and experiences of narratives. Early experiences of literature are oral and communal, actively shared and joyous. Private, silent reading, for McGillis, is "perfunctory" and "monotone" (25). He is concerned that when young readers progress toward such private reading, they may lose the ability to hear a voice in texts. For McGillis, "to save the reader from the reign of awful darkness and silence, we must give him voice; to save the text, we must save its voice" (25).

Drawing on the theories of Gilles Deleuze, the

French philosopher, this paper explores the *rhizome* of voices that readers "hear" in texts and postulates that voice may be considered as something virtual, a symbiotic fusion with the text created through a Deleuzian *becoming*. If a young reader is able to enter into a *becoming* with a text, then the voice of the text can indeed be saved. This paper looks in turn at the coming together of book and reader, the rhizome of voices emanating from the book, and the complexity of authorship from a Deleuzian perspective. Through a consideration of Deleuze's concepts of major and minor literature, this paper shows how the simulacral nature of voices present in children's literature can lead to what Deleuze terms a *collective assemblage of enunciation*. This paper, therefore, moves away from traditional levels of discourse, going beyond notions of narrator, author, and reader, and instead looks for the voice created through this collective assemblage: a *zeroth* voice, a term inspired by the zeroth law of thermodynamics, the most fundamental of the four

laws, albeit developed last. It is my contention that this zeroth voice liberates the reader from all the voices present in the creation of the text. It is a voice that does not impose any of these subject positions.

To explore these Deleuzian concepts and their application to the critical study of children's fiction, this paper draws predominantly on the Kamo quartet, written by the well-known and respected French author Daniel Pennac. As is often the case with French children's literature, Pennac's work is less well-known in the Anglophone world; however, this series is of particular interest when theorizing voice because of its somewhat unusual narrator, Kamo's lifelong friend, the otherwise nameless Toi (You).

### **Daniel Pennac and His Oeuvre**

A teacher of French until 1995, when he committed to his writing full-time, Daniel Pennac is himself interested in the question of what draws a reader to a text. In his philosophical treatise entitled *Comme un roman* (translated into English by David Homel as *Better than Life*), which questions how a love of reading begins, how it may be lost, and how it can be regained, Pennac defines more succinctly his ideas for nurturing young people's desire to read. This text also features his now well-known manifesto of readers' rights: a list of ten points designed to examine the norms of reading and to reinstate the notion of pleasure in reading.

Each volume in Daniel Pennac's Kamo series represents a school subject or related theme, reflecting his view that "children want to talk about school" ("Daniel Pennac"). *Kamo, l'idée du siècle* deals with the transition from primary to secondary school; *Kamo, l'agence Babel*, considers the challenges of learning modern foreign languages, in particular English; *L'évasion de Kamo* addresses the subject of history and sees Kamo's mother leave for Eastern Europe to research her family roots; and *Kamo et moi* raises the problem of a feared school teacher and the difficulties of writing imaginative essays in French. Pennac's novel for adults from 1999, *Messieurs les enfants*, is a reworking of the theme from *Kamo et moi*, where Kamo and Toi are transformed into adults and their parents become children. One of the highest accolades for French children's authors is for their work to appear on the list of titles recommended by the *Ministère de l'éducation nationale* to accompany the primary curricula; all but one of Pennac's titles, *L'évasion de Kamo*, have received this honour.<sup>1</sup> The Kamo series also ties in with Pennac's acclaimed series for adults, the Malaussène saga, which introduces Benjamin Malaussène and his extended family. Benjamin's brother, Le Petit Malaussène, is at school with Kamo.<sup>2</sup>

Kamo is a fiercely determined young adolescent who lives with his mother Tatiana, his father having died from a contaminated blood transfusion some years earlier. Kamo's somewhat madcap ideas, which "would

come to him two or three times a day" (*L'idée* 20),<sup>3</sup> lead to his adventures, which are narrated by his friend, Toi. There is nothing out of the ordinary about Toi, who appears amorphous and somewhat androgynous, emphasized by the rarity of third-person pronouns when describing him. Toi and Kamo, friends since kindergarten, are inseparable, and Toi's admiration for Kamo knows no bounds. Toi lives with his parents, Pope and Moune, who act as Kamo's surrogate parents in his mother's absences. Toi's simulacral character creates the possibility for Deleuzian becomings that may lead to the zeroth voice. He therefore provides a particularly clear example of how Deleuzian concepts can be applied in the field of children's literature. I now provide a glossary of some of these Deleuzian concepts that are pivotal to the remainder of this paper.

### **Rhizome**


Deleuze develops his concept of the rhizome in collaboration with Félix Guattari in *Mille Plateaux (A Thousand Plateaus)*. They draw their ideas about the rhizome from the root system and juxtapose it to the tree root, descending vertically into the earth, each root branching from the other. The rhizome, however, expands laterally by putting out adventitious roots at intervals. For Deleuze and Guattari, it is governed by a never-ending "logic of the AND" (*Thousand* 25). They write:

[A] rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction "and . . . and . . . and . . ." (25)


Deleuze and Guattari consider that the rhizome offers another way of moving: "from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing" (25). What is important is not the pause that occurs while resting on the nodules or plateaus of the rhizome but the movement between them. Plateaus and the movements between them are dynamic, creative, and, above all, intense. A rhizome of voice, then, would be an interconnected, anti-linear web encompassing all possibilities of voice within a text, facilitating movement between the different types of voice that constitute the plateaus of the rhizome.<sup>4</sup>

