

Research Directions

Office of Research Services



Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995)

I Think, Therefore... Literature as a way of thinking

Associate Professor Anthony Uhlmann from the School of Humanities and Languages and the Writing and Society Research Group, is examining the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's idea of 'the image of thought' in relation to literature. This Australian Research Council Discovery Grant will examine the representation of thought in works by nine major writers.

Art, in this case, literature offers a particular way of thinking, drawing upon images and emotions, which differs from other ways of thinking such as those developed by science and philosophy. Philosophy, for example, offers us a model of how to think by linking together concepts, whereas literature can offer a picture of thinking at work (in stream of consciousness novels, for example) or provoke readers to thought – asking them to interpret by drawing on emotions and cognitive processes.

The representation of thought and how it induces an audience to think will be examined in important works by nine writers from three periods of the twentieth and early twenty first centuries. Conclusions as to the kind of thinking made possible through literature will be drawn both from philosophical and scientific models of thought and consciousness and contrasted with the effects and images created by the works of literature themselves.

The works being examined are by writers with a specific interest in thinking and consciousness: James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, Iris Murdoch, Bret Easton Ellis, J.M. Coetzee and Toni Morrison.

'The idea that the arts offer important ways of thinking has, to an extent, recently fallen from view' says Dr Uhlmann. 'By not recognising the value of the arts as distinct modes of thought that challenge us to think and feel, the community becomes impoverished. Academics need to communicate ideas that have been developed through scholarship to the general community to counteract this misconception'.

The study will result in a book that will be of interest to scholars around the world with an interest in literature and literary criticism. Uhlmann will also convene events and seminars to discuss ideas related to thinking in the arts.

Anthony Uhlmann's monograph on Samuel Beckett, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image* will be published by Cambridge University Press this year.

Funding has been set at \$80,360. Project Title: *The Image of Thought: Literature as a way of thinking.* Hear Anthony Uhlmann's talk on Vladimir Nabokov on ABC Radio National's 'Perspective' program.

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