OPPORTUNITIES OF CONTACT:
DERRIDA AND DELEUZE/GUATTARI ON TRANSLATION

By

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This work engages with three contemporary thinkers who offer directions for a philosophy of translation. The initial thesis is that translation is a privileged mode of examining difference in language, because it indicates both the necessity to bring what is irreducibly other or foreign into terms of familiarity, and the extreme difficulties, perhaps the impossibility, of such an enterprise. I examine the particular responses to this translation dilemma given by Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guattari, ultimately arguing that although Derrida gives crucial insights into the problem itself, a future theory of translation would need to go beyond Derrida’s approach and adopt the radically pragmatic approach to language articulated by Deleuze and Guattari. Throughout, I examine this problem in terms of the distinction between Derrida as a philosopher of transcendence and Deleuze and Guattari as philosophers of immanence.

Derrida’s work insists on the impossibility of representing the other in language, and his simultaneous necessity and impossibility of translation is valuable insofar as it offers resistances to the presumptions of translation as standing in for the other. I argue, however, that Derrida’s insistence on impossibility as marked in the performativity of language itself is ultimately unable to give us a satisfying account of the relation between language and the world, which leaves us with no direction for how we might engage with concrete problems in actual translation situations in a productive way.

The central problem with Derrida’s view is his insistence on the model of interlingual translation as figuring the paradox of difference in language. The approach of Deleuze and Guattari reverses this order and re-conceives of translation in a pragmatic context, where inter-semiotic translations are uniquely able to release the creative power of language. Through their articulation of the expressivity of matter, Deleuze and Guattari place language in a wider context in which it is intricately engaged in a world. I place translation in this wider context in order to demonstrate how Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking
about language allows us to re-conceive of translation practices as opportunities for transformations of both language and world.
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INTRODUCTION

The Translation Impasse and its Opportunities

If translation is an activity that is becoming more common and more necessary in our increasingly globalizing world, it also provides a way of thinking about language that is singularly insightful. And as the difficulties of negotiating across incommensurabilities lead to more sophisticated analyses of what happens in translation and in language in any of its activities, this progress in turn can inform actual translation practices in ways that both increase sensitivity to what resists the usual methods and that recognize and seize upon the distinct opportunities that translations offer us. More broadly, questions about why and how we translate can function as privileged points of access to considerations of difference in language in general. Translation is privileged in this sense because it is when we try to translate, to ‘say otherwise’, that many long-held presumptions about language seem to come undone. We can no longer take for granted that we can know that which is not already anticipated in our own languages. To put in question this saying-otherwise is to ask about how our own languages can give us what our own languages do not give us.

This paradoxical question is what the following pages explore. My initial thesis, following Jacques Derrida, is that if translation is necessary it is because the foreign is irreducibly so, because there is no real equivalence by which a translation would demonstrate that the foreign text gives us that which we could say equally well in terms already familiar. This replaces the usual analyses of how best to ascertain what familiar expressions correspond to the foreign expression with the larger concern for how to let what is irreducibly other into language, how to mark or preserve or encounter the other without
reducing this to what we already know, to the presumed universal meanings for which language is thought to function as a mere vehicle of expression.

The difficulties of inter-lingual translations in light of this problematic demonstrate the limitations of correspondence theories of language. If language simply refers to things then translators would only have to figure out what things were being referred to and refer to them in the target language. But the experiences of translators seem overwhelmingly to have shown the referential use of language to be only one possible function of language and an extremely limited one. Translators simply do not find the things being referred to without passing through some subjective interpretation that must take into account the very forms of language itself. But the view that language is primarily referential persists in many analyses that imagine a source text that conveys something that we can access outside of the language in which it is expressed. Language can refer to concepts or ideas or themes as well as objects, and it remains a common view that translation can somehow simply reproduce such references.

If thinking about translation has for the most part long surpassed this naïve view in recognizing that the translator’s work is far more complex and sophisticated, much of it still remains limited by the extent to which it fails to recognize what these difficulties are telling us about the source text itself, the original, and even about our most basic assumptions regarding language. Innovative thinkers on translation like Derrida urge us to radically re-think what meaning might be and to consider the possibility that there is an event of meaning or language that is not in fact communicable. This further challenge to the view of language as communication opposes the notion that language merely conveys what any language can accommodate with a view that language might be doing something altogether different than
representing a world. This is not to deny that we do communicate, that we can use language in this way, but it is to propose that there are deeper possibilities in language that underlie and make possible our very forms of communication. And it is in such deeper possibilities that we get real insight into what I am calling the paradox of translation – the necessity of translating what at least appears as untranslatable.

It is in fact Derrida who has most insightfully drawn out the terms of a paradox of translation, but my own formulation of the paradox proposes a slight modification. Derrida’s paradox demonstrates that translation is both necessary and impossible, and for the same reasons: necessary because only translation can give us what is irreducibly other and therefore both in need of and worth translating, impossible because of this very irreducibility. I propose to suspend the question of whether irreducibility implies the finality of a structural impossibility, because my concern is to find a way beyond the impasse to which Derrida brings us. Thus my question: how can our own languages give us what our own languages do not give us?

It is my contention that while Derrida’s impasse gives us crucial insights into the stakes of translation, a path can and must be forged beyond a marking of this impossibility and towards productive responses that might successfully allow us encounters with the irreducibly other in ways that transform both source and target, both the familiar and the foreign. Using the analyses of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari I argue that this requires a shift from thinking about translation in terms of the problems specific to the inter-lingual to a model of inter-semiotic transformations in which language is only one among the various terms of exchange. Although my ultimate concern is translation in the broad sense that includes inter-semiotic translations and inter-cultural exchanges in any form, I argue that
inter-lingual translations themselves must be placed in this broader field. Derrida uses the model of the inadequation revealed in inter-lingual translations as figuring all inter-human relations, which he conceives of primarily as language-relations. My proposal is to reverse this order that stays with impossibility and to see how inter-semiotic and inter-cultural transformations, such as Deleuze and Guattari conceive of them, can inform a more productive thinking about translation and its implications.

_Derrida and Untranslatability_

Derrida’s reflections on language and translation are immensely powerful and insightful and it is not my aim to discredit or disprove his view of translation as impossibility. My discussion and analysis of his paradox here is not a mere setting-up of the terms to be torn down, rather I argue that thinking about translation in terms of the impossibility of representing the other as Derrida does is a crucial part of the re-thinking of translation that I propose. What Derrida primarily contributes to this discussion is an exposing of the errors of our common ways of thinking about language as representation and communication.

In place of representation and communication, Derrida offers a model of language in which translation is the primary function. And it is translation such as he conceives of it that exposes the errors of our taking for granted that there is some thing to be translated, some identifiable and representable meaning to be found in language. Translation as figuring all of the activities of language demonstrates the sense in which the meaning of what we say cannot be said otherwise without loss or betrayal, because it fixes into a particular expression that which by definition cannot be identified. Translation indicates that meaning is the very play _between_ the terms that we wrongly imagine to carry identifiable meanings. Thus the
activity of translation and not its products is what is at the core of language. As such, its products can never measure up to this sense of translation itself as the meaning of language.

I think Derrida is right to subordinate language as representation and communication to language as an activity of making-other or saying OTHERWISE, and I develop some of the insights of this view, in particular with respect to the political. Derrida does not simply give us a theory of how language works, but in attempting to do so also draws out the political implications of his view through developing the ways in which the illusions of representation and communication, of homogeneity and transparency in language, are from the first politically motivated, even if language as a functioning system itself tends towards such illusions. Derrida demonstrates that the errors in the way we think about language are not simply misguided but also dangerous.

The view that language is a mere vehicle for the objective expression of what is universal and therefore translatable is harmful because it allows us the assumption that the world that our language gives us is the only world, and causes us to ignore the ways in which our particular languages constrict us to particular and limited ways of perceiving and navigating a world. The myth of pure or transparent language that ‘reconciles’ differences and incommensurabilities is, in Derrida’s analysis, the source of a ‘universalist violence’ that subjects what is other to standards of ideality that are merely the ideals of a politically dominating force. In this context, to translate is to assume that my own language can already accommodate anything that can be expressed, and thus legitimates the imposition of my language on the other.

If the world is in fact given in and therefore limited by the language I speak, as Derrida believes it to be, then it seems that attention to translation might become the problem
of how to open my language up to possibilities that remain beyond the scope of such limitations. But although Derrida’s work on translation implicitly raises this possibility, his own sense of what is beyond a particular language leaves behind anything particular that the other language might teach me in offering a different set of limitations and possibilities. His concern is to suspend all particular ways of articulating a world in the concern for the wholly other that cannot come into any language, but persists between languages. What Derrida would rescue from universalist violence is not different ways of seeing and experiencing the world but the very possibility of relation (which implies a term that is other to which I relate, which very often for Derrida is the human other) that simultaneously makes possible and destabilizes every different articulation of the world.

A genuine relation for Derrida is one that brings into relation what simultaneously remains apart in absolute difference and otherness, only in this way ensuring that there is anything to say. But this holding-apart can never be captured in any particular expression of language, in any particular thing said. This is differéance as the ungrounding of the stability of all linguistic form. The meaning of language is this instability itself, the play that ensures that no linguistic form can dominate or represent any other in a translation that would efface the difference that makes relation possible.

Hence the paradox: that speaking and writing is really translation means that language is only possible because it is impossible to translate. To guard against linguistic violence is then to resist translation, to resist the myth of universality by demonstrating the impossibility of translating. It is to speak and write in order to perform a task whose goal is the impossible. This is how Derrida turns impossibility to its positive face. It is the desire for the impossible, for the other as irretrievably other than myself, that language as translation
performs. Thus translation as an activity whose products can never measure up, since what it
aspire to is the impossible itself.

As an ethical concern, these reflections on language are immensely powerful. To
 guard against reducing the other to my already familiar terms, is to be interrupted in my
presumptions to be able to represent and to translate. And the task of multiplying resistances
to such presumptions is that of standing back before the human other, certain only that there
is difference and no certain terms of measure between us. Politically speaking this is the
possibility of a community founded only on difference itself and not any particular
articulation of differences, founded only on the resistance to universalist presumptions,
Derrida’s community of true friendship. I argue that the possibility of such a community is a
good start to beginning to address the problems of the linguistic hegemonies that threaten to
efface the differences that give us possibilities of meaningful exchange and interaction.

But I also raise a critique regarding what I see as the limitations of Derrida’s
perspective. The efforts that he makes in some of his works in the direction of giving a
genuinely performative theory of language that would determine meaning in terms of forces
and context, comes close to articulating a relationship between language and a material
world. But this account is ultimately superseded by Derrida’s sense of language as
testimony. Testimony seems to amount to the meaning of language itself as performativity,
as the possibility of relation that is offered by the impossibility of transparent language. Thus
in order to suspend the reduction of the other to what my language can tell me, Derrida
suspend the possibility of determinable meanings in actual performances. His reflections on
the performative dimension of iterability are ultimately grounded in the inadequation that
makes the relation to the other possible only because we can never capture that relation in
any given expression or inscription. In his explicitly political concerns Derrida articulates this as the human other, the relation to whom makes my speaking possible. But this in turn is merely one kind of relation that différance makes possible insofar as it is the holding-apart itself that makes any coming-together in language (im)possible.

This primacy of the concern for what cannot be said in language ultimately leaves us without any account of how language might gives us a world in its actual forms and expressions. Any particular thing that language might say is reduced by Derrida to the meaning of language itself. Even where deconstruction is meant to release the suppressed other in the text, to articulate perhaps the particular other whose repression makes the text possible, this other is only the term that opposes that which appears in the text. What deconstruction ultimately offers beyond binary terms is only the meaning of language as possible on condition of the exclusion of the other.

Because Derrida is concerned to find ways for language to resist representation, I argue that his analyses remain within the terms of this very representation, such that his work does not offer ways to think about language as doing something other than representing. To represent is to take for granted something that might be presented in the first place, might be made-present, and Derrida’s procedure is to put in question this possibility of making-present in language. Performativity becomes the meaning of language itself – language is above all performativity as testimony because this figures the sense in which language holds out a saying against any said. But then the meaning of language itself as testimony is nothing but a resistance to representation. And it offers only these two alternatives: represent in language and lose the relation that makes language possible, or resist representation by refusing any
particular determination of meaning. I argue that Deleuze and Guattari offer us a way beyond these unsatisfying alternatives.

_Derrida and Transcendence_

Derrida’s preoccupation with language and with translation makes him an obvious respondent to the question I have posed. It might be less clear why I have chosen to read Deleuze and Guattari on the question of translation, since it is not evident that translation is even of much concern in their work. But to some degree it is this very lack of preoccupation with language and with translation in the narrow inter-linguistic sense that I think ultimately brings fresh insight to the particular way in which they view language and its possibilities. Deleuze and Guattari give an extremely innovative yet plausible account of how language is directly engaged in a world and how meaning relies not on a chain of signification but on this very engagement. In this context translation takes on a very different sense.

But before I outline Deleuze and Guattari’s own response in more detail I want to discuss what I see as some very important shared concerns between Deleuze/Guattari and Derrida. To begin with, Deleuze and Guattari are attempting to expose some of the very same illusions about language as is Derrida, illusions that they also see as genuinely harmful. The most common target in their extended critique of the science of linguistics is the view that language itself is neutral, and that a scientific study of language can analyze its workings apart from any actual utterances in real-world contexts. And it is this blindness to the fact that even science is driven by political forces that makes such assumptions so dangerous for exactly the reasons also outlined by Derrida. At the most basic level, then, Deleuze and
Guattari agree with Derrida that language only *leads us to believe* that there is universality, and that in fact it is always appropriated by particular political forces.

The importance of this basic agreement cannot be underestimated, because what it means is that like Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari are concerned in their analyses to dispel illusions of language as representation and communication. Deleuze has said, sounding a great deal like Derrida, that language is not a matter of transparent communication between those who understand one another, but is *for translation.* In this he demonstrates an affinity with Derrida regarding the opacity and heterogeneity of meaning and indeed agrees that there is a fundamental impossibility that actually structures our language use. It could be said that Deleuze and Guattari share with Derrida the following thesis: it is only possible to encounter what is other in language because the other does not appear in language as represented, because otherness cannot be transparently communicated. Deleuze and Guattari would have no objection in general to the claim that it is a fundamental impossibility that makes meaningful contact with what is not reducible to the already-known possible. And like Derrida’s their work is constantly exploring that possibility and its weighty political implications. The reflections on language of both Derrida and Deleuze/Guattari aim to release the power of difference such that language might both expose the pretensions of a world that is limited by particular linguistic forms and give us what exceeds that order, exceeds our very power to know. In this they are both responding to the more general question of how language can give us more than what is already familiar and anticipated.

It is in terms of their specific articulations of the problem of translation, however, that I believe the views of Deleuze and Guattari significantly diverge from those of Derrida.
While many readers have drawn important comparisons between Deleuze and Derrida\(^1\), it is my view that the affinities do not go particularly deep. They remain at the level of political motivations, and if they have both identified difference as that which must be sought in language, the directions they take from here are extremely different. While Derrida is above all concerned with respecting the absolute otherness of the other by refusing to bridge the gap, Deleuze and Guattari look at what actually happens in that gap in particular instances. I claimed above that Derrida sees the activity of translation as superseding any of its results, but ultimately what this means for Derrida is that language is the continual performance of the impossibility of bridging the gap as desire for the absolute other. Deleuze and Guattari see translation indeed as the very activity of making-other. And for them it is this activity itself, and the particular becomings-other that happen in language in its relation to the world, that supersede any absolute other or pure relation that might be betrayed in such an act.

The manner in which I propose to draw this distinction is in the terms of transcendence and immanence, describing Derrida’s différance as a quasi-transcendent (quasi-)concept, and Deleuze and Guattari’s virtual as immanent. The former requires some defense; while Deleuze and Guattari give an unashamedly immanent account of language and meaning, Derrida’s différance is certainly not meant to be an (at least fully) transcendent concept. Derrida at times calls différance transcendental, since it is the condition of possibility of language, but as with every one of his concepts even this remains only a quasi-concept, or a concept under erasure. Without opening the larger question of metaphysics and deconstruction, suffice it to say that différance is only quasi-transcendental because as

\(^1\) The collection of essays entitled *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, (Patton and Protevi 2003) for example, contains far more analysis of ways in which Deleuze and Derrida are the same than ways in which their paths diverge.
condition of possibility it serves only to unground - to simultaneously provide a condition of impossibility. We have seen above the way in which translation figures this paradox of language. But I am taking a further step in articulating Derrida’s difféance as quasi-transcendent.

Even if Derrida would not subscribe to this quasi-transcendence, I think the distinction between transcendence and immanence is an effective way to compare these two very different approaches to language and translation. I take this direction from Daniel Smith, who, following Giorgio Agamben (Agamben 1999), elaborates these not as terms of opposition but as two differing ‘philosophical trajectories’, two broad directions that philosophy has taken since and out of Heidegger (Smith 2003, 46-7). It is my view that Smith’s way of developing these as relative terms is extremely helpful to the task of pinpointing exactly what it is in Derrida’s work that limits his analyses of language, and subsequently what it is in Deleuze and Guattari’s work that allows them to go beyond, as I argue they do.

As Smith points out, it is much easier to place Emmanuel Lévinas on the side of transcendence, because of his overtly theological orientation. Derrida has certainly distanced himself in this particular respect from Lévinas, dispensing with at least the overt references to God’s transcendence as the ultimate meaning of the human other. But despite occasional attempts to disassociate himself from theology, Derrida nonetheless retains a sense of the other as transcendent in that the other is always beyond what is possible in an actual world. Yes this does generate, in Derrida’s view, a possibility of encounter, but it is a possibility that retains the structure of a possibility such that it can never be an actuality. It is the possibility of an interruption of the actual in the form of what is actually impossible.
Smith’s argument rests on the articulation of what he sees as the contemporary form of transcendence, particular to phenomenology, as always indeed constituting a *breech* in a field of immanence. That which is neither *x* nor not *x*, he shows, only appears as interrupting every term of opposition. And this is exactly what différance is for Derrida. It resists the oppositions – sensible vs. intelligible, speech vs. writing, etc. – because it is beyond the terms of the oppositions themselves. It is beyond insofar as it structures or regulates everything in the field of immanence but never itself enters into that field.