### **Becoming**

Becoming is a "symbiosis" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 238) of two heterogeneous parts, which Deleuze and Guattari clarify with their example of the wasp-orchid. For successful reproduction to occur, the orchid must rely on the wasp for pollination, while the wasp is reliant on the orchid's nectar for its survival. The orchid undergoes a becoming-wasp, the wasp a becoming-orchid. Intensities flow in the block



. . . a Deleuzian  
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theories.



of becoming between the two parts as they form a new *assemblage*: the wasp-orchid. It is not a question of transformation into: the wasp does not (and of course cannot) transform itself into an orchid; rather, it is a question of reciprocal change. Considering children's literature from the Deleuzian perspective of becoming involves the search for the intensities that flow when the encounter that is reading occurs. For Peter Hunt, "talking about a book means [. . .] talking about an encounter" (189); for Victor Watson, about a "meeting" between child and text (1). Deleuzian becoming provides another way of thinking this readerly encounter and this somewhat mysterious interaction between young reader and book.

To entice the wasp, the orchid forms "a tracing of a wasp [. . . .] It could be said that the orchid imitates the wasp, reproducing its image in a signifying fashion (mimesis, mimicry, lure etc.)" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 10). This imitation, while important for enticing the wasp to the orchid, is on a different level to the parallel act of becoming. Similarly, the book can be considered to form a tracing of the reader, projecting an image to entice him/her. The spirited protagonist of the Kamo series, renowned for his unpredictable ideas, may appeal to similarly minded readers, or, as Pennac has suggested, to those young people interested in school-related adventures. This image may equally emanate from an element of the title or of the cover art in which the reader recognizes himself or herself or that speaks to the reader's own personal narrative, or could encompass any other aspect of the book that resonates for the reader.<sup>5</sup> Let us consider the Angelina Ballerina series, written by Katharine Holabird and illustrated by Helen Craig, to clarify this further. Such a series may simply be described as a story about a ballet-loving mouse. For different readers, however, an Angelina Ballerina book may invoke the freedom of

dancing, the dream of succeeding or of achieving a goal, or the memory of past dance classes—sensations unique to the life experience of the reader in question.

To some extent, a Deleuzian encounter of reader and book complements reader-response theories. Response, as McGillis explains,

involves what happens in the mind when we read a text. The response critic is interested in the web of connections the reader inevitably makes to his or her literary or extraliterary experiences. Our response, the feelings and thoughts we have when we read, directs our interpretation and our evaluation of texts. To a large extent, we read the book we wish to read; we make the text as we read it. (*Nimble* 16)

While reader-response theories focus on the web of experiential connections created by the reader at any given reading, a Deleuzian analysis considers this rhizome of connections, but goes on to the becoming that may occur from a textual encounter. The reader, having been enticed to the book, may undergo an initial becoming with a character, a becoming-character, while the character undergoes a becoming-read.<sup>6</sup> This may lead to other becomings; in reading *Where the Wild Things Are*, for example, a reader may become with Max (becoming-character) and experience a becoming-animal as Max reaches

“the place where the wild things are” (Sendak). This does not imply mimicking the wolf alongside Max, nor is it a symbolic interpretation of the subconscious Oedipal desire, as “[b]ecoming-animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 238). To become animal while reading *Where the Wild Things Are* is to be contaminated by the pack of the “wild rumpus” (Sendak), to find an escape from the Oedipal dilemma, by losing oneself. Becoming-animal is, as Astrida Neimanis explains,

communicative and contagious, working according to a logic of infection, whereby human molecularity and animal molecularity collide in each other’s zones of proximity. Like a cold virus, the particles of human and the particles of animal literally infect one another and mix together to form a new singularity, irreducible to either of the two parts. (282)

For Deleuze and Guattari, all becomings rush toward becoming-imperceptible. When we interact with a physical object, we first perceive it by our senses, and then we interpret and categorize the perceived object. Becoming-imperceptible removes the reliance on perception, and points to the state outside perception. In this process, the reader goes beyond any tracing offered by the book, and any limited assemblage with

a part of the book. Becoming-imperceptible undoes identity and requires us to “leav[e] behind not only the perceptible boundaries of the body but also one’s conventional understandings of oneself, of others, and of one’s world, in order to respond to the informing impact of imperceptible encounters” (Lorraine 189).

### **Opening the Book to the Outside**

Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of *Babel Agency* encapsulates the many and competing voices within fiction and, by extension, children’s and adolescent fiction: there is not simply the voice of the speaking character or third-person narrator to consider, but also echoes of the voices of other individuals involved in the production and provision of books for children and adolescents: editor, illustrator, teacher, librarian, parent, and so on (263).<sup>7</sup> Bakhtin considers that these voices are in constant conflict between those trying to maintain a standard, official language and those trying to preserve unofficial forms. Before reading even begins, such voices are competing in what Gérard Genette would refer to as the editorial peritext (21). In the Kamo series, this editorial peritext is explicitly incorporated into the text: author biographies precede the text and interviews with the author and illustrator follow. Readers are provided with information about those involved in the production of the fiction that they read and are reminded at the end of the text, “you have just read Kamo, *Babel Agency* as well you know!”

and are encouraged to “rediscover Kamo in his other adventures” (*L’agence* 88). Such editorial interventions are common in series books and encourage further reading and also communication with the author and editor. A reader can write in with comments and suggestions for plot modifications and, in this Internet age, fans can discuss series and their characters and plots in chat rooms, predicting plot twists and future events. From a Deleuzian perspective, this peritext can be considered as rhizomatic, opening the book up to the outside and encouraging the creation of links; for Deleuze and Guattari, this is indeed the function of a book. In their rhizome,

There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders, so that a book has no sequel nor the world as its object nor one or several authors as its subject. (*Thousand* 23)

The purpose of the book is no longer to represent the world with a succession of linear sequels, but, as Kenneth Surin suggests, “to assemble with this heterogeneous outside, to move ‘rhizomatically’” (172). In this multiplicity of “assemblage[s] with the outside” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 23),

becoming is implicit. As two heterogeneous parts come together, they create a block of becoming: the creative flow between two parts.

To assemble with the outside, the book puts out a tracing, providing the reader with something familiar and comforting to facilitate his or her movement toward it. As already discussed, this could be as trivial as the format, colour, or feel of a text, but the voice of the characters could equally be an essential part of this tracing. To look for voice in written narrative is, traditionally, to look for the style or manner of expression that distinguishes author, narrator, or character, and some of the first questions typically asked of narrative are “who speaks?,” “who sees?,” and “whose story is it?” The character speaks in a voice that may be designed to resemble the reader’s, and sees and experiences things that might relate to the reader. Indeed, Maria Nikolajeva suggests that “[i]n traditional fiction, children as well as adult readers are expected to identify with and empathize with at least one character, to adopt a subject position coinciding with a character” (38). While such identification fits with the idea of the tracing, the image presented is nonetheless deceptive, as I will go on to show. In addition, going beyond the initial tracing that entices the reader, the subsequent assemblage created through becoming undoes traditional notions of subject position.

In the case of the Kamo series, Toi focalizes and narrates the story of his best friend Kamo. Toi tells

Kamo’s story and, at the same time, his own, which is inextricably linked to Kamo’s. Indeed, in every volume, there is a moment when the narrative focus switches from Kamo to Toi and to his story and his efforts to help Kamo. In *Kamo, l’agence Babel*, for example, Kamo is doing badly at English in school, while his mother keeps losing her job. To rectify both problems, Kamo’s mother challenges him to learn English in three months, if she can hold a job down for the same length of time. When Kamo’s mother has upheld her side of the bargain, she provides him with a list of pen pals and Kamo begins to communicate with a correspondent named Catherine Earnshaw. At first, his letters are abusive, but, when Catherine explains how his letter arrived on the anniversary of her father’s death, this strikes a chord with Kamo and his obsession with his pen pal begins. Toi, realizing that Kamo is corresponding with the past, becomes both suspicious and frightened, and quarrels with Kamo. As the two friends stop speaking, the third-person narrative switches to first-person, and Toi narrates his own efforts to track down the agency behind the letters. When Toi reveals to Kamo that his mother is the author of the mysterious letters, reinventing literary characters to inspire language learning, Toi reverts to telling Kamo’s story once again.

The use of both third- and first-person narrative could be considered a form of engaging narration as defined by Andrea Schwenke Wyile, where “the



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always call me: ‘you.’  
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me, you can’t be  
mistaken, it’s me. . . .”



narrator seeks to reconstruct the events being related in a way that engages readers, a way that invites them to consider themselves in, or close to, the position of the protagonist” (116). Toi as narrator, either of Kamo’s story or his own, may encourage such identification, creating the ideologically disturbing situation where “at least for the duration of the reading time, the reader’s own selfhood is effaced and the reader internalizes the perceptions and attitudes of the focalizer and is thus reconstituted as a subject within the text” (Stephens 68). The use of the second-person pronoun in the name of the narrator intensifies this identification. Toi is never referred to by name, and even acknowledges his own namelessness, stating “that’s what they always call me: ‘you.’ And I always know it’s me, because me, you can’t be mistaken, it’s me” (*L’idée* 10). In Toi’s own narration, he is simultaneously “you” and “me,” creating a blend of second and first persons within the one character. When, in *L’idée du siècle*, one of Kamo’s ideas backfires and the whole class begins to suffer the consequences, the other classmates turn to Toi for his opinion: “and you, what do you think about it?” (58). The question could equally be asked of you, the reader. In the Kamo series, You speak(s): You tell(s) Kamo’s story, not simply drawing the reader closer to the text, but positioning the reader specifically as Kamo’s lifelong friend. Toi’s reluctance to share his opinion, “Me, I didn’t have an opinion” (58), can be transferred to the reader.

In using the second-person pronoun, Pennac reduces any gap between reader and text and creates a situation where the narrative mode becomes less well defined; there is a conflation of narrative and readerly persons. This somewhat resembles the more well-known episode in A. A. Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh* when Pooh visits Christopher Robin, asking for a balloon:



“Good morning Christopher Robin,” he said.  
 “Good morning Winnie-the-Pooh,” *said you*.  
 “I wonder if you’ve got such a thing as a balloon about you?”  
 “A balloon?”  
 “Yes, I just said to myself coming along: ‘I wonder if Christopher Robin has such a thing as a balloon about him?’ I just said it to myself, thinking about balloons and wondering.”  
 “What do you want a balloon for?” *you said*. (8–9; my emphasis).

Here, as Barbara Wall states, this “method of narration requires the ‘real’ child listener to assume, perhaps uncomfortably, the identity of Christopher Robin” (184). Her discussion of Milne’s work shows the difficulties of positioning the real child reader as, at times, both narratee and character. The You narrator in the Kamo series is not beset by such problems. The real child reader may be drawn into the text by the use of the second person pronoun in the narrator’s name, but there is no “real” identity that the reader needs to assume. Toi’s anonymity avoids the problem that Milne faced with the character named after his son, Christopher Robin. In both examples, the child reader/listener may be pulled toward the text.

McGillis considers that “the voice that speaks from a children’s book seeks to draw the child reader in by gaining her trust, by embracing her” (“Embrace” 24).