It might be objected that this constitutes the transcendental but not the transcendent. But insofar as Deleuze and Guattari are themselves self-proclaimed transcendentalists, the contrast requires this further distinction in the *kind* of transcendentalism each espouses. Deleuze has called himself a transcendental empiricist, claiming that what he is after are the conditions of real experience, starting from those experiences themselves and trying to find in them the differential force that makes them what they are and at the same time gives them the virtual capacity to be otherwise. Derrida on the other hand examines the conditions of an experience that is only possible, never actual, and as such the condition is required in order to explain what cannot be accounted for immanently. This is what can be seen as the vestigial trace of theology in Derrida’s work, the necessity of a *beyond* that accounts for the field of experience.

Derrida’s is not a positive theology that posits a divine principle, to be sure, but it seems clear that différance is at least a negative theological concept. As Smith writes, “although Derrida refuses to assign any content to this transcendence, what he retains from the tradition is its formal structure” (Smith 2003, 54). This formal transcendence is indeed what I see as the central limitation in Derrida’s work on language and translation. The
strategy that Derrida employs to avoid reducing the other to a self-present knowing is to defer meaning futurally through signification in a chain that must always wait to be read. This shows that if for Derrida meaning in language is always tied to a real-world context, this context and this meaning are always interrupted by the other as transcending any such context. I insist on drawing out this transcendence in Derrida’s work because I believe that his focus on impossibility presents the same problem that all transcendent accounts of meaning carry - a suspension of possibilities of actual human activities out of deference/deferral to that which we cannot know in itself.

If for Derrida it is the meaning of language as a formal relation that is at stake, for Deleuze and Guattari the sense of otherness is left somewhat more open. When they discuss the concept of ‘becoming-other’, for example, they are simply indicating the possibility of breaking out of the limits of our most basic ontological assumptions. Although Derrida leaves every interpretation of any specific other open, his insistence on the irreducibility of the formal relation of self and other could be seen in Deleuze/Guattarean terms as one of those sets of assumptions that a becoming-other might leak out of. For my part, I propose to also leave open the question of what kind of otherness we are really looking for here, as in a Deleuze/Guattarean framework this very question is that which cannot be decided in advance of specific instances. For Deleuze and Guattari ‘the other’, ‘the foreign’, or ‘the novel’ are all ways of indicating that which we do not yet know, and more importantly that which we cannot know without being ourselves irrevocably changed. So for me, the question about translation is the question about the unpredictable: how can language give us opportunities for encounter that reveal or produce what we cannot anticipate from out of our languages such as they are?
So if the shared general concern between Derrida and Deleuze/Guattari in terms of language is that of ‘the other’, their sense of what exactly this gives us is very different. If they are concerned to show that language does more than communicate what is already there, it is in order to assign it a creative and productive role, because only in this way might we ever get from language what we don’t already have. Derrida finds in language the possibility that we might encounter the other as what interrupts presumptions of universal and transparent meaning through the production of resistances. For Deleuze and Guattari releasing the genuinely new out of the old is the goal. But their view of novelty is such that it emerges out of the possibility of entering our forms of language into becomings in which actual utterances might break out of a linguistic order that limits their power to transform. The novel is not a relation of not-knowing, of not-being-able-to-say, but is a becoming in which the terms are transformed by contact in a way that could not have been anticipated by either term from its starting-point. From Deleuze and Guattari we get the productivity of language in actual relations, rather than a formal relation that suspends the meaning and legitimacy of any specific relations.

Deleuze and Guattari on The Virtual

By contrast with différance the virtual, as Deleuze and Guattari elaborate it, remains immanent to the field of experience. As real as the actual, the virtual inheres in the world that we experience but describes the sense in which every actual contains capacities that exceed the relations in which it is presently engaged (DeLanda 2006). It also includes a capacity to be otherwise, that is. At first glance, this looks similar to différance. And with regards to language it is similar insofar as, like différance, it aims to expose the sense in
which an actual utterance or inscription is only possible because it might be otherwise, because it is ultimately contingent. But rather than interrupting discourse in order to ensure that the other escapes my knowledge, the virtual serves to open up a wider field of real options and opportunities for transformation.

Deleuze and Guattari articulate the relation between language and world such that expressivity indicates the capacity of physical systems to function also semiotically. In other words, physical systems are composed of bodies, but bodies also have significance. This semiotic function is possible only because of a margin of freedom in which the physical can express itself in various different ways. Every actual expression of a body’s significance depends upon the particular sets of relations in which it functions - a pragmatic context – but could be expressed in various other ways in various different contexts. The value of the virtual, then, is its revealing of the wider field of expressive capacities that inhere in every body.

Reciprocally, expressions are ways of putting bodies to work in particular ways, and as such our actual forms of language do not indicate a way that things really are, but rather use particular linguistic choices in order to enforce particular ways of seeing things. Looking at the virtual in language is to see that beyond the particular choices about what is proper or standard in a language lie different possible ways of ordering bodies in physical systems. The virtual as a power of language beyond its present forms is thus a de-centering of the standard. And because the ways of thinking that our ‘correct’ language imposes are not really ways of thinking, but ways of avoiding thinking by simply passing on the dogmas that ordinary language-use insidiously perpetuates, this is an opening up of greater possibilities of language, thought, and physical capacity.
Deleuze and Guattari do not see language as necessarily central to meaning. Expressivity is a category wider than language, which is only one form of articulation of significance and meaning. Meaning emerges on the border between the physical world and expressivity, in a mutual power of transformation. Against this background language has two distinct sides. On the one hand language in its reliance on constants and invariables, structures and homogenizing forms, confines becomings and transformations within its own limits. It cuts up the world in predictable and standardizing ways, forcing becomings into this or that thing with this or that quality, and forcing us to interpret bodies through the limiting categories of a grammatical order. Language in this aspect gives us beings over becomings, rest over motion, results over the very transforming process itself. On the other hand, in the wider context of expressivity language also has the power to disarticulate the particular ways in which it does this and thereby to access the very power through which it is implicated in the transformations of our world, its bodies and its institutions. This power of disarticulation is also its power to create, and creativity is the value of the de-centering that involves returning forms of language to the virtual.

This means that language on the one hand is driven by forces of conservatism that seek to limit and homogenize our forms of life and on the other in its power to undo these very forms it can participate in the creative becomings that might serve life in positive ways. It is for this reason that I see the analyses of Deleuze and Guattari as extremely fruitful for thinking about translation. If translation replaces communication as the activity of language for Deleuze and Guattari it is because it can function either to perpetuate the same old dogmas and clichés or to transform these towards their own greater potential for change and innovation.
For this reason, the manner in which Deleuze and Guattari would treat inter-lingual translation would have to be as a relatively superficial treatment of language. That there is no adequation between languages is a given for them, since for them as for Derrida difference precedes the identities that stop the unrepresentable play of difference. But this is only an impasse if there are no other functions of language beyond reference, reproduction and communication. To some extent inter-lingual translation has little choice but to re-inscribe the normative functions of our languages, perhaps unsettling the particular functions of a particular language, but never getting us to where we might see that beyond a particular language even language itself is a particular choice about how to see the world. In order for language to give us the novel it must itself enter into transformative becomings with other materials and semiotics where it participates in the genuinely creative articulation of bodies and forms of social and political life. This is why Deleuze and Guattari are more concerned with inter-semiotic translations, perhaps more accurately called transformations. Inter-semiotic translation takes language beyond its homogenizing reliance on constants and returns it to a more general power of expressivity. Only in such basic disarticulations might we invent novel functions in actual language-use that can radically change our world.

This allows us to re-conceive of translation without having to remain within the impossibility of representing the other. For Deleuze and Guattari the appropriate response to the irreducibility of the other is to treat it as an opportunity for transformation of both other and same. In other words, what I cannot understand, what cannot communicate itself to me, has the singular power to affect me - but can only do so by meeting me on the level of the differential/virtual in which new capacities of both terms emerge from the specific relations into which such contact enters them. Thus instead of conceiving of translation as an
impossibility that structures the possibility of meaningful relations, we might conceive of translations as opportunities for transformation that can create new forms of life through the increased power of language to reflect upon and subvert its own homogenizing tendencies.

This work proposes, then, to demonstrate both the valuable insights and the ultimate limitations of thinking about translation on the model of inter-lingual inadequation. My first objective in the entirety of this work is to show that both Derrida and Deleuze/Guattari provide extremely rich resources for thinking about translation as the question of difference in language and as the question of the encounter with what is other. I raise a critique against Derrida’s view in order to show that we might go beyond it without leaving it entirely behind. Its ultimate insufficiency lies in its inability to offer productive solutions to the problem of translation. I see this sterility as issuing from the element of transcendence in Derrida’s conception of language, but I do not think that Derrida’s great insights into the challenge of translation need all be abandoned. In fact, much of what Derrida offers can be re-written in the immanent terms of Deleuze and Guattari, which is to say that a great deal of Derrida’s reflections can be accommodated by Deleuze and Guattari’s theory but that this theory has the added value of going beyond and offering positive solutions to the challenges that they both take on. My second aim, then, is both to see where Derrida falls short and why and to see how and why Deleuze and Guattari are able to move beyond.

A final note on the choice of authors and texts. With Derrida I have attempted to be somewhat comprehensive in the texts that I have examined. While I have cited and engaged closely with only certain of them, I have chosen these to highlight the more explicit thinking on translation but have also attempted to place these claims in the larger context of his work as a whole. The texts I have chosen on the other side are more restricted. For the most part,
this is because I wanted to get as close as possible to what Deleuze and Guattari do say about
language in order to extend those analyses to a more explicit ‘theory’ of translation. Unlike
Derrida who is almost everywhere talking ultimately about issues of translation, many of
Deleuze and Guattari’s works simply do not deal even with the question of language in any
explicit way. Thus it was necessary to focus on a more narrow selection. It is certainly not
the case that Deleuze and Guattari’s views on language cannot be discussed in relation to
their wider philosophical works, but this would require considerably more space and a
different orientation.

The two works that I have focused on most extensively, *A Thousand Plateaus* and
*Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature*, both represent the collaboration of Deleuze with
Guattari. I find these to be the most interesting works on the question of language, the most
fruitful for thinking about productive responses to the problems of translation. It seems to be
common for readers to simply cut Guattari out of the equation, for various reasons, but there
is some evidence that it is Guattari himself who contributes to the collaborative works the
specific linguistic insights that I am interested in, and so in fact I seem to find myself
interested more in Deleuze/Guattari than in Deleuze on his own. Specifically, it is the
engagement with and explicit critique of scientific linguistics that Guattari seems to bring to
the mix, where Deleuze’s earlier articulations of a view of language are not as easy to locate
in a discourse in which they might be compared with those of Derrida, for example. As I
have indicated above, it is in objecting to the same assumptions but for very different reasons
that I locate the value both of comparing and of contrasting them. Nonetheless there are
works by Deleuze himself that I think greatly illuminate (and sometimes anticipate or
develop) the collaborative texts, and so I have also used these wherever appropriate.
Outline Of The Work

In Chapter One I begin by discussing in greater detail the *why* of translation and the manner in which Derrida develops the positive value of the diversity of languages. Here I outline some basic objections to correspondence theories of meaning that also sets up in part the later discussion of Deleuze and Guattari insofar as they are working against the same kinds of assumptions. This objection might be broadly construed in two points: 1) both Derrida and Deleuze/Guattari claim that language is for translation and not communication and 2) they demonstrate that it is only *in between languages* that insight into the nature of language is opened up. It will become clear that Derrida and Deleuze/Guattari mean different things by both 1 and 2, but they both launch their discussions from a basic objection to the common or scientific view that language is a neutral medium of communication that is best studied as a homogeneous entity.

Because it is Derrida’s view that translation reveals that it is relation between terms and not the identity of terms that makes meaning possible, he recognizes that it is relation itself – the play of difference - that calls for translation. In some of his analyses, and in his own textual performances, he seems to recognize that the only thing that can be done is to proliferate the play that makes possible the illusions of identity and unity that gives us a ‘source text’ in the first place. But while his own concern for style and performance and his particular suggestions in this direction are interesting, they ultimately give way to a greater sense in which all translations – including such transformative proliferations - are watched over by the impossibility of representing the other. The other in language can only be sufficiently respected by attending to the illegitimacies of our translations as presumptions to
represent. I argue here, then, that the transcendent in Derrida’s thinking on language seems to undo the steps he takes in the direction of translation as transformation, as creative re-distribution of the elements of an utterance with those of a new context or point of contact, because of his concern for keeping vigil over the borders of language as impossible.

In Chapter Two I further develop in Derrida’s work the political aspect that I see as indispensable to our thinking about translation. I show here that Derrida’s insistence on the necessity of guarding against the hegemonies of language is effected through attending to language as performativity, as testimony. Here I articulate the notion of difference in language in its explicitly political implications as Derrida sees them, describing the way that Derrida advocates a community of difference that would resist what he characterizes as the ‘universalist violence’ of translation. Derrida’s analysis of the insecurities of language is what makes possible such resistance, since what we resist is not simply the assimilating of the other but the very notion that we have a language, a mother-tongue, that establishes our right to be at home, to occupy the linguistic space that we do.

But these enormously valuable insights remain with the position of resistance, and though it is a kind of active resistance (through writing and reading practices primarily), it does not offer a beyond of resistance, a way to go forward and create new translations that have positive value as carriers of difference. I argue that Derrida’s analysis in the end gives us broad pronouncements about what language as a whole might be, but that in his writings any particular expression of language is ultimately reduced to the meaning of language as a whole, the formal relation to the other. And because Derrida’s account of language gives us no concrete sense of the connection between language and the world, its results are
somewhat ineffectual. This leaves us with no real insight into how the operation of translation might be made to unleash novel forces for an as-yet unknown future.

In Chapter Three I turn to Deleuze and Guattari, and occasionally Deleuze alone, in order to sketch an outline of the distinction between Derrida’s concern for translation and their own preoccupation with transformation. I introduce and interpret key terms and give a broad account of Deleuze and Guattari’s view of language in order to lay the groundwork for comparing the finer details of their views with those of Derrida. The central focus of this chapter is on demonstrating the way in which language is implicated in the very articulation and indeed the creation of a world. According to Deleuze and Guattari, language as signification is already a stratified, formalized system that can be seen as a particular political commitment. What it is also possible to see in such an analysis is the way that language might be located in its function as the very expressivity of matter and thus be made to work in ways that avoid an unconscious reinforcement of dominant political orders and open up the distinctly transformative capacities of language.

In Chapter Four, I use this broad outline and preliminary terminology to pinpoint more exactly the role of translation in Deleuze and Guattari. Here I explore the notion that for them all translations that really get at the transformativity of language must be inter-semiotic translations, practices that put into motion the capacity of language to disarticulate its own forms beyond political investments and get at an expressivity in which the normative functions of language might be set fleeing by the revolutionary forces of abstract machines. The abstract machine is Deleuze and Guattari’s way of getting to the very relation of expressivity to matter such that we might reconjugate the expressive capacities of matter itself in terms of function. What this means is that by tracing language to a wider field of
expressivity, we get a glimpse of other possibilities of the very construction of reality as different ways of articulating the significance of matter such as we find in genuine scientific revolutions.

Deleuze and Guattari’s 4-fold pragmatic analysis of forms of language demonstrates the procedure by which this discovery of expressivity as function is brought to bear on forms of language. Each level of analysis goes one step deeper in exposing the contingencies of language and of particular forms of expression in order to open up language to the wider virtual continuum that inheres in every form of language that purports to be proper. This discussion allows me to show exactly where Derrida’s impossibility fits in at a relatively superficial level of the capacities of language as Deleuze and Guattari see them. In their view it would have to be the case that inter-lingual translation remains unable to access transformative powers as long as it refuses to be framed in a pragmatic context. This demonstrates quite directly the sense in which Deleuze and Guattari ‘go beyond’ Derrida’s impasse. While placing Derrida’s sense of untranslatability as modeled on inter-linguistic inadequation at a particular place in Deleuze and Guattari’s schema, I also show that even the inter-semiotic translations that they articulate must be subjected to a pragmatic analysis the goal of which is to get to the pure capacities of matter and expressivity in relation.

Chapter Five develops some of the practical implications of Deleuze and Guattari’s views on language as transformativity in terms of minorization as the activity of disarticulating a major language or literature – exposing its power to reflect on and subvert its own forms and the limitations of bodies that are captured by these forms. This furthermore involves the disarticulation of structures of transcendence into the immanent desires that fuel them, revealing that transcendent analyses remain in thrall to a beyond the
belief in which only serves to reinforce a particular political order and blind us to the actual procedures that make up social systems. In reading Kafka as disarticulating forms of language and forms of social life, Deleuze and Guattari reveal the power of minorization as the power of contact, the possibility that instead of referring to a beyond we might see language as a ‘beside’, a process in which we are constantly immersed and which we can never get a hold on only for this reason and not because what we desire is beyond any particular desire.

This analysis makes clear the connection that Deleuze and Guattari see from language to the political in practical terms. If we analyze our forms of social organization and institutions through transcendence, such that a justice system needs to be seen as answering to an absolute Justice, for example, then we fail to see the political forces (forces of actual desires immanent to the social) that drive and maintain illusions of transcendence (and neutrality), fail to see their particular agendas and methods of capture. And this in turn blinds us to the ways in which we might transform repressive and limiting social institutions through exposing the languages and literatures that perpetuate them to their own internal variables. This is the minorization that would expose the contingencies of the major and in doing so open it up to its own virtual and revolutionary capacities.

This discussion also allows me to compare Deleuze and Guattari with Derrida on the notion of a future politics. I argue here that Derrida’s transcendent temporal deferral should be replaced with Deleuze and Guattari’s immanent spatial deferral. If the concern for a ‘future politics’ is shared by both Derrida and Deleuze/Guattari, it is because both are concerned to open up our forms of social and political life to what is not already determined as ensconced in illusions of the necessity, rationality or indeed transcendence, of our
institutions in their current forms. But Derrida’s temporal deferral of the other retains the structure of transcendence in articulating a politics in which particular forms of life are always illegitimate, always a betrayal of a politics that is yet-to-come. Derrida’s work in this respect gives us some direction about what particular forms of life, what particular institutions we should be striving for, but as in his analyses of language this striving is ultimately for an impossible politics, figured by the desire for an impossible Justice. Deleuze and Guattari’s spatial deferral, on the other hand, gives us a way to see the political as that in which we are immersed, as made up of the particular desires of which we are a part. This deferral also means that we cannot reduce future forms of life to current forms, nor to any sense of the way that institutions ‘naturally’ self-develop, but it does so by locating meaning not in a beyond that interrupts forms of life but in the places where predictability is shattered by the contingent in the specific relations that transform us. Either we preserve the future by suspending the present, or we preserve it by accessing the contingency of the present and its virtual continuum.