He continues by writing, “the text that embraces gives pleasure. The pleasure of the embrace may be based on mutual submission: the reader submits to the text, but possibly because the text submits to the reader. In other words, the text offers the reader something familiar; it accommodates itself to the interests and experience of the reader” (25). Perry Nodelman furthers this idea of the text accommodating itself to the reader when he suggests that the impression is given that “reading is primarily a matter of self-recognition” (“How” 181). Nodelman worries that this limited perspective could tend to solipsism,

a doubly satisfying solipsism: the belief that our own perceptions of the way things ought to be is in fact the way they actually are, and the equally comforting belief that our own perception of the way things are is the only possible way of viewing reality. These are comfortable but dangerous delusions. (“Cultural” 239–40)

The implication is that the self is all that matters. The tracing emitted to entice young readers to the book may not be what we think, however. To look at this more closely, it is necessary to look at the question of authorship.

### **I in My Capacity as . . .**

For Deleuze, one of the disadvantages of authorship

is “constituting a point of departure or of origin, forming a subject of enunciation on which all the produced utterances depend, getting recognized and identified in an order of dominant meaning or established powers: ‘I in my capacity as . . .’” (Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II* 27). Pennac writes in the capacity of Toi (You): the adult writes in the guise of the young reader. To some extent, links can be made here to Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of *major* and *minor* literature, which also bear similarities to Bakhtin’s official and unofficial forms of language. A minor literature is achieved when the author manages to write “just as a Czech Jew writes in German, or as an Ouzbekian writes in Russian” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 18). For Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka epitomized minor writing. As a Prague Jew writing in German, Kafka was in this respect “like a foreigner in [his] own language” (Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II* 4). Kafka was able to deterritorialize language, by abstracting it from the dominant social structures in which it finds itself. Children’s literature is fundamentally about young people and is read predominantly by them. Those on the receiving end of children’s fiction, those who are invited to partake of it, are *minoritarian*, not necessarily in their numbers, but in their “deviance from the norm” (Bogue 112) of the adult world in which they find themselves. Like Kafka, they have no language that is truly their own (indeed, Deleuze and Guattari comment, “how many people today

live in a language that is not their own?” [Kafka 19]). Children’s fiction is not written by young people themselves, but produced by *majoritarian* adults. In trying to emulate the voices of young people in their writing, adult writers can only produce a preconceived notion of young people’s language. They can conjure memories of their own childhood and adolescence, and observe the youth of others around them, but they can only recreate a pseudo-reality. As Jack Zipes notes, a true published children’s literature written by young people in their “own” language does not exist (40): majoritarian forces dominate the production of children’s fiction, giving young people voices to read that purport to be their own but never can be. Perry Nodelman suggests that “the book describes, not things as they are, but things as grownups imagine teenagers think they are. That is what readers are meant to identify with” (“Typical” 183). In this, authors are merely perpetuating the majoritarian norm of what adults consider young people to be.

Voices in children’s fiction can be highly didactic and the conveyors of distinct ideologies. Third-person narrators can clearly tell the reader what to think, and, although first-person narrators can only describe what they know, they often cannot resist the urge to tell the implied reader what they have learned (Trites). No voice is neutral: all texts are created within a specific discourse and context, and the voices found in them naturally reflect this. The young reader is told, overtly



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or covertly, how to behave, conform, and react to the world around. Mike Cadden writes, “[N]ovels constructed by adults to simulate an authentic adolescent’s voice are inherently ironic because the so-called adolescent voice is never—and can never be—truly authentic” (146). Similarly, Roberta Trites notes, “[S]ince the characters constructing parents against whom to rebel are themselves the constructs of adults who exist outside of the text, YA novels serve both to reflect and to perpetuate the cultural mandate that teenagers rebel against their parents” (69). Authors write characters to reflect their own remembered experiences of childhood and adolescence or to simulate images provided by the media and elsewhere. This is certainly the case with Pennac who, in an interview for Gallimard Jeunesse, states: “I wanted these books to take place at school. I had been a teacher for a long time. A child’s universe is all about school” (“Daniel Pennac”). There is, however, something more than ironic about the narration and voices in children’s literature, and Cadden’s use of *simulate* and Trites’s use of *reflect* are pertinent. Where deterritorialization in Kafka is produced through his use of a language that was both his own and yet never could be, deterritorialization occurs in children’s fiction not because young people are writing it, but precisely because they are not. Readers appear to be confronted with a mirror image in reading: character reflecting reader reflecting character, and, as if positioned between two mirrors, an infinity of copies remains.

The reader is thus projected into the domain of the Deleuzian simulacrum. Deleuze’s concept of the simulacrum consists of “denying the primacy of original over copy, of model over image; glorifying the reign of simulacra and reflections” (*Difference* 66). He pushes the notion of a copy of a copy to the extreme, to the point at which it “changes in nature, at which copies themselves flip over into

simulacra" (*Difference* 128). Jean Baudrillard has resemblance lead to the destruction of the original, by the copy being used to model then replace the source. The Deleuzian simulacrum is not about forcing all copies onto such a model, but is that which "overturns all copies by *also* overturning the models" (*Difference* xx). It does not destroy the original but becomes an entity distinct from it or an expression of pure difference.

Deleuze's work on pure difference or, as he calls it, difference in itself, is informed by Plato's allegory of the cave, where prisoners watch shadow play on the walls of the cave and, because they know nothing else, assume the figures and images they see to be "reality." Only if a prisoner were to escape and discover what is beyond the cave and then return to it to enlighten his fellow prisoners would any knowledge of another reality come about. For Deleuze, however, behind every cave is a deeper cave. There is no way of telling whether the new reality is any less illusionary than the last. When, in the mirroring of reader and character, the reader is projected into the realm of the Deleuzian simulacrum, each copy of the reader in the mirror of children's fiction becomes an expression of difference. Deleuze therefore refuses the concept of *comparative difference*. He demonstrates how difference has never been thought in itself, but has always been thought through subordination to uniqueness, equivalence, and representation. Deleuze

does not ask us to compare to find difference but to experience it in itself. In C. S. Lewis's *The Last Battle*, Digory's explanation of the transition to the new Narnia captures the essence of pure difference in the Deleuzian simulacrum:

It is as hard to explain how this sunlit land was different from the old Narnia as it would be to tell you how the fruits of that country taste. Perhaps you will get some idea of it if you think like this. You may have been in a room in which there was a window that looked out on a lovely bay of the sea or a green valley that wound away among the mountains. And in the wall of that room opposite the window there may have been a looking-glass. And as you turned away from the window you suddenly caught sight of the sea or that valley, all over again, in the looking-glass. And the sea in the mirror or the valley in the mirror, were in one sense just the same as the real ones: yet at the same time they were somehow different. (160)

The old and the new Narnia are identical yet inexplicably different; similarly, the reader, in confronting simulacral characters within the book, is not merely presented with an identical copy of the self, but rather something distinct, thereby eliminating any possibility of a self-satisfying solipsism.

Just as the *I* of Kafka is deterritorialized through



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and of themselves  
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becomings.



the complexity of his relationship to the German language, so the *I* of the reader and the *I* of the character are deterritorialized through the simulacra of the representations of childhood and adolescence. Children's fiction is not a minor literature in the way Kafka's literature is, but the *I* of the text is just as deceptive. The tracings characters emit are not reliable; characters are not who they say they are, but are rather a compounding of simulacra. In the Kamo series, Toi, as we have already noted, could indeed be You, the reader. In Toi's quasi-banalality, a familiar and reassuring tracing is put out for the reader. This tracing is a groundless simulacrum, which is not something to be considered negative; a Deleuzian simulacrum is inherently positive in its groundlessness. For Deleuze, the simulacrum is not reductive and it does not minimize difference like Baudrillard's simulacrum. Baudrillard's copy is anti-becoming: there is a recoiling from new perceptions in the attempt to make everything resemble. Deleuze's simulacrum, however, changes all copies into originals in and of themselves and thereby opens up potential for becomings. Newness is the only outcome of this switch to a Deleuzian simulacrum: Toi creates the possibility of becoming for the reader. At the same time, Toi is also a reflection of the person whose story he is telling. Toi is Kamo's shadow, his alter ego. They are two halves of the same person, as the Grand Lanthier discovers when he tries to reconcile Kamo and Toi over an argument about Kamo's obsession with his pen pal: "Kamo and you, we need you, it's like . . . (he tried to find a comparison), it's like, oh I don't know, it's like . . . (but he never found one)" (*L'agence* 53). The fact that the Grand Lanthier cannot find a comparison is remarkable in itself, pointing to the inability to reduce the comparison to a model. Toi is a reflection of his best friend. It is impossible to search for differences between the two friends and

yet, in the Toi-Kamo mirror, the two are not identical copies of each other but simulacra, as indeed are Toi and You, the reader. Similarly, Digory cannot explain the difference between the two Narnias because there is no comparative difference between them, there is only a pure difference or a difference in itself. When the reader relates, or tries to relate, to either Kamo or Toi, she or he is therefore confronted with further mirroring and further layers of simulacrity.

From this Deleuzian perspective, in all children's literature, voice is necessarily unreliable, in as much as it is always groundless and always rhizomatic. The *I* of the young Toi is actually an imagined *I* (I in my capacity as) created by the *I* of the author through abstracted memory and chosen to reflect the images of youth that Pennac observes around him. Pennac (adult, writer, father, former teacher) could not be more abstracted from Kamo's universe, which he is depicting. In his efforts to produce a true reflection of society in the character and voice of Toi, he creates a voice that actually resembles nothing. The reader of the Kamo series, who may attempt to appropriate this image of childhood, discovers characters that are copies of a childhood abstracted at various levels by the author. In *Kamo et moi*, a further layer of illusion is added to the characters when they are transformed from children into adults. In this volume, the two friends have the dreaded Monsieur Crastaing as their French teacher, who sets them an essay to write: what

happens when you wake up one morning and find yourself transformed into an adult and your parents into children? In writing the essay, the transformation occurs: Toi (as Pope) goes to school to apologize for his (son's) absence, only to find Kamo, who has not written the essay, unchanged. Toi asks Kamo to complete the exercise, and together they attempt to undo the transformation. They visit Crastaing and find that he, too, has attempted the essay and is changed into a child, also discovering his reason for setting the essay: he is an orphan and has no family of his own and attempts to discover the meaning of family vicariously through his pupils' essays. Only when Kamo writes a more inspired essay for Crastaing is the transformation reversed. In *Messieurs les enfants*, Pennac's version of the transformation for adults, the nature of this transformation is explored in greater detail. The "child"-parents demonstrate a wider awareness than befits their age, which leads Crastaing to comment: "I have no more regressed to my childhood than you have matured in writing this essay. We are, what can you say, imitations of what we used to be, while remaining what we were and always have been" (216). While there has been a physical transformation, it is deceptive. The children have not turned into adults nor has the irritable Crastaing suddenly become a child. In the transformations presented in both texts, characters are reflections of themselves, and yet somehow the same as they always

have been. The reader cannot simply mimic or copy such illusionary characters. Pennac therefore allows each reader to experience his or her own childhood *differently* through the Deleuzian simulacra that are created.