If the question for a future politics might be formulated in terms of how we can avoid reducing the future to what is already given, then the response can be seen as a matter for translation. On the one hand, we might recognize that language is translation insofar as we are always saying-otherwise, and to preserve the otherness of the other it is necessary to perform the impossibility of knowing-in-advance: the performance of the impossibility of translating. On the other, if language as translation means that it is this very process of saying-otherwise, then it is translation not as impossible but as always mid-way between here and there, always lost in the transformation of what was familiar into what could not be predicted that holds open the yet-to-come. This latter is the direction that would allow us to
proceed to a level of insight that would give us ways to translate that take advantage of situations of contact, in order to create novel becomings that contribute to the flourishing of their terms.

I also include an Epilogue in which I use the insights gained from Deleuze and Guattari to suggest some concrete directions for how experimentation with the forms of language in translation might yield better forms of life. By better forms of life I mean new ways to order the world through language such that we might shake off the conservatism of its standardizing forms and release its power to organize bodies in ways that genuinely respond to events and singularities and the complicated webs in which existence unfolds.

Translation is an important question because we have to translate, but because its difficulties are the very difficulties of our human interactions, examination of its problems and opportunities can give us tremendous insight not simply into the technical aspects of how to do it, but into the very terms of inter-human and intercultural relationships as they impact our world. The implications of a re-thinking of translation might have enormous impact on our thinking about the geo-political situation, and it is this that I develop here in concluding the work. My aim here is both to make explicit the link between translation and geo-politics that comes from Deleuze and Guattari’s views on language as transformativity, and to make suggestions for further thinking about the geo-political future from the perspective of a re-thought translation described explicitly in the terms of taking advantage of situations of contact. Attention to the opportunities of contact are now more than ever needed as the crumbling of an outdated political order calls for new and innovative solutions to the crises and the opportunities of globalization. If we must begin with an awareness of the dangers of translation as the violence of universalist aspirations, we must also take the step forward in
meeting the new relations into which our forms of life might be engaged with the willingness to be surprised by our own capacities to transform.
CHAPTER 1
Derrida: Translation as the Site of Impossibility

“One should never pass over in silence the language into which a discourse on translation is translated”

This claim of Jacques Derrida’s in his essay “Des Tours de Babel”, can be said to capture something central to his claims about translation. Firstly, it simply captures the fact that translation is crucial in Derrida’s writing. For although the claim here is that when it is a matter of translation we must not pass over the actual language in which we receive such a discourse, it will be evident at the end of this section that it would have to be the case for any discourse that attending to the language in which it is expressed is crucial to an authentic reading. Secondly, when we look at what this says about why translation should be so essential, we find a splitting, not between two possible interpretations but between two dimensions of the word.

On the one hand, we could take it as a claim to be interpreted; accordingly, we give various possible readings and/or we open the floor to a general discussion around the theme of translation. Secondly, we could see the very problem of translation announced in this claim at work in the inscription itself. In this latter sense, we recognize first of all that we are already reading the sentence in translation. What would it mean, in this situation, to not pass the language over in silence? Presumably, we would have to consider the words themselves, and in recognizing that they are already translated from a text in the French language, we might consider whether they do, in fact, adequately translate the French inscription. However, even where we can in this way see the performative dimension of language as playing out the very problems of language, we find that we are immediately returned to the
first case in which we take the claim as independent of its particular language, because even though we are attending to the language or languages involved, we are treating what we discover here as generalizable. And this marks, for Derrida, an absolute impossibility that is a structural feature of language, an impossibility that is the problem of translation, the problem both announced and performed by translation and in translation.

Although it is a problem, it is a problem that for Derrida has a positive consequence; the impossibility of translation is also the site at which the différance that is at the heart of language might appear. In attending to this possibility, that is, in marking the very site of untranslatability, we are offered another possible dimension to the claim, a dimension that is nicely demonstrated in the very convention of placing the words of another writer at the start of ones discussion, quite often uninterpreted, at times even unremarked, occasionally untranslated. What we are doing when we offer such a juxtaposition in the form of the epigram is precisely the marking of a limit that leaves the words, even while hopelessly caught in the generality of discourse, at the same time resistant in a way that leaves them both singular and open to multiplicity, ‘shining like the medallion of a proper name’, to use Derrida’s own words.

In this section I will present several topics that help to explain Derrida’s preoccupation with translation. In the course of this explanatory work, I will show how Derrida’s views on language and the way that it functions through différance commits him to a view of translation that takes as its primary concern that which only appears between languages, and which therefore cannot strictly speaking be translated but can be revealed in its untranslatability through a transformation that proliferates an open multiplicity. I will conclude, however, that while this is the view that seems to follow from Derrida’s general
theory of language, it does not sufficiently address his most fundamental claim about translation, which is that the task of the translator is an essentially insolvent debt.

Thus I will subsequently show that this latter claim rests on the structure of transcendence that for Derrida marks an impossibility for which translation as transformation is a merely provisional solution, one that only receives legitimacy from its ability to see itself as necessarily lacking, as a performance of failure at the limit of translatability. It should be clear, furthermore, how these two dimensions of Derrida’s thinking on translation are closely interrelated, but the distinction is important because I will argue later on that the kinds of insights Derrida offers into the possibilities of translation as productive transformation could be preserved without requiring the infinite deferral of transcendence as the desire for the impossible.

Translation Conditions: Meta-language, Semantic Content and Subject-Matter

It has seemed an unassailable claim that the goal of language is to communicate, and yet this has traditionally contained at least one questionable assumption – that there is some thing to be communicated, one that furthermore precedes, or is at least in some way detachable from, that which does the communicating. This ‘content’ has been variously formulated in the philosophy of language, generally as something like “information value” or “semantic content”, and debate continues about just what this might be. Translation studies, in addition, must also consider the larger questions of the subject-matter of a text, most often taking for granted that there is some clear message or coherent world-view to be expressed that might be isolated from its inscription.
Derrida’s work on language attempts to undermine the very basic assumption that there is some content to-be-communicated at work in language, either at the level of texts or at the level of the semantic components of a text, that we could ever hope to get at outside of its utterly particular expressive form. He questions both the notion of semantic content presupposed by so many philosophers of language and the notion that the goal of a text is to communicate a subject-matter.

Generally speaking, the central problem for translation viewed simply as a particular species of communication is that of how the translator might firstly identify the content and secondly express that content in the target language. Since these are most often seen as two distinct steps in the translation process, we immediately come up against the notion of a meta-language. Unless we could always simply point to an object as the meaning of an utterance – and obviously we cannot – it is inevitable that what we want to call ‘meaning’ must be couched in natural language. If the meaning of our language is what is in question, then we need a further language in which to express that meaning. This supposed meta-language is often called “mentalese” because it is meant to get at something like the thought or concept that is expressed, not necessarily pre-linguistic, but at least somehow indifferent to its expressive form.

Derrida rejects this possibility categorically. Not only is the positing of a meta-language easily defeated by a version of the Third Man argument, but it also raises the spectre of a universal language, the kind of logical system that would succeed in avoiding all

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2 In addition, it would quickly become clear that this would not solve the issue anyway, since we would already be in need of some sort of a convention of pointing, as Wittgenstein points out in the *Philosophical Investigations*, and as Roman Jakobson (Jakobson 2000, 139) also observes.

3 Eco, for one, gives an account of this common objection (Eco 2001).
of the pitfalls of natural language. But everything that is avoided in this way, all of the
features of natural languages that cannot be reduced to a system of set relations and
functions, are the very things that Derrida thinks ought to interest us. Thus if a meta-
language were itself a natural language, then it could never mediate absolutely – and this
really is the crux of the Third Man argument – and if it were a logical language then it could
never get at anything of real interest as a question of language.

This is not really an argument against the possibility that there can be something like
informational content to any proposition. After all, quite often the communication of
information is exactly what language is used for. But in the widely accepted claim that the
basic function of the sentence is the transmission of semantically coded information, Derrida
would argue that philosophers of language are mistaking the part for the whole. It is a part,
furthermore, that is particularly effective at evoking the illusion that language can somehow
be separated from what it is has to say.

At the same time, it must be recognized that the translator does indeed have to get a
‘sense’ of what the text is saying in order to say it otherwise. But where exactly do we locate
the sense of a text? If the sense remains embedded within the particularity of its language,
then the sense has already been said. But this means that the sense cannot really
communicate itself beyond its immediate, sensible form. In other words, if the sense is not a
propositional content but is seen as inhering in the words themselves, then there is no extra-
linguistic sense.

This is Saussure’s great insight, which Derrida expresses most succinctly in the essay
“Différence” (Derrida 1982). Here he describes the way that the communicability of
language rests not on transcendent, intelligible meanings, but on the very currency and economy of language as a system of differences. Following Saussure, Derrida describes language as a system of social convention, where the meaning of a word depends not upon a mental entity that grounds it in the world of real things but upon the differences between the words of a language, the particular kinds of distinctions that a language makes. Thus alterity is built into the very structure of language, since the ‘sense’ of any word, and indeed of any expression, rests outside of the word itself and in the differences that play between the words of the language at large.

And if, in this way, the sense of a word or an expression is always that which must be determined by what is other, then we can no longer imagine translation as an activity of faithfully transposing the sense of an expression into a new language. If we are to speak of a sense of the text to be translated that can never be fully situated in either the source language or the target language, nor in a meta-language, then we must look instead to a sense that is ‘at play’ between the two languages committed to the translation.

It becomes clear, then, that where we thought we could isolate content in a source text and then find the appropriate form for expressing it in the target language, all we have is a translator making a decision of some sort, trying out various translations in an attempt to create something that resonates with the source text. The impossibility of meta-language means that these decisions are not grounded on any universal propositional content or concept that is entailed by the expressions of the source text. This is abundantly evident when we get multiple translations of a text that are vastly different, yet all somehow
recognizable as translations of the same text\textsuperscript{5}. While such decisions about equivalence can have no objective grounds, they can have acceptable grounds, to be sure, and we can identify seemingly unproblematic cases where such equivalences can be established to a certain specified end. A bilingual weather report that equates “it is raining” and “il pleut” can be said to ground its translation in something like the proposition that it is raining, a state of affairs that is said to subsist independently of the two languages. Indeed, both French and English in this case seem to do the same job of delivering this propositional content as information. In the interest of reporting the drops of water falling from the sky, this translation seems to be situationally equivalent and objective.

But even in this seemingly unproblematic case there turns out to be a great deal of complexity. Though the translation here can be said to have served its purpose, we might still wonder how it does so. Can we really be sure that “il pleut” means the same to a francophone that “it is raining” means to an anglophone? If we accept Saussure’s claim that “in language there are only differences without definite terms”, then we must recognize that the ways in which both the French and the English ‘version’ of this sentence play off other words and expressions in their own language makes it not only unlikely that they have the same meaning but admittedly difficult to ever determine such a thing. As we will see later on, there is far more to this story for Derrida. Not only do the semantic and phonic differences within a language provide meaning, but meaning also relies on an endless chain of associations and relationships that we can never fully manage. When we try to translate we come up against the enormity (or limitlessness, as we will see) of what we thought we understood.

\textsuperscript{5} for one interesting case among many, see the compilation of translations in \textit{Le Ton Beau de Marot} (Hofstadter 1997)
In this sense, the decision to consider a particular expression of a language as a denotation of a specifiable state of affairs may not be entirely unjustified in a particular pragmatic context, but it is a decision that cuts off an enormous range of the meaning-possibilities of that expression. Such an arbitrary culling hides the richness of the expression, a richness that makes the equivalence even of two expressions as seemingly innocent as “it is raining” and “il pleut” seriously problematic. We do the best we can given our objective, in this case to report the weather conditions, and this seems to make the equivalence of the two expressions acceptable in this respect. What is crucial is that we do not mistake the illusion of ‘propositional content’ or ‘semantically encoded information’ as the primary source of meaning in language.

The banal example given above is the kind of thing that Derrida often refers to as what is obviously translatable, but not actually worthy of the name translation. It seems that for Derrida this distinction turns on a sense of what we are asking language to do. It cannot be denied that there does exist the kind of case where we see drops of water falling from the sky and wish to use language to report that state of affairs. Here the ‘translation’ is unproblematic, but only because different languages have independently established conventions for denoting certain states of affairs using certain linguistic expressions. Since the denotations are conventionally established, and since we believe that the state of affairs is both unambiguous and independent of the language, there is no site for any consideration of the differences between these French and English expressions for that state of affairs.

If, on the other hand, we are translating that same sentence from a poetic text, it is clear at least that we miss the point of the expression if we take it to mean the proposition ‘that it is raining’, and what we seem to miss in this case is precisely the sense in which a
poetic text is, in some fundamental sense, untranslatable. If a poetic expression gives ‘it is raining’ a singular meaning, one that involves not denotation but also connotations, and furthermore relies on a vast network of inter-textuality, then we seem to be stuck in the problem of a sense that does not communicate itself.

It is for this reason that Derrida is concerned above all with the literary and the poetic. It is in the literary or poetic text that we are most acutely aware of the inseparability of form and content, and because the poet’s very aim can be seen as the expression of a singularity that would defy explanation either by semantics or pragmatics alone. There is no doubt that one can translate in a ‘straightforward’ fashion, but as Benjamin makes evident, the translator of poetry who concentrates his efforts on subject-matter is without doubt a very bad translator, and so even though there always is subject-matter that can be identified in a literary creation, it takes the good translator to separate this from the essential poetic expression. This is not to say that only some language has this ‘being-language’ quality, but for Derrida it is only where translation recognizes the ultimate impossibility of determining the precise scope and meaning of an expression in terms of subject-matter or content that it comes up against the true to-be-translated, if it can even be named in this way. And so to come up against the true to-be-translated is to come up against the untranslatable.

The Name: Singularity and Multiplicity

At first glance it seems odd, then, that what Derrida consistently refers to as the ‘origin of language’ is the name, that element of singularity in language that functions as, to use Derrida’s words, “the reference of a pure signifier to a single being” (Derrida 1985, 166). Even more so given that, as I will demonstrate, it is this concern for singularity that organizes
all of Derrida’s thoughts on translation. But this notion of singularity is not developed by Derrida as that which resists indetermination, resting on a ‘single being’ as ideal or specifiable content, but will be that which figures the sense of language as a system that is internally divided from its very origins.

Already in the name – which ought to be unproblematic as simply denoting a specific person or thing – Derrida identifies the problem of referentiality. In the Babel essay Derrida identifies a duality between this reference of a pure signifier to a single being and the possibility that a name might always function as a common noun. But he will also, as we will see, indicate the fundamental splitting and dissemination that is already in the name itself in its alleged purity as singular reference. These two distinctions will show that singularity, while it ‘organizes’ Derrida’s thoughts on translation, will not provide an organizing principle to a ‘theory of language’ that would then be grounded in a stable signifier/signified relationship. Rather, the problem of singularity as a questioning of the very division of signifier and signified will show that the difficulties, even the impossibilities, of reconciling the differences between languages, are already present within any language at the very first word inscribed.

The first distinction then, between the name as proper and the name as general, seems to contrast a ‘pure singularity’ with what Derrida elsewhere calls ‘the general economy of language’. This is a familiar distinction in the philosophy of language that has taken on, in one case, the form of a debate over whether a name denotes through the association of a description or set of descriptions with the object denoted, or whether it somehow denotes by direct reference. In other words, does the name “Aristotle” denote by somehow directly picking out the person called “Aristotle”, or does it denote that person only through a
semantic content hidden in the name, such that “Aristotle” would be equal to something like “the most famous student of Plato”\textsuperscript{6}

Though Derrida nowhere refers to this debate, it helps to make sense of what is at issue in his discussions regarding how we think about our use of names. The example that Derrida uses is the name “Pierre”, pointing out that neither “rock” nor “Peter” seem good translations. “Peter” doesn’t seem a legitimate translation, not necessarily because of obvious concerns over domestication of the foreign but for the simple reason that it attempts to circumvent the realization that a name structurally does not have any genuine equivalent. “Peter” does not really translate “Pierre” because “Pierre” does not need to be translated. In this case the need to be translated would have as necessary condition a meaning that remains opaque to non-speakers of the French language, in other words, a content to be deciphered. The content would then be that which can be made common to any language, for which we simply need the right words to pick it out. If “Pierre” did refer through a definite description, such as “the mailman on my street”, then we could presumably translate it into any other language that has similar common nouns as the ones found in this sentence, as in “le facteur dans ma rue”.

This seems to be the point that Derrida is making with the odd example of translating “Pierre” as “rock”. The substitution of a semantic interpretation for the name is in this case obviously illegitimate, but it is important because, like descriptivism, it is indicative of a certain more subtle confusion that is prevalent in our thinking about language, a confusion between the proper name and the general noun. This confusion fails to recognize the unique and interesting possibilities afforded by our use of proper names.

\textsuperscript{6} see, for example, Russell, \textit{On Denoting}, Kripke, \textit{Naming and Necessity}
Derrida points out that any name can also be taken as a general noun. By this, of course, he does not mean to weigh into the debate about descriptions itself, but simply to point out that a name can be interpreted. In fact, his claim is stronger than that; in a certain respect, this is all that can be done with the name. When we speak about things, in other words, we interpret those things in certain ways, such that we could, if asked what we mean by “x”, substitute some kind of description that we imagine to sufficiently capture the meaning of “x”. But at the same time, this is not what a name really is. The example of the untranslatability of the name Pierre is intended to show that the “properly proper name” and the general noun with which we interpret it, are “two absolutely heterogeneous values” (Derrida 1985, 172).

The proper name, Derrida says, does not really belong to its language. To belong to a language would have to be to fit into the system of differences that Saussure describes, or to have a meaning that, as I suggested above, would be opaque to a non-speaker of that language, but a meaning that nonetheless could become clear through a translation that would pick out the referent. The proper name does not fit these conditions because its meaning is found in the entirely formal relationship of signification, not in signification through the mediating term of semantic content.