There is a risk that the voice of the text may in fact be lost through the layers of illusion created and the chaotic proliferation of simulacral subject positions. Deleuze provides a solution to this chaos that reveals exactly what happens to the notion of subject position in becoming: for Deleuze, “there isn’t a subject, *there are only collective assemblages of enunciation*” (*Kafka* 18).

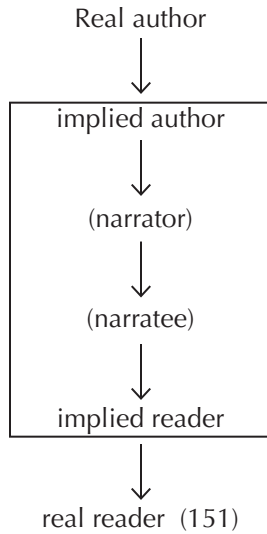


. . . for Deleuze, “there isn’t a subject, *there are only collective assemblages of enunciation*” . . .

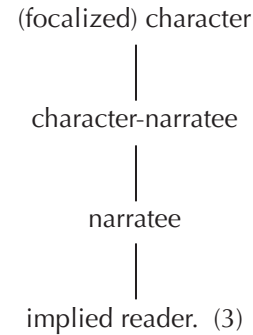
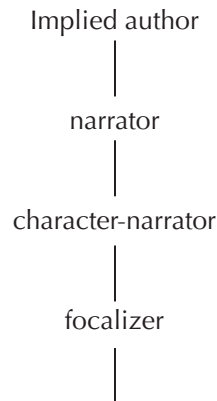


### **Collective Assemblages of Enunciation**

For Deleuze, it is necessary to go beyond levels of discourse, to go beyond notions of narrator, author, and reader. Deleuze and Guattari write, “Undoubtedly, for a while, Kafka thought according to these traditional categories of the two subjects, the author and the hero, the narrator and the character” (*Kafka* 18) before rejecting them. To move beyond these narratorial aspects, it is essential to return to what Deleuze and Guattari consider is the purpose of the book in the rhizome, where the tripartite division of the world as reality, the book as representation, and the subjectivity of the author disappears. In the rhizome, the sole purpose of the book is to assemble with the outside; all forms of subjectivity (the *I* of the author, reader, and character) disappear and only the assemblage remains. Elements of the world, the book, and the author come together to form this assemblage with the outside. The creation of this assemblage necessitates a reconsideration of the traditional and well-known linear author-reader continuum that Seymour Chatman depicts thus:



and that Maria Nikolajeva adapts to include character voice, which she considers is lacking from Chatman's model:



The assemblage re-establishes the elements of the continuum as plateaus of an author-reader rhizome: a highly interconnected web of narrative possibilities. All elements find themselves in the middle, each connected to the other. This author-reader rhizome also incorporates all the elements of the peritext that reading evokes: illustrator, editor, and so on. In *L'évasion de Kamo*, for example, the rhizome of voices is made more complex through its historical content. This volume takes Toi and his parents to the Vosges for their annual holiday, accompanied by Kamo, whose mother is retracing her family roots in Eastern Europe. Pope has repaired Toi's grandfather's bicycle for Kamo, complete with bullet holes from the Second World War, yet Kamo refuses to ride it, his intuition warning him against it. Instead, Kamo is happy to stay in the holiday cottage and cook (he is renowned for his culinary skills) while Toi and his parents go cycling. Kamo is eventually forced to ride the bicycle to the nearest post office when his mother tries to contact him. On their





The assemblage . . .  
overturns notions  
of the embrace and  
readerly submission  
to the text.



return to Paris, Kamo is given the bicycle as a present. Returning on his bicycle from a late-night showing of *Wuthering Heights*, Kamo has an accident and is taken, comatose, to hospital. When Toi, with the Grand Lanthier, visits Kamo, they find him muttering words in Russian and calling them by various names: “he was still calling us Djavaïr, but he gave us other names too: Vano, Annette, Koté, Braguine . . . He asked us for favours, he gave us orders and we obeyed as if we had been Djavaïr, Vano, Annette, Koté, Braguine” (*L’évasion* 74). With the help of their Russian teacher, Toi discovers that Kamo is somehow reliving aspects of the Russian Revolution in his coma. Toi and the Grand Lanthier bring him the objects he asks for, and, in doing so, assist Kamo in coming out of his coma. The author-reader rhizome can effortlessly incorporate such historical voices and facilitate the movement between these voices and the connectability of them. The assemblage fuses all these voices together and creates a voice unique to itself. It is this voice that a reader “hears” when reading, if the reader is able to become with the text.

The assemblage is thus endowed with its own unique collective voice. This voice overcomes the need for empathy, for mere identification with a character and the related ease or otherwise with which this may occur. The assemblage also overturns notions of the embrace and readerly submission to the text. The assemblage created through becoming is an equal balance; one part cannot dominate over any other, all parts change reciprocally in their becoming. The voice that readers “hear” when reading does not belong to the reader, author, or character, but to this assemblage.

While Andrea Schwenke Wyile’s concepts of engaging narration come close to describing the “intensely personal relationship that [readers] develop with the central character” (116) in a state that exists

before becoming, traditional narratological terms such as *autodiegetic* or *homodiegetic*, *first-* or *third-person*, cannot adequately describe this collective voice of the assemblage and the twofold dynamic it provokes. For Claire Colebrook, “It is in free-indirect style that literature discloses language as a ‘collective assemblage’” (112). Free-indirect style provides an indirect representation of characters. Pronouns and tags do not indicate who owns the narration; instead, there is a distortion of character and narrator perspectives. Colebrook goes on to write that free-indirect style

frees language from its ownership by any subject of enunciation, [and] we can see the flow of language itself, its production of sense and nonsense, its virtual and creative power. This is why free-indirect style merges with stream of consciousness. Free-indirect style uses the third person to describe single characters from the point of view of a received and anonymous language. (114)

For Barbara Wall, Enid Blyton deliberately employed a similar device throughout her oeuvre, whereby “[t]he pervading tone of the dialogue becomes inescapably blended with the narrative voice. The narrator briefly recounts an action and then slides imperceptibly into the thoughts of the character” (191). For a more salient example of the fusion of narrator’s voice with that of the protagonist, Wall credits

Ivan Southall’s *Josh* (1971). His present participles “obliterate the distance between narrator and character and momentarily create the impression that Josh himself is putting his own experience into words, and is speaking to himself, becoming in a sense, both narrator and narratee” (250). In the Kamo series, the simulacry of narration previously discussed similarly frees that narration from any form of ownership, as any notion of ownership is lost in the illusionary layering of the characters.

### ***Zeroth Voice***

Just as all becomings head toward the becoming-imperceptible, so the assemblage that is created through becoming puts us on the path to that which is outside subjectivity. Deleuze borrows the concept of the “fourth person singular” (*Logic* 103) from Lawrence Ferlinghetti—it appears in the French translation of *Her* (1960) and is incorporated into the more recent poem *To the Oracle at Delphi*—to express the voice of the assemblage. The verse in which it occurs reads,

Far-seeing Sybil, forever hidden,  
Come out of your cave at last  
And speak to us in the poet’s voice  
the voice of the fourth person singular  
the voice of the inscrutable future  
the voice of the people mixed  
with a wild soft laughter—

And give us new dreams to dream,  
Give us new myths to live by! (93)

This verse captures the essence of a multiple voice of the rhizome, of “people mixed,” creative, and dynamic. While Deleuze’s term *fourth person singular* is radical in itself, it is not without its difficulties and, in particular, Deleuze’s insistence on “singular” appears almost at odds with the inherent multiplicity of the concept. While the collective assemblage, the fusion of all separate parts to become one, may go some way to explaining this insistence on the singular, the assemblage in itself can never be that clearly and simply “singular”: it is both singular and plural. I propose, therefore, that the voice of the collective assemblage be described as the *zeroth voice*.

In thermodynamics,

[the zeroth law] states that if two objects, A and B, are at thermal equilibrium with each other and if B is at thermal equilibrium with a third object, C, then A is also at thermal equilibrium with C. This fact is important enough to be called a law of thermodynamics, and is so basic that it needs to precede the other laws, but the other laws had already been numbered before people figured out how important this law is, so it is called the zeroth law. (Mortimer 100)

In narrative theory, a zeroth voice would equally be more fundamental than the voice of a first, second, or third person, existing in the absence of, or before the imposition of, any defined grammatical person, in the flow that is the assemblage. The term *zeroth* also brings us closer, I believe, to the fundament of the Deleuzian simulacrum and the expression of pure difference that it represents. The zeroth voice would not be negative in the sense of being null and worth nothing, but would rather be groundless, containing all other voices but not imposing any one of them. The zeroth voice would form “[a] new type of esoteric language [. . .] which is its own model and reality” (Deleuze, *Logic* 141), the language of the assemblage, the voice of becoming, but, more specifically, the voice of becoming-imperceptible, avoiding any reduction to one given person only.

While we can identify distinct traits that characterize Kamo (his determination, his crazy ideas, his love of cooking, his fear of cycling, his passion for *Wuthering Heights*, etc.) it is not possible to do the same with Toi. Nameless, anonymous, amorphous, Toi puts out a groundless, simulacral tracing. It is precisely because Toi is so indiscernible that becoming-imperceptible may arise from a reading of him. In his simulacrity, he is already on the path to the imperceptible; his own self is effaced in his groundlessness. Through any becomings with Toi, the reader may open up to possibilities beyond the bounds of any subjectivity. Instead of looking



. . . with Deleuze, I believe we can insist on the next step, the death of the self and the birth of the imperceptible assemblage and its unique voice, the zeroth voice.



inward to the self and one's identity, "[t]he becoming-imperceptible is about reversing the subject toward the outside: a sensory [. . .] stretching of our boundaries. It is a way of living more intensively and of increasing one's potentia with it" (Braidotti 156). Becoming with the infinity of reflections that are Toi therefore opens the possibility for the zeroth voice, for the language of the assemblage.

To clarify how this zeroth voice might be attained and what it might mean to a young reader, it is worth elaborating on Deleuze's broader philosophical stance. Throughout his work, Deleuze commits himself to *transcendental empiricism*. Empirical philosophies foreground experience, and the importance Deleuze attaches to such experience and experimentation is clear from his work. He recommends experimenting with literature until a book can be found that "works for you," stating, "We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 4). The intensities resulting from experimentation with literature may be sensory, but experience should not stop at what can be sensed or observed. Experience cannot truly occur without going beyond perception; indeed, Deleuze's empiricism becomes transcendental because of the emphasis he places on experience outside perception. Becoming-imperceptible is therefore crucial in Deleuzian philosophy because, for him, it is not possible to experience only through perception. For Deleuze, transcendental empiricism allows the hierarchy of what *is* to be rejected, and shifts the focus to what *becomes*. For Deleuze, the ultimate use of becoming is to become-imperceptible, unrelated to who we *are* and detached from our senses.