This is not to return to the claim that the meaning of an expression is some sort of object that it represents or signifies. When Derrida claims that the proper name is the “reference of a pure signifier to a single being” he is not locating meaning in that single being itself, but rather pointing to a peculiar relationship whereby the name means what it means always in a singular way. Without the mediation of semantic content, the ‘single being’ is of a singularity such that it cannot be specified, and thus it is not a case of a...
signified ‘represented’ by a signifier, but a case of a singularity emerging within the signifier itself, which thereby cannot be delimited by an object alone.

To understand this relationship more clearly, Derrida finds Benjamin’s discussion of ‘ways of meaning’ instructive\(^7\). For Benjamin, certainly the words “pain” and “Brot” designate the same object, and in this respect mean the same thing. However, it is clear that they do not mean the same thing in the same way. Benjamin, followed by De Man in an essay on Benjamin’s “Task of the Translator” (De Man 1986), mentions some of the associations and relationships to other units and expressions of the language that each word carries with it as contributing to its meaningfulness, such that the reference to the thing that in English is called “bread”, is conditioned by such associations\(^8\). What becomes clear is that there is really no way in which we can mean bread as an object without meaning it in a singular way through particular language.

This is not, of course, to deny that there can be an object which we designate with the word “bread” in English, and that a French speaker can designate that very same object with a different word, but where the function of the word is not simply the practically aimed pointing out of an object, the way that “pain” denotes for a francophone and the way that “bread” denotes for an anglophone are not equivalent in any respect. So even where terms can pick out the same object, it is clear that no two terms can ever have the same way of

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\(^7\) It was in fact Frege who first illuminated the distinction between sense (what Benjamin calls ‘ways of meaning’) and denotation (reference), but Frege is not interested in the particularities and differences between natural languages and so, in pursuing only the logical implications of denotation, he ignores the problems of connotation. Deleuze will comment that while Frege ‘discovered’ sense, he never sufficiently explored what it was himself, merely pointing to the fact that there was something other than reference at work in language.

\(^8\) It is interesting to compare these two texts discussing the issue of the connotations of the words “Brot” and “pain” whose different lists of ‘connotations’ associated with these words further demonstrates that the connotations are not necessarily the same for every speaker of the same language.
meaning that object. Although translation studies attempts to deal with these kinds of
problems, the solutions can be seen generally as ways of compensating for the ultimately
irreducible fact that ways of meaning cannot be translated because they tie particular
associations, linguistic and cultural, to the very form of the word. Derrida is interested in
these ways of meaning that are illuminated in the process of transmission as that which
remains untranslatable.

Although we have been discussing personal proper names, what we are to learn here
is not that where proper names are untranslatable we are to imagine some singular being of
the thing designated that is then captured by the name we give to him or her. Rather this
shows simply that there is an irreducible singularity in our use of language that defies at least
the usual operations of translation. This makes sense of Derrida’s claim that although the
name remains “at the edge of language” it is at the same time that “its call makes the
language possible”. Derrida asks “what would a language be without the possibility of
calling by a proper name?” (Derrida 1985, 172). Given what has been shown above, this
‘possibility’ is that of an inscription that holds out against its reduction to semantic content
by virtue of its form. As signifier that resists reduction to the signified, the name stands as
the one thing in a language that will not be translated, that remains obstinately stuck in its
particular form in its particular language.

We will see below that Derrida means to show that all language has the possibility of
functioning as proper name, but for now we need only observe that for Derrida it is this
possibility demonstrated in the name that guarantees that there are languages and not just
language in general. It is the ultimate and impenetrable line of defense against
universalization. This suggests a couple of things; firstly, that language is only possible
because there are languages. In other words, if meaning was entirely reducible to propositional or semantic content, then language as form of expression would have to be merely incidental, and we could just as easily develop the universal language of which Leibniz dreamed, or communicate telepathically. If we recognize something irreducible in natural language itself, then it must be found in something that defies the generalization of meaning, and for Derrida this is the formal aspect of language as demonstrated in the name. Secondly, and consequently, it demonstrates why it is that Derrida insists that at the origin of meaning is a kind of non-meaning, or at least a linguistic function that resists any transparent, communicable meaning. Derrida calls this non-meaning ‘différance’.

Yet at the same time, this possibility of naming that promises absolute singularity in the form of the non-meaning of language seems to slip away immediately. As soon as we ‘solicit’ the name to speak, Derrida suggests, it cannot help but speak as a general noun. This is the paradox of the name, that “it can properly inscribe itself in a language only by allowing itself to be translated therein, in other words, interpreted by its semantic ‘equivalent’: from this moment it can no longer be taken as proper name” (Derrida 1985, 172). A name cannot be translated, or is entirely lost in translation, because its ‘meaningfulness’ – its significance can only be found in its resistance to meaning in the usual sense, the propositional or informational sense. The proper name remains at the edge of language untranslatable, and therefore uninterpreted.

This might at first seem trivial. However, as we saw above, the reason a proper name holds out against the general is precisely because it does not need to be translated. Certainly in the case of a personal proper name such as “Pierre” we might be inclined to see the ‘untranslatable’ as the already-transparent, but the purpose of Derrida’s various discussions
of the name is to show the very opposite, that it is this ‘properly proper’ that calls, above all else, for translation. For this reason the discussion by way of personal names is somewhat misleading, since the kind of ‘properssness’ that Derrida is trying to illuminate is the kind where the sense, or way of meaning, not only fails to give us an unambiguous object, but also fails to have any obvious role or use. A name like ‘Babel’, about which Derrida’s essay turns, works like the personal name in its untranslatability, but its role or use is problematic. The personal name as a matter of pure convention simply indicates a unique person and so doesn’t require any sense in order to function. But where we don’t have an object as referent we need to look into the sense of a word or expression in order to be able to use it meaningfully.

Derrida begins the essay by asking what it is that we are naming when we say the word ‘Babel’, and he does this not in the spirit of the usual rhetorical formula whereby an essay begins with a question, elucidates that question and weighs possible answers in order finally to reveal the one that is already definitive. Rather, he is trying to get us to see the singularity and the multiplicity of the name ‘Babel’ that might be lost in the usual discourses on the theme. This usual discourse about Babel neither begins nor ends with Derrida’s essay and it involves the assumption of a subject-matter and the exchange of more or less transparent ideas about that subject or theme. Derrida is clear that this cannot be avoided when speaking about Babel, and “Des Tours de Babel” is also a contribution to that discourse that amounts to a set of propositions about the story of Babel as a metaphorical story about language.

In this vein, Derrida claims that the story “recounts, among other things, the origin of the confusion of tongues, the irreducible multiplicity of idioms, the necessary and impossible
task of translation, its necessity as impossibility” (Derrida 1985, 171), and Derrida’s essay thematizes and discusses these ‘subjects’ in a fair bit of detail. This is immediately recognizable as Derrida’s own interpretation of the meaning of ‘Babel’, and yet despite this being the only way that one can discuss Babel, there is yet something in the name itself, as well as in Derrida’s essay in its singularity, that resists being so generalized.

Derrida draws attention to this resistance by following his list of interpretations with the claim that “in general one pays little attention to this fact: it is in translation that we most often read this narrative” (Derrida 1985, 171). The reason this goes unnoticed, Derrida contends, is because the name, in this case Babel (but we are already talking about how to translate the discourse on Babel), is not translated “in its appearance as proper name”. This seems to indicate the domestication of the name ‘Babel’, which can be translated even into a different script, such that we forget that ‘Babel’ means in the first place something singular in a specific language, having its own connotations and associations.

But beyond this, we are talking about translating a discourse, a narrative, without recognizing the fact of translation. What, then, would it mean to translate a text ‘as proper name’? Derrida has already given us the alternative; the translator would begin with a sense of the subjects or themes that the text is about and would then look for similar expressions in the target language that would convey the content of the text so interpreted. In this sense the essential work of the translator is no different from the work of hermeneutics. Derrida himself does this work in the present essay, but he adds that Babel is also the proper name of a number of things, among them a narrative, a tower and a city.

Clearly the point is not that we should or could translate the text as meaning only these referents - in that case a translation would have to be something like a mute pointing
out of those objects themselves, and in any case Derrida rightly insists that the name itself cannot specify which object it refers to (that will be a matter of convention, which varies between and even within languages, as we saw above). So the translator has no choice but to translate according to the principle of subject-matter, but in doing so she effaces a singularity that remains in the source text as a tension between Babel as ‘an event in a single tongue’ and a generalizable discourse on language and the multiplicity of tongues. This tension remains more evident in the source language, Derrida suggests, imagining that the speakers of the language of Genesis might have had a sense of ‘Babel’ as a name apart from its common interpretation, but the tension is irreconcilable. The singular sense of ‘Babel’ cannot be legitimately reduced to the ‘common interpretation’ but the very inscription of the word immediately brings with it a translation that ‘reads’ the name by interpretation.

What is certain is that the inter-lingual translation has no choice but to efface this very tension. This, in short, is the meaning of Derrida’s claim that translation is impossible; the true to-be-translated is the name in its proper sense and this, above all, remains resistant to translation. But because the proper name cannot legitimately be translated (while other elements of language do not appear to work this way) it “retains a singular destiny”, a destiny that can be glimpsed in the marking of a limit that remains even as it is transgressed, that can only, in fact, appear in its transgression.

Thus it is somehow between the lines of an explicit discourse on the name that Derrida tries to inscribe the singularity that holds out against this discourse. Just how he does this is something that I will explore below. As a preliminary claim, though, it will not be surprising to find that it is a certain literary style that will allow Derrida to show performatively what he cannot state propositionally. This, not incidentally, helps us make
sense of Derrida’s writing style not only in this essay, but in so many of his works that have been found by some to be so impenetrable. Tellingly, his essay is called “Des Tours de Babel”, indicating the plurality of possible references named in this way. It must not be forgotten that this essentially means not the objects themselves but the ways in which Babel as a name means the objects it picks out. While the general discussion of Babel necessarily reduces these various possibilities as metaphoric vehicles for the theme of something like ‘the multiplicity of languages’, “Babel”, as a proper name that suggests various objects in different ways, holds itself out performatively as an irreducible multiplicity in the midst of this discussion. This is to say that what ‘Babel’ means is precisely that what ‘Babel’ means must remain focused in the language itself as proper, but in that focus must remain open to other naming possibilities.

This ultimately is the value of the proper name; it is not that it should not be interpreted, translated into semantic content, but that it “watches over” every possible translation and guarantees that more can be said, that new and different translations/readings can be accommodated. In its very picking out of something absolutely singular, the proper name initiates and keeps open a multiplicity. That feeling of never quite being able to get at the heart of what we want to say can be attributed to this fact; the condition of any discourse whatever is that of which we cannot meaningfully speak without immediate betrayal.

Iterability As Untranslatability

While the name is the most obvious bearer of what Derrida calls ‘this confusion’ in language, he of course means to say that all language in fact has this quality. In his discussion of Austin’s theory of performatives (Derrida 1982), Derrida introduces the notion of iterability
and what he calls a ‘generalized writing’ as the source of all language. Derrida excavates the various ways in which speech has come to be privileged over writing on the assumption that spoken language constitutes a true and natural state of language, with writing a mere secondary extenuation of the presence of language, and he identifies in this view the presupposition that the meaning of an expression can be found in either (or both) the present consciousness (most importantly, the intention) of the speaker or in the total context in which the expression is uttered.

Against such views Derrida demonstrates that language is meaningful only because it has this ability to extenuate the so-called ‘present’ of the utterance. If it is possible at all for meaning to be conveyed beyond the context and beyond the conscious subject present to herself and her utterance, and it undoubtedly is, then meaning cannot depend on either of these conditions. The ability of language to function in the absence of a ‘source’ is what explains the way it works. As we saw above in the case of the name, Derrida now shows that it is all language and all elements of language that are divided internally;

Let us consider any element of spoken language, a large or small unity. First condition for it to function...[a]cross empirical variations of tone, of voice, etc., eventually of a certain accent, for example, one must be able to recognize the identity, shall we say, of a signifying form (Derrida 1982, 318).

As we saw above, the recognition of a “signifying form” is not the identity of the signifier with a signified but the very form of signification as generating meaning through the distinction between the general and the singular. Nonetheless, this would seem to suggest that words and expressions have identifiable meanings that remain stable across what Derrida calls “empirical variations”. But this is not the case. Derrida goes on;

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9 Rousseau and Condillac in this case, but as we will see, all the way back to Plato in Derrida’s estimation (Derrida 1974).
Why is this identity paradoxically the division or dissociation from itself which will make of this phonetic sign a grapheme? It is because this unity of the signifying form is constituted only by its iterability, by the possibility of being repeated in the absence not only of its referent, which goes without saying, but of a determined signified or current intention of signification, as of every present intention of communication. This structural possibility of being severed from its referent or signified (and therefore from communication and its context) seems to me to make of every mark, even if oral, a grapheme in general, that is, as we have seen, the non-present remaining of a differential mark cut off from its alleged “production” or origin”. (Derrida 1982, 318)

The fact that we can recognize the word across empirical variations shows that there is a signifying form that is no more tied to the presence of the speaker than to any referent, and if we can recognize this form in the absence of any such speaker then the meaning of the word can never be found in either the speaker’s self-present intention or in the full understanding of the context in which it comes to be. It is not simply that no context can ever be entirely saturated or that we can never know for certain what the speaker intends, but it is a structural feature of language that it can and does convey meaning without any recourse to these sources.

Thus it is not just that a unit of language can be intended differently and have different meanings in various contexts, but that its very meaning in a single performance is predicated upon its non-self-identity. This is why, even while dismissing Austin’s commitment to the presence of context and of the speaker’s intention, Derrida nonetheless praises Austin for having reversed the traditional privileging of the constative over the performative use of language. Privileging the constative seems to lead to the assumption of the integrity of meaning over various iterations, whereas the performative, as it is reconceived by Derrida, shows that iterability is constitutive rather than derivative. Where
Austin claimed that the possibility of, for example, citing a play must be considered parasitic on the normal sense of how language works, Derrida reverses this order by showing that every so-called ‘constative’ utterance is in fact, like all language-use, a citing of language from elsewhere.

Every expression must use language of a universally recognizable form, and so relies on iterability, and yet because that form is nothing but its iterability, its self-division, each repetition is a unique transformation of its text. Every performance is an empirical variation of a signifying form and is thus recognizable as at once old and new, repeated and transformed. Derrida’s theory of iterability demonstrates that this is the way that all language functions, thus showing the constative use of language to be in fact ‘parasitic’ on the notion of performativity.

The signifying form of a unit of language thus gives us not its meaning apart from any context, rather it gives us nothing but a space for its meaning-possibilities across contexts. This sheds more light on Derrida’s sense of the name as internally divided. The name was, one might say, externally divided in the division between the proper and the general. But even in the so-called proper form, the name was indeterminate, opening onto a multiplicity by its very resistance to generality. In Derrida’s discussion of différance we find a deeper explanation of why this is the case. Focusing on what he calls “phonocentrism”, Derrida identifies in our cultural and intellectual history a privileging of the spoken over the written word that carries a strange misconception about the way that language works. The notion that the spoken word somehow contains its meaning is, in Derrida’s interpretation, the assumption that there is a simultaneity of thought or meaning and the words that express it, which makes it possible to convey to the present listener the very thought expressed by the
words. Writing, then, merely reproduces the bare words that in their separation from the act of speech are dead, empty, and contain no living meaning.

Derrida need not work very hard to show why this is such a wrong-headed view of language, but his notions of the temporal and spatial aspects of différance are helpful here to a discussion of translation. According to this, the mistaken view relies on a reduction of the fundamentally spatial and temporal aspects of language. If writing defers the ‘true, present meaning’ in a spatially deferred sequence by relying on their materialization, and also in a temporally deferred sequence by being always at a temporal remove from the presence of the utterance, spoken language is thought to be immune to the impurities imposed by a spatial and temporal iteration. The ‘simultaneity’ of thought and word in which spatial and temporal deferral has not yet infected meaning is shown by Derrida to be a myth.

The very speaking of language, as articulation, is already a deferral from any sense of a ‘true meaning’, a ‘thought’ that would ground the word in a true world of intelligibility. A thought would also be an articulation, in fact, and so is already linguistic, already meaningful because iterable and therefore made meaningful by what is already outside of it, by the differences of language and by its always being beyond any imagined ‘source’. But there is a great deal at stake in this fidelity to a phonocentric view, and this is the commitment to presence that Derrida reads in the history of Western consciousness.

It is not that Derrida wants to deny the possibility of presence, but that he emphatically denies the priority of presence, which in his view is grounded on the ambiguously non-grounding ‘différance’. And it is for this reason that Derrida can write that “a present-Being can only come on the scene of presence by dividing itself, by relating to what is other than itself” (Derrida 1982, 9). Thus it is not that ‘Babel’ means something that
we (let’s say, English speakers in the 21st century) do not have the linguistic or cultural tools to interpret, but that structurally, as a feature of language, ‘Babel’, like any word or expression, can only reveal itself as other-than-itself. And more than that, the very ‘itself’ that it becomes ‘other-than’ is now exposed as illusory.

So ‘Babel’ in fact means something that does not, in itself, mean anything. Its seeming reference to something like a city or a story or a tower is simply what preserves this lacuna of what we might call ‘meaningfulness’ against the generalizing discourse that would appropriate it as a common noun, but these are only the terms of play between which we might begin to get a sense of ‘Babel’. In this context Derrida writes that “différance emerges out of the economic order” (Derrida 1982, 19). It isn’t that the language we use to speak about things thematically is the wrong way to speak – Derrida concedes that it is the only way to speak - it is that there is another dimension to this very discourse, a dimension that we might attend to by changing our focus.

Reproduction and Transformation

It is already evident why it is that translation cannot be a process of reproduction, but in asking what we might substitute for the rejected model, we face the question of just what the ‘essence’ of the text might be. Derrida’s well-known pronouncement of the ‘end of the book’ (Derrida 1974) issues from his concern about the delusions inherent in the metaphysical approach to language. For even if we accept the claim that the words of a text play off each other and constitute their meaning from out of their differences, we might still

It should be noted that, as with the notion of the ‘end of Metaphysics’, Derrida is alluding not only to the ‘death’ of the form of the book but also to the limits of the book, as preserving a boundary that is itself illuminating and even necessary.
fall prey to the deep-seated belief in the transcendental signified, the one thing that is
signified but does not itself continue to refer as signifier – the end of the chain. The book or
text might function in just such a role, if we see it as a complete and self-sufficient entity, or
imagine that there is some signified that the play of the words of a text ultimately point
towards.

This is certainly a common view of literature, and one that is generally presupposed
in translation studies. And it shows that even if we accept the formal nature of language and
the impossibility of reproducing content, we might nonetheless imagine that language can
represent some meaning of the text as a whole. When translation theorists consider what to
take as the unit of translation, for example, they often recognize the importance of context
and play, which then leads to the realization that a unit of translation anything less than the
text itself will be lacking in an account of the overall meaning. Although questions of inter-
textuality have certainly begun to be addressed in translation studies, even here there remains
a sense of the primary text as a complete entity that can be said to simply ‘borrow’ allusions
from other texts. But if the meaning of our language at any level can be said to constitute
itself only as a limitless play of differences beyond the possibility of self-presence, then there
is no justification for the unity of a book or text other than the physical structure of the thing.
Derrida’s deconstruction of the myth of the book reveals it as an attempt to reproduce the
myth of the self-presence of the voice, where the transcendental signified thought of as ‘the
book itself’ (its meaning, perhaps, or its truth), is somehow present between the covers.

Derrida prefers to refer to ‘texts’ rather than books, but only after having excavated
the allusion to ‘textiles’, as a weaving together of various threads, where a coming-together

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11 see for example Hatim and Munday, *Translation: An Advanced Resource Book*
and a coming-apart are constantly at work everywhere. A so-called single text, then, is both a thread in larger texts and itself constituted by various threads, threads that are not necessarily contained by the artificial limits of the text. One can see the text as a woven piece of cloth, to be sure, and this is exactly what we do when we take the discourse on Babel as general and transparent. We assume that there is some unifying concept that regulates the discussion. On the other hand, seeing the various strands as proper names that in their uniqueness cannot be legitimately reduced to such a discourse is to recognize the impossibility of specifying the scope of the text itself. It is important to stress again, however, that it is a structural fact that we cannot exhaust the scope of the text, for the chain of signifiers both temporal and spatial is infinite, not simply beyond any particular text.

It is already evident why this leaves translation in ruins. The word that comes to mean in a play of differences can be seen as a convergence point of otherness that is neither strictly present nor strictly absent – clearly not simply present as the signifier only refers by deferring what it signifies, but neither properly absent since these differences persist in an actual meaning – and this is what Derrida calls the trace. If language constitutes itself as trace, both at the level of word and of text, and if this has always already undone any possibility of unity in scope, integrity of meaning or reference to a simple signified, then translation has no stable point of reference.

Translation, to a great extent, can only proceed on the assumption of a transcendental signified. Insofar as translation “appears possible”, Derrida writes “it practices the difference between signifier and signified”. But this is illegitimate, on Derrida’s view; “[w]e will never have, and have never had, to do with some “transport” of pure signifieds from one language to another, or within one and the same language, that the signifying language would
leave virgin and untouched” (Derrida 1981, 19-20). The accepted sense of translation as a
communication of a content that can pass untouched from one language to another sees its
aim as one of reproduction. Derrida essentially poses the question of what exactly we are to
reproduce. If the essential in our languages is not content and the text cannot be delimited,
then we have no clear or objective method for the determination of meaning, and as Derrida
writes, commenting on Benjamin’s essay “does not the ground of translation recede once the
restitution of meaning ceases to provide the measure?” (Derrida 1985, 177).

Translation as representation, resemblance, or restitution of meaning, then, relies on a
fundamental misunderstanding about language. It is reproduced by the structuralist’s view
that we have a *system* of language at our disposal, complete with rules of grammar and
syntax specifying legitimate modes of combination and regulating the ways that we might
express ourselves, which we then manipulate into our particular utterances. This
langue/parole distinction, which would help to interpret our expressions by reference to the
regulative system of language, itself breaks down with the edifice of metaphysical views of
language. ‘Language as a whole’ is itself, in Derrida’s view, constituted by threads
interwoven in various ways that no grammarian or logician can get a hold on in order to
successfully notate and manipulate. Our expressions do not mean what they mean in virtue
of a structure that they (consciously or unconsciously) reproduce in particular instances.
Rather, as we have seen, they transform other particular expressions that they find in
circulation. Translation, then, will have to be itself a mode of lateral *transformation.*
Derrida suggests this explicitly; “if the difference [between the signifier and the signified] is
never pure, no more so is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to
substitute a notion of *transformation*: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another” (Derrida 1981, 19).

Derrida’s ascription to this view can be seen at work in some of his comments on specific instances of translation. When reading Gadamer in German, for example, Derrida is struck by Gadamer’s having drawn attention to the *proximity* of the words ‘denken’ and ‘danken’ (Derrida 2005). Derrida translates the words with a pair of Latin words, ‘pensée’ (thought) and ‘pensare’ (to weigh) that also have a ‘proximity’, but that clearly do not reproduce the meaning of each of the words thus translated. In distinctly Heideggerian language, Derrida discusses what the words ‘denken’ and ‘danken’ might ‘give us to think’, or more precisely what the *proximity* of the words gives us to think. If we take différance seriously then we must accept that neither word gives us anything to think on its own, but between them there is something suggestive.

Because we can never get that grasp on what a word (or a concept, as Derrida shows in the essay “Différance”) means, we can only get a sense of it as something that suggests itself between words, thus the *relationship between* ‘denken’ and ‘danken’ might allow a certain positivity of both words to come out of their proximity, or more precisely their distance, their spacing. This in-between cannot be *reproduced*, but the relationship can be *proliferated* in order to locate the words in their untranslatability – the non-place from where they contribute to the development of something new. In Derrida’s translation we have a new relationship, that between the ‘denken’ ‘danken’ pair and the “pensare” “pensée” pair. This multiplies the play and in that very process opens the original words, and the original pair, to a greater field of meaning-possibilities, an expansion of what they might give us to think.
This is immediately evident as a case of transformation, and this can be seen in the notion that the objective is to allow the words to ‘give us to think’. While there is certainly some allusion to what Gadamer might have given us to think, there is also an entirely self-conscious twisting of that possibility into something not evidently suggested by Gadamer’s words, but something that nonetheless is not only a legitimate extension of Gadamer’s suggestion but even possibly an illumination of the initial inscription as itself drawn from a play of differences.

This brings to mind Benjamin’s arcade, an image of a translation that, rather than replacing the original text, serves to bring the original into relief and thereby reveal something that was not present in the source text itself on its own but only in its relation with its translation. This, for Benjamin, is the ‘truth’ of the text, which amounts to a performance of the multiplicity of languages, their irreducible difference, or what Benjamin calls their ‘complementarity’. And this is a good reason for Benjamin’s insistence on literal word-for-word translation; translating semantic content is akin to ignoring the differences between languages, where to translate word for word is to bring those differences together in their inevitable contrast.

Such a translation would thus serve to illuminate the non-presence of a meaning-content through such a bringing-into-relationship. And because literal translations tend to be awkward and to show the strict untranslatability of the individual words, often relying on neologisms that bring a new form of expression into the target language, they do the best job of accessing the formal possibility of the trace, not only within but also between languages. This is why Benjamin claims that the supreme translation is the one that is inter-linear, but
this juxtaposition amounts to nothing if untranslatability is effaced by reducing language to translatable generalizations.

We can see then that Derrida has something like a ‘theory of translation’, a view that categorically rejects the possibility of reproduction or communication of content and reconceives the translatival operation on the model of transformation. In doing just this, Derrida performs his own ‘versions’ of other texts, or of threads of texts, and does so in a way that is often highly poetic and stylized, not in order to mystify for its own sake, but in order to get at something in that thread that defies informational or representational meaning.

It is not only the case that Derrida does not attempt to reproduce Gadamer’s intention (we have already seen why the concept of ‘intention’ would be illegitimate here anyway), but also that Derrida has made no claim to have exhausted the meaning of these words. Similarly, when Derrida ‘translates’ – by giving a reading - Benjamin’s text in his essay “The Task of the Translator”, which he reminds us is itself a translation in the form of a translator’s introduction to a translation, which is also a translation, etc., he makes no claim to interpret or exhaust the possibilities within Benjamin’s text. In fact, it doesn’t look like a translation at all for the very reason that it does not reproduce the text. It does not even look like an interpretation because it does not presume to find the meaning of the ‘original’ but instead helps to further the process of unraveling and re-weaving the various threads that make up the source text.

Derrida’s claim that language is always from the very first word a translation, if only an internal translation, since our language is never fully present to meaning, legitimates his
claim that every reading is a translation. On the one hand this means that every act of reading or writing is necessarily a transformation of an original that cannot be captured because its very integrity disappears in the attempt to reproduce it. The acts of reading and of writing, interpretation and – we might venture - even adaptation, commentary and interpretation, etc., themselves must follow the law of translation, with a refocusing that allows a view of the threads and the various patterns woven through a text, and a conscious disavowal of the notion that one can legitimately represent the play of differences that one takes as source.

But hidden in this very notion is the sense of translation as impossible. Derrida’s concern demonstrates that rather than the reproduction of content the true task of the translator, as announced by Benjamin, is a matter of performance. A performativity that resists even the transformative operation. Without this it would be difficult to see why translation is an absolutely essential operation for Derrida and a constant thread woven throughout almost every one of his works. For if translation were simply wrongly conceived on the model of reproduction but could be reconfigured as transformation, then it would be exactly like very other act of reading – interpretation, commentary, adaptation, etc. - and its unique value would therein be undone.

It is important to see, then, that where Derrida insists on the special status of translation – on its impossibility, on its necessity in virtue of its very impossibility, he is neither pointing out simply that it is impossible as a transportation of meaning and that this model ought to be abandoned, nor simply that it is necessary that we do it anyway and so we

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12 This marks the divergence of Derrida’s views on translation from those of Benjamin: Derrida cannot accept the notion of the ‘original’ text that is so central to Benjamin’s theory of translation, since the original would already be a translation/iteration.
ought to develop a new model. Rather it is in the *simultaneity* itself of the impossibility and the necessity of translation that something like the ‘truth’ or ‘(non)origin’ emerges. So while on the one hand we have Derrida’s practical comments about translation as transformation, on the other we have the value of the impossibility of translation that for Derrida marks a certain absolute but negative limit to the legitimacy of our translations, and so of our language. The fact that we cannot represent the Other in language is the meaning of language as différance.

*The Language Contract*

Derrida reads the important notion of performance in Benjamin’s essay, announced at the outset in a title that names the ‘task’ above all. For Benjamin, once ‘the ground of meaning recedes’, the task of the translator becomes that of bringing out in the target language something that he calls ‘pure language’, an ‘infinite relation’ and an affinity among languages. This is what Derrida calls ‘the multiplicity of languages’, the fact that there are tongues and idioms that resist a universal language. When Benjamin says that it is here that language speaks, it is not that language says something, but *that* language speaks. What is important is not that language can communicate content, but that *language has* a meaning in itself, quite apart from any particular thing said.

Benjamin’s pure language is a distinct messianic deferral, such that there is a reconciliation promised where it is the promise itself that maintains the plurality of tongues. This seems to capture the sense in which for Derrida the meaning of language as such can only be demonstrated in a performativity. This performativity is specifically found in the task of translation as that which strives towards what is manifestly impossible, strives
towards a reconciliation of languages that will in fact never come. If actual reconciliation were the telos of translation, that could only be because all languages can be reduced to the universal, and this is why the promise is messianic; it relies upon the structure of the promise as always yet-to-come. When Benjamin writes that all languages are striving to say the same thing he in fact means that only together do they same the same thing, and what they say is only that the meaning of language itself cannot be reduced to the universality of transparent meaning. This is why he calls them ‘complementary’: it is only where we see them in their untranslatable, incommensurable truth that we see that together they say the meaning of language as inadequation. The translator performs the very impossibility of translation in order to get at the ‘truth’ that can neither be transported between languages nor revealed in a single language.

Derrida clearly subscribes to this sort of messianism. While language says nothing but that it speaks, and while this indicates Derrida’s insistence on the idea of meaning as tied to form and not content, there must be at least a ‘promise’ of reconciliation such that the terms of difference are held apart by a common untranslatability. And the notion of the promise is entirely consistent with the structure of différance. Derrida writes that “a promise is not nothing, it is not simply marked by what it lacks to be fulfilled. As a promise, translation is already an event, and the decisive signature of a contract” (Derrida 1985, 191). The promise functions like a trace, a mark of what cannot be carried over within the very medium that transgresses its limit.\footnote{It is significant that the terms of a promise figure prominently in Austin’s “How to Do Things with Words”, the text that first raises the importance of the performative function of language.}
Early on in the Babel essay Derrida writes that “understanding is no longer possible when there are only proper names, and understanding is no longer possible when there are no longer proper names” (Derrida 1985, 167). While Derrida seems to want to show above all that we must learn to see proper names where we would be inclined to see only themes, he is insistent that what is utterly essential to language is the limit itself between the proper and the general. That we cannot translate what is entirely singular is not a fact that requires explanation, just as we could never communicate through proper names alone. The singularity of expression and the plurality of tongues are what come out between the lines of the generality of meaning. The translator can ‘approach’ the limit where language no longer means anything, but he cannot touch it, as Benjamin says. This would have to be because in an important sense this is no longer language, no longer legible.

This means that translation as reproduction, a translation that relies on content, cannot be entirely abandoned. Transformation, instead of entirely replacing reproduction, becomes instead the possibility of productive slippages within the usual processes of translation, just as Derrida’s ‘style’ performs something in the process of interpreting a text. The impossibility of translation, then, is marked as a limit, a borderline, between the attempt to reproduce or represent and the vestiges of language that get away, instantly beyond our grasp. Only at the very limit do such vestiges appear in relief, not as instances of positive meaning, but as the performance of articulation itself, which both Derrida and Benjamin characterize as a messianic horizon.

This horizon that is always at a remove, that articulates a meaning for language itself by holding its singularities and multiplicities out against the universal, also describes the structure of the signature and the contract. Derrida shows that the validity of the signature
depends simultaneously upon the presence and the non-presence of the signatory, such that the signature constitutes a trace, a neither-present-nor-absent but regulative structure (Derrida 1978, 307-330). The signatory is there in the signature, but only in virtue of not being there. The signature, then, is an event - a kind of performativity that marks the simultaneity of presence and non-presence, a limit that is neither the act of signing nor the content of the signature in itself, but in holding together a contradiction allows the signature to function. The terms of the contradiction are absolute generality in the form of a signature that can be reproduced (and forged, as Derrida reminds us) and the absolute singularity in the act of signing.

A translation is similarly an event in its holding together of the generality that authorizes the transportation of meaning and the singularity that is only glimpsed in its resistance in that moment of transport. The association with the notion of contract is already anticipated in this; one signs a contract as a point of coming-together of that which can only come together meaningfully in a relation that depends upon a coming-apart. The separate singularity of each term is necessary, in other words, in order for there to be a relating in any form. This is why Derrida calls translation the contract between languages, as well as the very form of the contract itself. What is promised in the contract is a coming-together that, by the very nature of the contract, can never be fulfilled. So while Derrida would have to reject the notion of any real reconciliation, it is nonetheless a promise, the promise of an impossible coming-together, that all translations must be said to ‘mean’.

Here the structure of transcendence becomes unmistakable in Derrida’s discussions of translation. Because the différance that constantly defers the present or positive value of the word is in itself unrepresentable within language, but at the same time the very condition by
which language functions, it is that which is structurally transcendent to language that as a general economy remains a closed system. It is not simply a horizon as condition that would constitute a transcendentalism, since it can only function as condition by virtue of its impossibility, its breaking through all relations of immanence. It is, therefore, what constitutes the *wholly* other, that which resists a system that allows only the sameness and equivalence regulated by semantic or propositional content. But the translator, as attending to the singularity of the text as the untranslatable meaning of language itself, must take as her primary concern this otherness fundamental to the (non)meaning of the text. The translator must position herself as performing an impossible task, and it is for this reason that the important thing becomes the task itself, the very position of responsibility.

What, we must ask, is this a responsibility to? Ultimately, for Derrida, though he names various things that might ‘figure’ this responsibility, it is a debt to the Other in language. In a passage in the Babel essay that exposes his deepest motivations, Derrida writes;

In seeking to “make a name for themselves”, to found at the same time a universal tongue and a unique genealogy, the Semites want to bring the world to reason, and this reason can signify simultaneously a colonial violence (since they would thus universalize their idiom) and a peaceful transparency of the human community. Inversely, when God imposes and opposes his name, he ruptures the rational transparency but interrupts also the colonial violence or the linguistic imperialism. He destines them both to translation, he subjects them to the law of a translation both necessary and impossible; in a stroke with his translatable-untranslatable name he delivers a universal reason (it will no longer be subject to the rule of a particular nation), but he simultaneously limits its very universality: forbidden transparency, impossible univocity. Translation becomes law, duty, debt, but the debt one can no longer discharge…[s]uch would be the Babelian performance. (Derrida 1985, 174-5)
This is perhaps the single insight with which postcolonial translation studies begins: what poses as a universal idiom is always in fact a particular idiom situating itself in a position of violent domination over other idioms. Deconstructing ‘master narratives’ and indeed dominant languages and their legacies becomes the duty of postcolonial theorists as well as communities, and translation is a particularly pointed site of such operations.

As such, the duty is to inscribe the experiences and histories of others in the languages that we use. But even if Derrida’s own most concern is colonial violence (as I will demonstrate in the following chapter), the responsibility that he bestows upon the translator above all is to the wholly other not as a different or foreign discourse, but as that which destabilizes any discourse. The responsibility, then, is to language as such, the very multiplicity of languages, to the untranslatable that serves to undermine any pretension to universality, and this absolutely necessary task can only perform itself at the limit that we call untranslatability.

This discussion has demonstrated that there are two distinct aspects to the problem of translation for Derrida. On the one hand, there is the claim that language is iterability, which means that the recognizable forms of language themselves do not subsist but are performed. Translation, then, is itself a performance, an operation of language that takes hold of a convergence of relationships and brings them into further ones, never claiming exhaustive or determinate mastery over that which it performs, but simply proliferating and transforming the performance that the text already is. To translate in such a way is to attend to the differences that make language meaningful and to take seriously the differences between languages as irreducible, even while such possibilities can only emerge from between the lines of necessarily generalizing, dominant languages. This looks like a claim for
immanence in translation, whereby the singularity sought by the translator emerges from within the generality of discourse in its particular play of differences.