When a reader is unable to get beyond the meaning or ideology of

a text, we should point him/her beyond its reduction to a general theme to the infinity of links with the external environment and the virtual journey triggered by reading. For Deleuze, every book “transmits intensities”: it functions *with* and transmits intensities to an external body. In this connection to a unique reader, the related flow of intensity releases the expansive potential of the book, changing and ultimately going beyond our perception. A passage from Robert Louis Stevenson’s “A Gossip on Romance,” while romantic and idealized, captures the all-consuming, intensive, and almost otherworldly experience that reading that leads to becoming-imperceptible can be:

In anything fit to be called by the name of reading, the process itself should be absorbing and voluptuous, we should gloat over a book, be rapt clean out of ourselves, and rise from the perusal, our mind filled with the busiest kaleidoscopic dance of images, incapable of sleep or of continuous thought. (151)

If becoming-imperceptible is achieved, then the reader is “rapt clean out of” the self and given access to a new voice that exists only in the creative flow that is the collective assemblage. The zeroth voice overcomes any authorial voice, any narratorial voice, any solipsistic voice, but reaches a voice that precedes all of these. It is a voice that is inherently enabling and liberating

because it goes beyond the limited horizon of the self, beyond the need for identification with another, and endows us with possibilities of as yet non-realized potential. It allows readers to escape the bounds of the imposed voices of the text. It is, therefore, this zeroth voice that we should hope will prevail when reading. Where Roland Barthes is renowned for requiring the death of the author and the birth of the reader (148), with Deleuze, I believe we can insist on the next step, the death of the self and the birth of the imperceptible assemblage and its unique voice, the zeroth voice. When Deleuze claims that the only questions we should ask of a book are “[d]oes it work, and how does it work?” (*Negotiations* 8), he is asking if this intense zeroth voice is created.

To look for voice in fiction from a Deleuzian perspective is not to look for the overtones of authorial voice or the distinct voice of a character, but to look for the assemblage between these voices and that of the reader. This article has demonstrated how characters and the voices they present are not as straightforward as they would appear, but are, rather, composed of a multitude of subject positions vying for consideration. Readers required to empathize with or embrace this many-faced narrator-protagonist find themselves in a rhizome of simulacral subject positions. Deleuze’s notions of major and minor modes of literature point toward the somewhat minor nature of juvenile fiction; while such a description does not apply completely,

the collective voice or collective assemblage of enunciation, the cornerstone of minor literature, is relevant. This collective assemblage, achieved through the simulacral proliferation of subject positions, avoids all subjectivity, and is enunciated through the zeroth voice. For Deleuze, it is only these assemblages, necessarily collective, that create “voice.”

McGillis writes “to save the reader from the reign of awful darkness and silence, we must give him voice; to save the text, we must save its voice” (“Calling” 25), and, “what I am arguing for is a liberation from

hermeneutics” (28); a Deleuzian approach provides this. Criticism therefore moves away from identifying meaning toward looking for ways in which becoming-imperceptible and the zeroth voice may be attained. Criticism becomes experimental, discovering with what a text functions, “in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand 4*), shifting the hierarchy of what *is* to what *becomes*. Wanting readers to be able to “call a voice out of the silence of the text” is, from a Deleuzian perspective, wanting the zeroth voice to be “heard.”

<sup>1</sup> Appearing on this list guarantees sales and readership, and ensures that books will be read in schools, but it also leads to the situation where, as Jean Perrot notes in his article on French children’s literature in the *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children’s Literature*, French publishing for children is “too rigidly bound to literature and school” (718).

<sup>2</sup> Titles from Pennac’s Malaussène saga available in English include: *The Scapegoat*, *Fairy Gunmother*, *Monsieur Malaussene*, *Passion Fruit*, and *Write to Kill*. From the Kamo series, only *L’évasion de Kamo*

is available in English, translated by Sarah Adams as *Kamo’s Escape*.

<sup>3</sup> All translations from Pennac’s work are my own.

<sup>4</sup> In *Radical Change: Books for Youth in a Digital Age*, Eliza Dresang considers literature for young people as rhizomatic. Dresang also draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of plateaus, but her emphasis on the creation of plateaus within texts as a means to pause and assimilate meaning is at odds with Deleuze and Guattari’s anti-hermeneutic stance. Plateaus, the nodules of the rhizome, are not a place for

calmly pausing to acquire meaning: as Brian Massumi remarks in his foreword to the English translation of *A Thousand Plateaus*, “a plateau is reached when circumstances combine to bring an activity to a pitch of intensity that is not automatically dissipated in a climax” (xiv).

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze insists that the only questions to ask of a book are: “Does it work, and how does it work?” (*Negotiations* 8). The tracing must, then, provide something that works for the reader. While this might mean something that directly appeals to the reader, a tracing can also be the antithesis of the familiar and reassuring, if that is what the reader seeks.

<sup>6</sup> I have previously called this assemblage the read(er)-character (see Newland).

<sup>7</sup> In *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity*, Robyn McCallum demonstrates that Bakhtin’s theories on dialogism, “that an individual’s consciousness and sense of identity is formed in dialogue with others” (3), are particularly relevant to adolescent fiction. She shows that “ideas about and representations of subjectivity are always inherent in the central concerns of this [adolescent] fiction: that is, in the concerns with personal growth and maturation, and with relationships between the self and others, and between individuals and the world, society or the past” (256). She goes on to suggest that research into adolescent literature fails to address the importance of this issue of subjectivity, and she demonstrates the way in which a Bakhtinian approach may be used to this end

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