However, insofar as translation is the very marking of language as the impossibility of ever seizing upon positive terms, of ever getting at that which makes language meaningful, it can be seen as constituted by a relationship of transcendence, in which the translator answers to the Other of language that is the very non-origin at the origin of our languages. In this mode, the most telling translations for Derrida are those that leave something untranslated, in order to mark the liminal space of translation itself. Where Benjamin leaves a passage from Mallarmé untranslated in his German text Derrida remarks that it is thereby allowed to “shine…in his text like the medallion of a proper name” (Derrida 1985, 177) with all the attendant implications of the proper name in Derrida’s texts.

This is also why Derrida asks rhetorically how one could translate a text in more than one language. It is the relationship between elements in a text that is seen as the essential, the very form of relationship whereby the two terms are held apart. Derrida, however, looks beyond those particular relationships themselves to what makes them possible, the translational operation itself as the language contract, différance as the transcendent possibility of language, beyond differences as they come into play in particular expressions and contexts.

The impossibility of translation means, then, that language must always measure itself against what cannot be represented in language. Quite the opposite of a meta-language that would lay hold of meaning in a particular expression, différance forces us to measure our translation decisions against a non-meaning, against an openness in the very form of our words. So in the face of the impossibility of authentically representing the Other in our
language, in any language, our own language is destabilized in the marking of that Otherness as impossible. If we look at interlingual translations in this way, the point is that what we need to translate is what is singular in the discourse, the singularity of its language and ways of meaning, and this is precisely what we cannot translate. The proper response to this situation, according to Derrida, is to mark the untranslatable in order to bring into relief the tendentious and ultimately unjustifiable nature of the interpretations of Otherness to which our particular languages constrict us.
CHAPTER 2
Derrida: Performativity as the Meaning of Language Itself

If Derrida demonstrates that language works through iterability, the focus of his concerns about translation is for preserving the traces of a language that at its most significant remains in suspension. In the notion of iterability we have seen that there are two distinct if inseparable moments; on the one hand the particular performance to which language is consigned in every speech-act, or the actual translation-decision that chooses a direction, and on the other that concern for singularity that makes of every act of language a betrayal of Otherness and that reveals itself as a final resistance to any direction as definitive. But as we have seen it is only in the very act of betrayal that what has been betrayed can come to reveal itself: a border that only marks itself as the passable/impassable border in its being crossed. Thus for Derrida the point is not to stay within our limits, not to refuse to translate at the risk of betraying the otherness at the heart of every expressing, but to mark this otherness as so many points of resistance in the very act whereby they are given over to a generalizing discourse that cannot help but efface them. Thus the poet/translator need not stand back in despair before the inevitable loss of the idiom, but has a productive task that aims to mark the trace in language of this otherness, to mark the untranslatability of language in its idiomaticity.

This task is what Derrida describes in the essays collected in Sovereignties in Question as the task of ‘multiplying Schibboleths’; a way of erecting barriers that closes the border to general traffic while ensuring that every lone crossing leaves its singular mark. This issue has fundamentally to do with translation for Derrida, and it remains to be
examined whether this becomes a way of legitimating certain translations. And if this is the case, how is this possible given the previously described impossibility of translation as the decisive moment of significance? In other words, in what sense can a translation be *successful* if its operation is ultimately impossible, and treasonous in any case? I will show that the legitimacy of a translation for Derrida is one in which something about language itself is illuminated, something that sanctions the translation *as a responsible transformation* of the original only because what it demonstrates is not some content of the original but the trace of différance itself.

In the course of developing this position, I make two critical claims. Firstly, that the great value of Derrida’s views on translation can be found in the notion of what he describes as a schibboleth, and that the notion of this barrier, such as Derrida describes it, as a check on the presumptions of translation wherever those presumptions are indeed made, is an absolutely crucial approach to language if we are to thwart the linguistic hegemonies that threaten to efface difference in an appeal to universality. Secondly, I argue that since for Derrida the marking of that impossible passage is where we locate the ‘essence’ of language, and since that marking does nothing but restrict what can be legitimately said, language in Derrida’s universe loses a certain potency.

This is not Derrida’s explicit intention; in fact, he advocates a creative and productive use of language where ‘multiplying schibboleths’ is exactly the creation of new ways of speaking, the formation of ‘alliances’ that enable new ways of imagining what language might give us to think. But as I have demonstrated, such productions are ‘regulated’ by différance, measured against the transcendent, against the ultimate non-meaning that restricts what language can legitimately say to what is not said at all but what is demonstrated in
language and its resistances. Every translation, in other words, is watched over by the ultimate untranslatable, untranslatability itself - Derrida’s différance. The result of this approach is that *language as différance gives us to think nothing but language itself*. This functions to cut the potency of language off from the world and the infinite meaning-possibilities that lie outside of the demonstration of the (non)meaning of language as such.

The question I will then try to address in a preliminary way is whether we can retain Derrida’s notion of the schibboleth and yet dispense with the transcendence of différance in such a way as to disperse the meaning of language into a real world. The aim would be to retain a sense of the danger of the common presumptions of translation, but at the same time to see the possibilities of the transformative function of translation beyond the negative task that Derrida assigns it. In the three chapters that follow, I argue that Deleuze and Guattari’s views on language give us just this option.

*Resistances: The Idiom and the Body*

In the first chapter we saw that for Derrida the possibility of meaning in language is a function of the multiplicity of idioms. In other words, *that* there are differences in language is what makes it possible for a system of arbitrary marks to function as a language of meaningful expression. And between languages, in the translatative function, it was shown that it is the differences and not the commonalities with which a good translator is concerned. Commonalities lead only to possibilities that are already there, to readings already sanctioned by the dominant idiom - for us generally the idiom of the Western metaphysical tradition. If we are to get at some meaningful way in which language can uniquely express, if we are to experience language as something other than indifferent signifiers pointing us to signifieds
that supposedly transcend language itself, this can only be possible by returning to the singularity of the marks that language inscribes.

It is Derrida’s aim to show that everywhere that language is used to express something unique it is being used in a distinctly idiomatic manner, which is to say that this kind of significance can only be found where we recognize untranslatability. This is why Derrida assigns the task variously to the poet, the translator and the poet/translator. It is commonly said that any good translator of poetic texts must also be a poet in her own right, but Derrida reverses the terms, claiming that the poet, the genuine poet who uses the language idiomatically, is also always a translator, perhaps first and foremost a translator. Discussing Célan, for example, Derrida claims that he “not only translated from English, Russian, and so forth, but within the German language itself he performed an operation that it might not be an exaggeration to construe as a translating interpretation. In other words, there is, in his poetic German, a source language and a target language, and each poem is a kind of new idiom in which he passes on the inheritance of the German language” (Derrida 2005, 100).

So it is immediately clear that ‘the idiom’, as Derrida refers to it, does not simply designate the ‘multiplicity of tongues’ along political divisions. There is, rather, a certain idiomaticity at the heart of language that marks differences even within what we identify as discrete idioms, and that protects the ‘secrets’ of language as Derrida sees them. This means that ‘speaking the same language’ does not guarantee transparency of meaning. Rather the play of the differences within a horizon of intelligibility - where a horizon is the iterable form understood in common by any group of people and the play of differences are what ultimately create and constantly transform that iterable form - are what make language work.
While language may function perfectly well to perform what we call communication, it is crucial that we recognize that the essential performativity of language makes complete transparency impossible, and while it relies on an iterable form, the singular meaning of any performative cannot be reduced to and thereby guaranteed by that form.

So here we run up against the ‘risk of oblivion’, the risk that one may not be understood, may not be read or witnessed at all, and this is a risk with which Derrida is deeply preoccupied. But it becomes clear that this is a necessary risk because without it we are left with meaning that is decided in advance, with language that itself says nothing new - says, in fact, nothing at all. The idiomaticity of language, then, is what must be attended in its resistance to universal significance, its resistance to a translation that would pair it up with expressions of any language that also express, in their own way but equivalently, that same content. This is a matter of what Derrida sees as cultivating the poetic, and in one text he describes it as “the resistance that ‘once’ offers to thought” (Derrida 2005, 1) since it is the singularity of the poetic that resists; the unique expression that necessarily eludes capture.

To use language poetically is to translate in such a way that one takes the language that one ‘inherits’ and transforms it for those who will in turn inherit the language anew. This is to write for the Other, in opposition to writing for everyone and anyone who can understand the language, and this is expressed by Derrida in numerous texts, as a matter of the body of language, the corporeality of any idiom. The marks that one makes, rather than expressing what we are all capable of thinking, *inflict wounds upon the body of language*. Derrida indeed describes this cultivation of the idiom as ‘giving a new body to language’. The poet/translator inherits a language in the form of a body of expressions (Célan’s source
language), and in inscribing new expressions on that body, irrevocably alters and transforms the body that it has inherited (Célan’s target language).

But to inscribe ones expressions in the language one inherits is to leave a mark, to alter what is and will henceforth be possible in that language. If meaning is dependent upon differences, and if a genuinely new way of performing across an iterable form will generate new differences within the language, then each performance makes an incision that cannot be undone, that leaves a kind of wound that does not dissipate and that affects the entire body, the meaning-possibilities of the language. This is a creative endeavor; the poetic does not simply attempt to bring to our attention something that few or none of us have ever noticed before but that ultimately amounts to something known, it attempts to create experience, the experience of the poem, to create expressions that give us to think what is new, what is as yet unknown, what was not possible in the language as it was.

This idea that a singular expression in a language is an irreversible mark, an incision that changes what is possible in terms of language and experience, is what calls for language to be described as a body, as corporeal. As material and always singular, a body seems resistant to the attempt to appropriate meaning into the universally communicable. As we have seen, Derrida describes the traditional model of language as ‘logocentric’. In this picture, as words are transmitted from one mind to another through sounds that are supposed to correlate with identifiable thoughts or concepts, communication only momentarily stumbles over interlingual difference. Only momentarily because the translator can step in and make the unproblematic correlations between words of different languages assumed to point out the same concepts with the same divisions.
This is language as a matter of mind, a familiar picture where the ‘body’ of language serves only as vehicle, as arbitrary signs regulated in order to express what is not fundamentally arbitrary in a stable and shared mental universe. Alternatively, we have seen Derrida’s view that language in fact functions without any reference whatsoever to the alleged contents of the mind, and so it is crucial to refocus on language itself, the body of language, no longer as vehicle for something more permanent but as itself productive of meaning.

Although as always Derrida only emphasizes the undervalued term of an opposition in order eventually to overcome the opposition itself, it is helpful here to look at the way he specifically opposes the language/mind picture with the language/body model. Turning away from the notion that what language expresses, or the value-source of language, is to be found in the immaterial world of concepts or thoughts, language-as-body becomes a way of pointing out what resists because it is fundamentally singular and in no way gives itself up to ‘comprehension’ without betrayal or remainder. If the ‘spirit’ of an expression can be translated easily because it is an already available concept for which the language simply stands in, how would a body be translated if a body is not essentially reducible to spirit? Wouldn’t the translation into a communicable ‘meaning’ of something that was essentially a singular body necessarily be its betrayal as something unique and different? If we recognize the distinction between spirit and letter, we must recognize that the letter cannot be translated unproblematically into spirit.

This is the question that occupies Derrida in the essay “Schibboleth”, where the incomprehensibility of the body becomes a distinctly political resistance. Derrida here invokes various scenes of violence that call for resistance, but in particular the “second world
war with its universalist exterminations”. Deeply resonating with his own biographical writing about imperialist violence in Algeria (Derrida 1998), the force to be reckoned with is precisely the universalistic presumption that for Derrida inaugurates the story of Babel. In seeking to impose a ‘universal’ order that claims to want to unite people in the common features of being human, the Babelian move is a crime because it knows that there are only differences and that the ‘common features of being human’ are in fact the linguistic inheritance of the dominant group normatively imposed upon the rest.

In fact the crime functions against the dominant group as well, since as we have seen differences within languages are as real as those between languages, and furthermore the very designation of a language tends to unify by force diverse language practices. But the Babelian imperialism is characterized by a presumption that seeks to discipline bodies and bring them into conformity with an *ideal body*, an ideal body that is not a body at all but a sense of what a body ought to represent. So it doesn’t really matter what the unique properties of a body are, as long as these properties can be shown to reflect the official version of human goodness and virtue. Thus for Hitler some Polish bodies could potentially reflect the right Aryan values if properly re-educated in the German idiom, which alone was thought to enjoy access to these ideals. Bodies that could not be transformed through re-education, that remained too tied to their idioms – perhaps through ineffaceable bodily marks - could only be destroyed.

In Hitler and Franco, indeed, the most terrible possibilities of the Babelian story come into the world. In imposing an ‘idiom’, one they took for a properly universal – and
therefore ‘pure’ – language\textsuperscript{14}, they sought to erase, in various ways, all the bodies of
evidence that might resist a vision of purity, of translatability into a pure and unified spiritual
vision. Resistance, then, must come through singular bodies and their resistance not only to
this particular instance of violence, not only to the imposition of this particular idiom
masquerading as universal and pure, but to all attempts to annihilate or transcend differences
that remain marked in the body uniquely.

Though the idiom, as any expression of any language, might be translatable in
obvious ways into any other idiom, what Derrida is pointing to is not the meaning of any
expression that happens to be expressed in a particular idiom (this will amount to any and
every expression, for one thing), but the meaning of the idiom itself, the meaning of
\textit{idiomaticity}. But insofar as the idiom is identified as a manner of resisting the universal
violence described above, it is both the absolutely singular and the meaning of all language,
like the proper name. It cannot be, for Derrida, that “the idiom” is a way of expressing a
general proposition such as ‘the meaning of language is to be found in the singularities of its
expressions’, rather it must be the case that each idiom just \textit{is} irreducibly singular, expresses
what it expresses in ways that are not accessible to non-speakers of the idiom, and so its
meaning is not in some thing that it says uniquely, but in its being – and this is the
idiomaticity of any expression - an untranslatable saying that holds out against a presumed
translatable said.

\textsuperscript{14} In a particularly striking example of an entirely self-conscious attempt to introduce purity
into a language, Greeks academics in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century developed the language called
‘\textit{katharevousa}’ – literally “purified one”. It was modeled on a hypothesis about how the
‘original’ Greek language might have evolved from the ancients without any external or
foreign corrupting influences and at several points in history was enforced upon citizens.
This much Benjamin had already pointed out. Just as the name cannot be legitimately translated into a generalizable meaning, so knowing an idiom in its idiomaticity is not knowing what, for example, Derrida thinks about idiomaticity in general – we can only know an idiom and use it as an idiom by being part of the community. But at the same time, it doesn’t exactly end here; this way of participating in the body of the idiom through a community is indeed the meaning of language itself as poetic and idiomatic. The ‘essence’ of language as singularity and multiplicity is also the possibility of a genuine community composed of relations of difference.

So it is not in specifically colloquial expressions, but in every act of speaking and hearing, reading or writing itself that we find the irreducibly singular. This explains, of course, why Derrida did not write one dedicated work explaining his ‘theory of language’ but continued to write and rewrite in rather idiomatic ways around the topic of language and its singularities. Getting to the meaning of language can only be for Derrida a matter of performing the impossibility, the untranslatability, that gives resistance to language.

*Suffering and Mastery in Language*

The above seems to shed light on the notion of language as corporeal and as wounds, marks or incisions that cannot be effaced in the indifference of universalist presumptions. But it is more difficult, though no less crucial, to get at why Derrida refers to language as suffering. Firstly, and in a sense that should now be apparent, language suffers rather than acts. In other words, language as such is *acted upon* by every instance in which it is used and thereby twisted and transformed once again. Derrida also refers to what the German language ‘was made to say’ during Hitler’s reign. Along with the obvious passivity here,
language suffers because what is said is not a matter of indifference, not a mere use of a language that itself remains intact and unaffected, but a wound inscribed on a body that cannot easily be undone.

The words of the German language remain haunted by its most ignominious performances, because a language is a historical event that is constantly reformed by what it is made to say. Perhaps Derrida’s references to Célan’s poetics of ‘Aschen’ is meant to demonstrate this: this word is haunted by the Holocaust and such a spectre is not merely an external psychological association; it is rather an inescapable feature of the German language that one cannot use this word without at least opening the possibility of recalling the ashes of the victims of Nazi exterminations.

So it is already apparent why it is that along with the suffering of language itself come a number of stories in Derrida’s works that describe individuals and peoples suffering in a way that has essentially to do with language. To suffer from linguistic violence is, as Derrida describes it, to be denied a home, to be denied a proper and natural genealogy and a peaceful relationship with ones language and ones community. Very often the systematic oppression of a people begins with the dominant force denying them their language, stripping them of the power to speak in their own tongue. This is the situation Derrida describes in his own experience as a Jewish child growing up under an oppressive and racist regime in Algeria, and it is not an uncommon story.

It seems that oppressive regimes understand the power of linguistic ‘mastery’ and it is not sheer unwillingness to learn a new language that provokes them to impose their own on the colonized. It is through language that an oppressor imposes not only its own rule but also its own way of interpreting the world that justifies its particular form of power. This
generally effective strategy of stripping the other of power seems to show that living comfortably in one’s own language with others who share it affords a kind of mastery over one’s environment. But Derrida insists on the illusory nature of this kind of linguistic being-at-home. Though a political force may impose mastery through the power to name, it is in fact language itself that denies us any natural rights to it, denies us a rightful home within it.

Here if the body of language were to obey the ‘spirit’ or ‘mind’ of language, as parole is to obey langue, as our expressions are to obey grammatical structure, then one could get a grasp on a language, one could hold the key to all possible productions of meaning. But if iterability is the way that language works, then it is never the case that the meaning of an expression could be sufficiently accounted for by ‘knowledge’ of the language. Thus a language or idiom as a body, extended in space and time, is dispersed among its speakers and its actual and possible performances, and is furthermore subject to its interchange with other languages or idioms.

In this way Derrida shows that because language does not work by expressing the contents of a universalizable consciousness and because we cannot get a hold of a language by way of a grammar or a structural key of some sort, language cannot be mastered. Our experience of language, of that which appears to be what ties us to home and to our own most identity, will always fundamentally be one of exile, an experiencing that cannot quite grasp the essential or the legitimizing source of this experiencing of self and belonging. Thus the exile from a supposed home is the authentic experience of language, an experience that is only more violently, more deliberately imposed on those who are subject to linguistic violence of an explicit nature.
If language is characterized by Derrida as being non-identical to itself, it is also, then, recognizable as that which seems to instinctively pull in the opposite direction. In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida states that “every culture is originarily colonial…every culture institutes itself through the unilateral imposition of some “politics” of language. Mastery begins, as we know, through the power of naming, of imposing and legitimating appellations” (Derrida 1998, 39). But we have seen above that appellations can never be ‘legitimate’ in this determined sense, can never be guaranteed or naturally tied to what they name. We have only conventions, and if we take them seriously, we notice that the conventions tell us more about language itself than the things it might name.

Derrida, however, describes the manner in which the very instability of language, the very impossibility of mastery, is what leads language to want to impose itself so forcefully. It is the insecurity of language that makes its appropriation a matter of such high stakes. Everyone is supposed to have a ‘mother-tongue’, a proper language, a language as rightful property, but the fact that one’s most proper property, so to speak, is not something one can really have rightful possession of, is what ensures that it “gives rise to an appropriative madness” (Derrida 1998, 24). And because Derrida has demonstrated that the ungraspable nature of language signals in fact the ultimate impossibility of genuine property, of authentically owning or being-at-home in any form, it makes sense that it would be here that the attempt to get control over the uncontrollable would be staged.

It is here that we meet with colonial violence, the attempt at getting under control what is other in order to impose an order of right and law, and the subjugation of what is unlawful or foreign under ‘natural, rightful’ mastery. It is important however to look beneath the political facts of colonial violence, where foreign occupiers – forces of the ‘outside’ -
usurp ‘natural’ inhabitants from their land. In fact, this linking of the notions of the noble savage with an originary and natural speech is what Derrida deconstructs in *Of Grammatology*, in reading Rousseau’s various texts on language and nature. It must be the case that any ‘natural’ inhabitants would have had to suppress or repress the rebellious elements within their own group and impose ‘a culture’, a linguistic hegemony in the form of a dominant language with its dominant interpretation of the world, in order to stand as the ‘rightful’ (and so-called ‘original’) inhabitants. For Derrida this is not solely the story of what we explicitly think of as colonial violence, but the story of language and culture itself, as always a power-struggle to impose one idiom over another, a struggle for a mastery that is to appear natural, but is ultimately anything but.

The point that Derrida is concerned to make in this text as in many others is that linguistic categorizations, such as the one that separates ‘language’ from ‘idiom’ from ‘dialect’ are always politically motivated and most often ideologically weighted. The very appellation ‘mother-tongue’ seems designed to convince us that this is a language that cannot be taken away from us because it is ours by birth, and therefore by natural right. But to make this assumption is to make a claim of exclusion. In contrast to my ability to speak any given language, my *right* to speak *this* language, this one that I was born into, is thought to be grounded in its being my property, and therefore not being the property of others who are not like me, not naturally the same as me in this respect.\(^{15}\)

\(^{15}\) Certainly the situation seems different when it is a matter of an oppressed people or minority population asserting the right to speak their own tongue. But the point is not that this should never be asserted; only that any such assertion of a right to language will exclude those who do not share in the language by birth and so is not structurally different from asserting a majority language, and is ultimately subject to the same dangers.
So language as natural birthright serves to exclude the other, to identify a centre of superiority, and to establish uniformity in what is always a political backlash against its own insecurity. But turning back to this very insecurity, for Derrida, will give us the chance, in contrast, to welcome the other, to interrupt and question superiority and to foster difference. And this is really a re-articulation of a point that Derrida is constantly making. Previously we saw that if language is taken to be reducible to the universal, to signified concepts that we can all share alike, then it has nothing to say because there is no other in language who we might address or be addressed by. And here his claim is that a language that is taken to be the exclusive property of a group of like-minded individuals would remain unable to say anything new, unable to express anything singular or creative, since the other who provides the catalyst for the play of differences that produce meaning, has been cut out of the so-called life of the language.

So the extension of the way in which language suffers by being passive and subject to wounding is the sense in which language is always and fundamentally an exile, but it is this exile that is productive of meaning. Derrida’s claim is that we long to be at home in our language, we long to say ‘I’ in a language that comes naturally and that already knows us as an ‘I’, but we are fundamentally alienated from language and from this possibility of being at peace, at home, complacent with our rightful property. This kind of suffering, furthermore, is insurmountable, as the exile that is language is not a fall from grace as though there were once a pure language, a rightful mother-tongue that we somehow lost.

Heidegger’s “homelessness” speaks of this kind of loss of what once was rightfully ours, but in fact this is an alienation that has never been alienated from anything, that never had any plenitude from which to be alienated in the first place. Language has not
deteriorated - though many may believe this and attribute it to the dispersal of languages and the mixing that dilutes the purity of mother tongues – rather it has always been this process of dispersal and deferral, this activity of defying transparency and translation. So the ‘natural’ relation to language is a feeling that Derrida calls “unheimlich”, the feeling of not being at home, the feeling of being alienated, but alienated from what is most near. If the literal translation of this term is “unhomely”, the English reverberates with ‘strangeness’, giving a sense not only of what is entirely other and unknown, but what is oddly so, what ought to be familiar but appears other than itself as familiar, and as such disturbs my own sense of being at home and familiar to myself. So this second sense of language as suffering is the difficulty of always striving towards a promised language that will never be and indeed never was. But it is just this impossibility that is also the possibility of being disturbed in my complacent sense of mastery of and in my own language, and is thus the possibility of turning towards the Other in language.

_Schibboleths and Dates_

The essay “Schibboleth” plays with the possibility of the community-as-body – thus not community as an ideal structure that relates individuals to this set of ideals or to that general will, but a relating through language among singular bodies that refuse to be reduced to the former. This sense of community is what Derrida calls a ‘minimal community of resistance’, where to preserve the idiom, to reject the model that sees all difference ‘worked out’ in the big picture, is to hold oneself, in lieu of the impersonal structure of the community as a whole, responsible to the other. This responsibility of one to the other is articulated by/as a schibboleth. The ‘password’ (the particular kind of password that is called a ‘schibboleth’)
that gains one access to such a community turns out to depend upon saying the word in a particular way, a way that could be identified as the way the legitimate community says it.

But this seems to imply that one should only be granted access to what one already belongs to. Is this meant to be an exclusive community that allows no outsiders, no foreigners who are, for example, physically incapable of saying certain words in certain ways? Clearly Derrida is treading delicately on this ground, trying to show a sense of solidarity that is not exclusive but not entirely transparent either, and what is meant to be excluded is nothing more than the imposter who believes it possible to know the password without living among the community, without dwelling in the idiom. The untranslatable letter of the text here becomes the body of the initiate, where to belong is to practice resistance to the appropriation of the community by the forces of purification and unification, forces that would assimilate the idiom into the dominant ‘language’. The password of the forces of resistance in the Spanish Civil War, ‘no pasaran’, that Derrida analyses, is instructive here. It says nothing but that someone, some “they”, will not pass, will not succeed, will not infiltrate the community of those who authentically belong, will not cross the border that one thereby crosses through the act of saying that “they” will not do likewise.

But who are these others and why could they not pass by simply saying the same word, or an approximation or a translation of it that gives the same meaning? If the ‘schibboleth’ is the mark of belonging that amounts to being among the initiate, the ‘no pasaran’ works by the same logic. One cannot say ‘schibboleth’ the right way unless one had lived among the community, in other words one could not say it correctly having merely read it or heard about it or tried to discover what it means apart from its language. The only ones this excludes are those who believe they can reduce the community to an abstraction, an
empty structure or an ideal of purity and unification in which all culture amounts to the same. The ‘no pasaran’ excludes, in a sense, everybody except the speaker and those whom she addresses.

Clearly the explicit intention in this historical instance is that the “they” denotes the enemy, the forces of fascist Europe, but Derrida’s interest in this password seems to play on the non-specificity of the “they”, such that the password becomes a performative. It is a performative because the “they” excludes those who are not involved in the very performance here and now, those who are neither the speaking nor the spoken to. Others can and will perform the same and gain admission, but the meaning of the password is only the sense in which it means nothing, means only that it is the performance of the password that counts, and that the performance of the password is the establishment of this alliance of the minimal community. If one were to imagine that what counted was a message that the password expresses and that could be said otherwise, then one would have missed the point of a password. From this Derrida wants to hypothesize a community that excludes no singularity, no difference – a community that excludes only the attempt to eradicate difference. It is not by chance that the ‘they’ actually intended in this historical instance turns out to represent just such an attempt.

The great danger, of course, is that this kind of ‘preservation of difference’ can (and often does), lead to its own nationalisms, in a world where closing the borders to those who would impose a structure that is insensitive to the singularities of a people can become a paranoid isolationism or a ‘pre-emptive’ imperialism. The very community of difference can give itself over to resisting any difference that seems different from its own sanctioned differences. But this is a risk that must be taken, a dangerous border that must be watched
over, since the alternative is to simply give in immediately to imperialist forces and nationalisms without resistance.

The possibility of resisting is only, according to Derrida, to be found in what he calls ‘alliances’, which are those relations that come together only to resist. Thus what unites a people under an idiom is a sense of its singularity in general, the singularity that is preserved through the impossibility of reconciling the differences that make it up. It is a community founded on difference itself, and not upon any particular thing that makes it different from other communities. This is the balance that must be kept, and what must be guarded against is the failure to retain this sense of ‘resistance’ so carefully described by Derrida, particularly when the community is no longer ostensibly in peril. To retain this sense of resistance is to remain vigilant about any force that would dominate the differences within a community and thus to remain committed to a community that is inclusive without being reductive.

Reading the poetry of Paul Célan in “Schibboleth”, Derrida illustrates this necessary risk in terms of the date, dating as a sealing-off from generality, which in so doing risks its own readability. Celan demonstrates that all poems insofar as they are genuinely poetic, have their dates. But to ask “what is a date?” or to inquire about what this might mean is to miss what is singular about every act of dating, to miss it by asking questions along the lines of a traditional metaphysical model. This particular linguistic hegemony, that of the Western philosophical tradition, has effaced the singularity that might possibly be glimpsed in the poetic word by reducing the meaning of the poetic to its content – which is the very intention of the question ‘what is the date?’ - and thereby missing the sense in which the poetic functions like the password, bringing the genuinely idiomatic into a relation where its very idiomaticity might be significant.
To date is to seal the letter off from the spirit in which it would be appropriated for the universal, to turn away from the question about what it is. It is obvious that the date is a marking of a particular place on a calendar, and as such there is nothing mysterious going on. Even if a date can be marked off as singular within a calendar of generalized ‘dates’, it is only readable as the particular thing that it is because the same date comes around again every year and we have a general sense of where “January 31st” fits in the scheme of things. This is just to say, again, that singularity on its own can leave no mark, that it requires the generality of meaning in order to be inscribed at all. But the date also harbours, in Derrida’s analysis, the same iterability as language, whereby it is not only a recognizable form that is required but also an unrepeatable singularity that must hold out if what is to be inscribed is to say anything at all. In this sense to date a poetic work is a linguistic act of making-singular the language. What happened on January 31st is an event that happened at no other date, not even another January 31st, but this one, and not even the one experienced by anyone on that date, but one that only belongs to Célan himself. As such what is dated is what happens one time only, and happens in secret. The genuinely poetic risks its very legibility insofar as its singularity seems to increase its significance, its having something to say that has not been said before, or cannot have been said but at this moment in this manner.

Since the poetic must be both readable and singular, the trick is something like finding the possibility of marking the date in its unreadability, its untranslatability. And as should now be familiar, this is the only opportunity for genuine reading, for becoming attuned to the unique possibilities of poetic language. If we return to iterability, to the notion of the non-identity to itself of language, the meaning of this becomes more apparent. Derrida’s notion of a password demonstrates iterability: the form remains the same insofar as
we identify the words “no pasaran” as meaningful across all possible utterances, but then this
general meaning is only a function of the singular performances in which the phrase is put
into play. Each time language is put into play the playing field and the other players change,
making each performance therefore singular insofar as it brings the iterable form into new
relations. The players and the playing-field here are the contexts that are always unique, and
the point is that there is no way to reduce the meaning-in-the-context to something
specifiable outside of the particular relations that make up the context. Thus the ‘password
quality’ of poetic language is the sense in which reading is not figuring out what the signs
refer to in their context as a whole, but paying attention to the way that the performative
holds together what remains different.

This points to Derrida’s sense of language as testimony, in which he shows a great
deal of affinity with Emmanuel Lévinas. Lévinas was equally concerned with preserving the
irreducibility of the community as a resistance to its complete reduction to the rational.
Accordingly, Lévinas imagines a practicing community that defies reduction to a meaning
that would be something like a ‘spirit of the community’. In particular Lévinas is concerned
in this regard with the language of victims as testimony. If the testimony of those who suffer
were to be reduced to what we can understand from it – either information about what
happened or universal lessons to be learned, then the singularity of those sufferings is
effaced. Derrida shows a similar kind of vigilance, particularly in his essay “Forgiveness”.
Here his references to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission consider the
paradox of language as testimony in distinctly Lévinasian terms. The value of the
Commission, Derrida insists, is above all that of the value of language to mark the
untranslatability of testimony. As Lévinas writes, “suffering can only be told in the language
of the victims” (Lévinas 1994), and indeed Derrida thinks that any content to the testimony of the victims must ultimately be superseded by the testimonial act itself.

In what Derrida refers to as the logic of exemplarity (Derrida 1998), the issue is thus: if the singular example is to be a genuine example and not just a general claim, then it has to remain singular, but in the very making-exemplary of a singularity, it must now function as the marker of a general claim, and it thereby loses all that made it singular. What *holds out* by *holding-together* is the way in which the example is not only singular in itself, but can only function as singular because it is in fact multiple, itself an ‘alliance’ of singularities whose relations *to one another* resist any unity that might allow an exemplarity.

The case of the Second World War and the events, times and places that came together there are not the same as those of the Algerian war and its own injustices, or South Africa under Apartheid. They may be made to exemplify the same general points about imperialist violence, but they also each hold together a group of singular dates that are different *from amongst one another* and therefore have no right to speak as a whole in order to exemplify something general. This is not just the point that the relations that make up the meaning-in-context of a text must go beyond into inter-textual relations that could never reasonably be delimited, but the further point that the various relations in which each performative must be enmeshed cannot be reduced to a unified context.

So the meaning of the date, as that which is both singular and repeatable, is that there will be a secret of the event as a holding-together that is one time only and in this way alone will it go out to what is other than itself. Célan, and Derrida in turn, speak of the poem going out to the ‘*wholly* Other’, because insofar as the poem marks its dates it can only perform a certain significance of its unreadability, it singularity, its inability to stand in for the general.
Let me make this somewhat more concrete. If a poem that is ‘about’ the violence of the Second World War were to presume to speak to victims of the Algerian war of a general violence that is shared, then it would presume to understand the suffering of the victim in advance, a suffering that is just like all other suffering and has a meaning and a general significance. Then the poem would not speak in any way to the victim herself, would not address the victim in her singular situation.

A poem that, conversely, can be read as marking a suffering that is in no way reducible to anything but its own idiom, has the unique possibility of being able to speak to the other as to one who also suffers, and to some extent inevitably suffers alone and in secret, never transparent or fully understood. This must be the power of the poetic, of the singular that can only be read in the poetic as unreadable, untranslatable. And this is the meaning of language as witnessing, testimony, and as address. Language as testimony is the language of the victim, the saying that is betrayed in any reduction to a said. And this means that it cannot be translated, for the language of the victims is the performative event of witnessing, not the vehicle for conveying some message about what this particular story of suffering means in general.

To address the singular other in her otherness is precisely to acknowledge an opaqueness with regards to what cuts her out of the world, both in the sense of marking the singularity of her suffering (what ‘cuts her out’ as what distinguishes her as different) and in the sense in which that very suffering excludes her from a world of shared meaning and understanding. Thus the poet ‘witnesses’ events, dates them, rather than explains them or analyses them, and in so doing, needs not readers but witnesses, to its own event of language. The poet and the reader, or the poet and the victims, do not share dates, but they share the
experience of dates, and in this their singular dates might speak to each other, without really saying anything beyond that they are secret and therefore mark and acknowledge the fact of one another’s secret. This is significant because it seems to present the possibility of illumination of the singular through juxtaposition with other singularities. Resisting the reduction of the meaning of suffering to a universal suffering whose meaning is worked out in advance leaves no possibility for insight, and therefore leaves us no reason to testify, since what we might say will already have been anticipated. To speak to the Other out of the non-comprehension of singularity, is to listen to the Other’s testimony as possibly meaningful in its uniqueness.

Here again we have the question of what Derrida calls the ‘language contract’. A holding-together for the sake of keeping apart, the language contract promises that there is difference in language, and what becomes apparent through this examination of the schibboleth is that it is difference itself that cannot be translated. In the essay “Des Tours de Babel” Derrida asks the crucial question of how we might translate a text that is in more than one language, pointing out the apparent impossibility of translating the relationship between the languages that are juxtaposed in one text. When Benjamin, for example, includes passages in French in his German language text, a translation of the German text into French could not help but fail to acknowledge the intentional juxtaposition, the difference

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16 The same problem attends the translation into any other language of both the French and the German. It seems we might translate the German into another language and leave the French intact as Benjamin obviously intended, but even this fails if the particular juxtaposition is significant, the juxtaposition of these two particular languages, and in both Benjamin’s and Derrida’s view, this would have to be the case since the French partly gets its resonance in the text from its not being German. Just how and why the text intends this particular ‘alliance’ could be further investigated, but in any case it should be clear that the relation of the French to a target language would at least be different than to the German original.
that is marked in Benjamin’s act of language, and yet it is simply not possible to translate the
text without losing the meaning of this relationship.

In the same way, the differences that are the holding-together of events, times, places
in what Derrida has called an ‘alliance’ – a community of resistance – are what remain
fundamentally untranslatable. This is why any genuinely ‘idiomatic’ or poetic use of
language cannot be translated, since it is constituted essentially by this kind of alliance, this
kind of ‘gathering’ of what thereby is held significantly apart. And because these remain
untranslatable, while at the same time the operation of the poetic is essentially a translating
operation, we return to the notion of the performance of impossibility, the border that is
marked only in its being transgressed.

*Why Translation?*

The point at which we have arrived is that if a poetic singularity, as a gathering of
singular and singularly-related dates, is to be marked in its resistance to translation, its brute
refusal to be reduced to common meaning, then strictly speaking it cannot be read, cannot be
understood at all. But Derrida remarks that it is those texts that are the most poetic, the most
tied to their language and letter, that in fact call to be translated above all. They call to be
translated because, as we have seen, they alone can really speak to the other in her
singularity, they alone hold out against the reduction of the other to the one who must
understand me in a common language, and therefore understands me only as I am like her,
and herself only as she is like me.

But here we see that ‘transforming’ the text, in the manner that Derrida seems to
sanction, runs up against the same problem that any presumed translation would. That is, as
soon as we in any way speak about the text in a language that is understood because we hold
it in common, we have already betrayed the literal body of what we read, have already gone
beyond the text as testimony to its own resistance, and unified that alliance of differences in a
discursive ‘subject-matter’. But without this going-beyond there is neither reading nor
writing, so it is a matter of performing a resistance to transparency, to translate in such a way
that one neither claims to have given a definitive interpretation of what one is translating, nor
to have produced a ‘target text’ that in itself could ever be fully understood. In this way one
sanctions a going-beyond but lets the text remain as the yet-to-be-read. As Derrida writes,
regarding his own desire not to write in a way that is fully transparent:

But this is also a way of giving to be read [donner à lire]. If something is
given to be read that is totally intelligible, that can be totally saturated by
sense, it is not given to the other to be read. Giving to the other to be read
is also a leaving to be desired, or a leaving the other room for an
intervention by which she will be able to write her own interpretation: the
other will have to be able to sign in my text. And it is here that the desire
not to be understood means, simply, hospitableness to the reading of the
other, not the rejection of the other. (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 32).

This is what the writer, or the poet, or the reader of poetry, can do to respect otherness in the
text, and this is the kind of transformation, it could be argued, that Derrida not only sanctions
but performs, in all of his own writing.

And this for Derrida is a ‘translation’, even without moving between distinct
languages, in as much as he has identified translation as that poetic operation of the sort that
Célan performs in his own texts even within the so-called borders of the German language
itself. It is also the matter of the epigram, as suggested at the outset of Chapter One, that
rather than providing a nice summary of the general point, becomes a kind of singular
counterpoint to which we respond without ever fully penetrating. And this, as we have seen,
is the necessity of translation, the response that is called for and that in responding can do no better than to remain mindful of singularity.

This kind of good translation, then, first of all recognizes the fact of iterability, the fact that all speaking/writing is in any case a speaking/writing otherwise and that even the attempt to faithfully reproduce would have to contend with the non-identity to itself of language in the very ‘original’. With this in mind, the translation then, rather than attempting to faithfully reproduce, allows the singularity of the text and its language to resonate with the singularity of another language and another set of dates – a new context.

The most obvious examples of this sort of juxtaposing of unreconciled singularities seem to be found in instances of contemporary stagings of classic plays, such as Baz Luhrmann’s 1996 film version of *Romeo and Juliet*, where the language of Shakespeare’s play and a contemporary set of problems are made to breathe new life into one another. In productions of this sort, it is often the disparity of the contemporary setting and context with the well-known and antiquated language of the text that seems to produce a unique meaning and significance.

However, this is not the sort of work that we would normally call a translation, but falls into the category rather of ‘adaptation’, which might not be a bad way to describe Derrida’s texts on other writers and philosophers. And the case can easily be made for these other things being labeled translations of a kind. But when Derrida says that the works that are most tied to their languages are the ones that call out most urgently for translation, he surely is referring to translation proper, to the ‘reproduction’ – in some obvious sense – of a text into other languages. His concern is for the untranslatability of language in its uniqueness.
Based on Derrida’s descriptions of translations as transformations, it would seem that we should be able to reverse the priority and have translation proper follow the model of the transforming kind of reading - of adaptation, for example - where the meeting of two different singularities seems to transform each. On this model it would be necessary to respect the way in which the poetic text is tied to its language and allow it to reverberate in another language in some singular way, thus preserving the space between the two texts as a space to be leapt across in a manner that is always to some degree arbitrary, but significant as the new creation of a relation between the two. In other words, a translation would leave the impression of its having been a finite choice among many, but a choice that creates or reveals new possibilities in the text.

This seems a fine idea in theory, but if it is easy to see how an adaptation or a work of interpretation can do this, it is not so clear how a poetic translation in the proper sense might. This is mostly because the reader of an adaptation or of a philosophical interpretation might easily have access to the original (since an adaptation does not always, or even often, involve the switch to another language), but also because the creative nature of the leap can be evident in the very target text itself – the juxtaposition of costume and language, for example, in Luhrmann’s *Romeo and Juliet*. In cases such as philosophical readings of the kind Derrida offers, the target text generally refers to the original and so keeps its distance, never posing as any kind of substitute. In the case of adaptation, it is again a question of a different medium (or Jakobson’s ‘inter-semiotic translation’ (Jakobson 2000)), and so it is self-consciously a ‘writing-otherwise’, as when we ‘bring a novel to the screen’ and are given to endless comparison between the film and the novel. But in the case of interlingual translation, the presumed goal is to bring the text to those who do not have access to the original - and as
such the translation stands in for the original. It is this that seems to be the source of the problem of translation for Derrida, because of course the good interlingual translator is conscious of her task as one of ‘transforming’ the text into a new language and its own singular ways of expressing. But this can only be done legitimately by responding in an entirely arbitrary way that nonetheless cannot present itself as arbitrary but necessarily appears as definitive. So the impossibility of translation lies not solely in the inability to transfer meaning but rather in this coupled with the presumption to stand-in-for. The impossibility lies in marking the distance/difference between target and source within the very target text itself.

This seems to shed light on the question of why Derrida insists on the betrayal if there are what seem to be entirely legitimate ways of going beyond the original in other forms of reading and writing. The practices of reading and writing, interpreting, adapting and commentary seem legitimate because they don’t presume to stand in for an original. But insofar as any act of reading or writing of any sort does in fact say something about the meaning of a source, does in fact reduce another text to a content, there is only a provisional legitimacy that must be ‘watched over’ by the terms of impossibility. This is why for Derrida it is necessary for the model of inter-lingual translation to preside over all of these practices. Inter-lingual translation is explicit in its presumption to stand-in-for, and so it is of the utmost concern, and our concern to put under erasure any reduction of a text to its meaning content must take heed from its example.
Performativity and Futurity

Because iterability guards its own secret date, but in so doing remains legible only from the distant point of another singular date, the meaning of the text must wait for the other to read and interpret, and yet this reading/interpretation can only be itself singular and secret. It is the presumption of the translation to capture the proper meaning of the original that betrays the text, and yet because of the nature of the translation as standing-in-for, this presumption cannot be avoided. To the extent that we do presume to be able to read and understand texts, we betray the always future-oriented nature of reading and writing. This is the necessary interpreting/translating that is both the future moment of reading what is written and the present moment of reducing the writing/speaking to what is written/said, which betrays the futurity of writing, and even of speech.

As a feature of a writing that Derrida has declared generalizable as the necessity of inscription and the différance that is the condition of communication, this is also a description of the way that people relate to one another in friendship. Derrida conceives of the ‘minimal community of resistance’ as the very matter of friendship, that necessarily involves this betrayal. In *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida discusses the performative contradiction that reveals itself in Aristotle’s “Oh my friends, there is no friend”:

Behind the logical game of contradiction or paradox, perhaps the “Oh my friends, there is no friend” signifies first and last this overrunning of the present by the undeniable future anterior which would be the very moment and time of friendship. Undeniable future anterior, the absolute of an unpresentable past as well as future, which is to say of traces that one can only ever deny by summoning them into the light of phenomenal presence. A temporal torsion thus knots up the predicative proposition (“there is no friend”) within the apostrophe (“O my friends”). The torsion of this asymmetry envelops the theoretical statement or the knowledge within the performativity of a prayer it will never exhaust. This asymmetry leads back to what I will call the question of the response (Derrida 1993, 18)
In what follows this passage, Derrida describes various forms of address (answering for and answering before) that always seem to imply an anterior addressing that is in fact the future anterior that makes up the possibility of true friendship. If it cannot be said that there are friends, it is because friendship as a fact - “presented as a being-present (substance, subject, essence or existence)” - is outrun by friendship as a ‘promise’. It is not (as with Derrida’s well-known discussion of “the democracy to come”) that sometime in the future – one hopes – there will be genuine friendship, but that friendship is essentially future-oriented. As an ‘alliance’ of the kind already described, friendship is, prior to what is said by friends or about friendship, “a being-together in the allocution” (Derrida 1993, 18).

Aristotle’s address, “oh my friends”, is a performative that both denies and affirms friendship. It affirms it by its very performance as *address*, by performing the distance and the difference between speaker and listener, reader and writer, and relying upon and presupposing the otherness of the other to receive the communication. But it simultaneously denies that the friendship thus enacted might be reducible to the kind of friendship that would be announced in a statement such as “there are friends/there is friendship”, as a matter of fact. A friendship in which I am genuinely responsible to the other as absolute alterity, is only possible as a relation to that which transcends “substance, subject, essence or existence”. The other that I address is that which I cannot bring within my present or my presence, reducible to my knowledge of her or representable as coherent subject or object for me, and so the statement of fact ‘that there are friends’ would betray any genuine friendship.

Derrida claims here that the ‘prayer’ he invokes, the performativity of language, is not to a god, but to the friend, human and singular. But it is a gesture in language to the very alterity of the other as that which transcends any possible experience, save as the
impossibility of the friend in her presence. The friend is only she who is spoken to with a performative meaning that absolutely resists the constative. And the simultaneous betrayal of this very saying always takes place in what is said, but such a betrayal – the denial of a correlative statement that captures the meaning of the friendship-alliance as to be futurally determined – is what marks the very meaning of friendship as resistance itself.

Although such prayers call for response, the response takes on the same structure of asymmetry in which the other invoked in the responding in turn “exceeds the measure of man” (Derrida 1993, 22). What is important is the act of responding, but paradoxically the content of the response that cannot fail to attend any responding, that in fact constitutes the meaning of what it responds to, will be a betrayal of that very act. And this is why it is crucial to mark the betrayal itself, since it is only here that we might glimpse the true promise of friendship in its contradiction to the friendship of an egalitarian sharing of communicable ideas. That is, as a pure relating that holds apart the terms it brings into relation. In this regard Derrida describes,

the recognition of the common strangeness that does not allow us to speak of our friends, but only to speak to them, not to make of them a topic of conversation (or articles), but the movement of understanding in which, speaking to us, they reserve, even on the most familiar terms, an infinite distance, the fundamental separation on the basis of which what separates becomes relation. Here discretion is not in the simple refusal to put forward confidences…but it is the interval, the pure interval that, from me to this other who is a friend, measures all that is between us, the interruption of being that never authorizes me to use him, or my knowledge of him (were it to praise him) and which, far from preventing all communication, relates us to one another in the difference and sometimes the silence of speech (Derrida 1993, 23).

The presumption of a transparent sharing of ideas precludes any real communication, which relies on difference as the possibility of genuine relation, but as this presumption must lie at
the bottom of all acts of communication, language is a constant betrayal of the alterity that is language. Rather than giving ourselves over to the presumption of transparency, it becomes necessary to stand guard over the border that distinguishes the saying from the said, but only in the performance of their relating to one another in which they are inextricably linked. The preserving of the alterity of the other, then, becomes a matter of acknowledging an infinite debt to the other as the source of language and as that friend who is always immediately betrayed.

This insolvent debt, then, is what the translator must mark, and we have already seen how Derrida makes this explicit in “Des Tours de Babel”. If the acceptable translation is the one that authentically attends to the singularity of the text by refusing the presumption of a theme or a concept to mediate between languages, then the authentic translation is impossible because there is nothing that brings together the differences that make language meaningful. In acknowledging its own operation as impossible the translation inscribes the infinite debt to the Other whose meaning and whose relation cannot be captured in language. Paradoxically what makes the translation possible is this impossibility as debt, what makes meaning appear is that which can never itself appear in the text, that which always withdraws itself from what passes between reader and writer, speaker and addressee, as transcending this because it is the relating itself. The addressing of my text to another is its possibility, and makes it impossible to capture its sense in the particular ‘what’ that happens to be addressed to the other or with which the other responds. Thus, while this otherness withdraws from and transcends the reduction to the content of the text, it remains there as the trace, as Derrida’s différance.
But of course the question circles back to us—how do we actually translate the address? Or how does the address appear through its betrayal? And if it seems obvious that Derrida’s response is simply that we do not and cannot translate such a thing, that such a thing does not appear, he is clear that we do nonetheless somehow mark its withdrawal, its impossibility as trace in both an ‘original’ text and in a translation. To see how this might work we return to the text of “Des Tours de Babel”, and to the notion that the (un)translatability of the text, and therefore the infinite debt as trace of the other, appears and disappears in that which the text demonstrates about language itself.

Here Derrida reiterates Benjamin’s view, which owes its own debt to the German Romantics, that a text must be cleansed of content in order to reveal language itself as the very meaningfulness of our world. That is, language—the possibility of address—as that which separates and holds us apart, is the infinite source of meaning and value that can appear in our world. This sense of ‘language as such’, then, is none other than the resistance that language as testimony holds out against any claim to understand what is being testified to. This means that every particular meaning that language expresses is a betrayal of the very address that makes it possible, and so any particular meaning that is created in language finds its ultimate meaning in that which denies content in favour of form.

*What* we say is always transcended by *that* we say, by language itself that says only its own saying. For Benjamin, the translation freed from its ties to any particular content still retains a subject, but that subject is always language itself. Any text, any utterance, in its true, pure meaning, reveals language itself and nothing other. Derrida follows Benjamin here, and his différance is revealed only where the subject of the text is language itself, only
where the text appears as a translation that strips language of any content and leaves nothing behind but form - the ways of meaning that are revealed behind meanings themselves.

With this in mind, it is striking that Derrida’s reading of Célan’s poetry seems to distill meaning into demonstrations of language itself, its secretiveness and its potencies, and the very sense in which it defies meaning. Derrida shows that to read the poem is not to identify a subject-matter and figure out what the poem means, but to read in such a way as to mark the places where language holds out against meaning. This is not really a theory of language, but insofar as Derrida is constantly developing this resistance as the condition of possibility for the infinite possibilities of meaning in language, this is all that can be said about language. Much can be said about what language is not, but the nature of language is continually revealed by Derrida through tracing the content of what language says back to what is revealed about language as resistance to meaning.

**Force**

It has often been argued that Derrida is commonly misinterpreted as giving a formalist account of language that ignores his claims regarding the real-world context in which language gets its meaning. Jeffrey T. Nealon, for example, argues that “[f]orce in Derrida’s linguistics is not primarily the force of lack or the demonstration of an inevitable absence, but is rather the positive or affirmative force of context breaking, the necessity of responding to emergence or the event” (Nealon 2003, 163), and goes on to describe the misreading of Derrida as having reduced language to pure signification or the open-endedness of interpretation. And indeed in “Force and Signification” Derrida explicitly critiques formalism in structuralist approaches to language and literary creation (Derrida 1978, 3-30).
Derrida argues here that the attention to form neutralizes the distinctly historical forces through which a text emerges as a creative act. Structuralism, he contends, works primarily with a spatial metaphor and as such reduces the duration in language and literature that is the impossibility of presence.

In another essay in the same volume, Derrida also aligns himself with the positivity of a distinctly Nietzschean sense of play that opposes the “saddened, negative, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play”. Rather than mourning for “the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin” (Derrida 1978, 292), Derrida insists that this impossibility is simultaneously the possibility of the creative act in language, and that something more like a celebration is called for in marking the absence of a structure or pre-formativity that would reduce all the particular historical details of a text to the inessential. In these reflections it would seem that Derrida opposes an ahistorical structuralism that reduces meaning to a comprehensive formula, in order to preserve meaning as historical, contextual and creative. This constitutes a performative theory of language, as is clear also in Derrida’s theory of iterability, which demonstrates that while it is form that holds out the impossibility of ever exhaustively determining meaning, it is force – the particular, historical performance of that form – that determines actual meanings.

But if Nealon is correct in thinking that force is a matter of ‘context-breaking’, which I am calling performativity, he seems to ignore the transcendence that Derrida finds necessary in order to preserve the marks of temporality from a reduction to spatiality and therefore presence. In his concern to mark the temporal deferral that keeps meaning open and so never completely present, Derrida as we have seen appeals to a deferral that preserves

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17 And this allows Nealon to go on in this essay to discuss Derrida as significantly similar to Deleuze in respect to language, a similarity that my subsequent chapters aim to dispute.
the future of the very words written on the paper. It is true that for Derrida the meaning of
the words are always made possible by historical context, but it is also true that for Derrida
language is creative only because the openness of its forms preserves that which transcends
context, the temporal deferral over the specific performance. What this means is that while
Derrida most certainly means to give a theory of language that is performative\textsuperscript{18}, that locates
meaning in performativity, the performatory meaning in each case is transcended by

*performativity itself.* As Derrida has made explicit, it is the *fact* of performing, the
performatory posture in which language is addressed to the other, that is the very possibility
of the meaningfulness of any particular performance. And this amounts to performativity as

*testimony:*

Derrida, as we have seen, is concerned to hold apart the terms that can only
communicate by resisting common language, by resisting the reduction in which they would
become fully present to one another – the effacement of the other in her very otherness. The
futural dimension of language holds out this impossible possibility. Thus force, though it
sometimes in Derrida’s work is associated with the particular social and political historical
forces that make up the context of a performance, is always overridden by the ultimate force
of play itself, différance. This is not to override the historical, but it is to override the
particular historical context in order to preserve historicity itself. And if différance is never
anything in itself, is only the play between particular forces and the forms of language, it is

\textsuperscript{18} Here I am reading Derrida as opposing performativity to structuralism specifically, and
although the usual distinction is between performative and constative linguistics,
structuralism seems to fit into the category of constative linguistics. Douglas Robinson draws
this performative/constative distinction explicitly, and makes the connection between
structuralist and constative linguistics, in a book that brings this distinction to bear on the
question of translation (Robinson 2003). He draws primarily on Derrida (as well as Austin
and Grice) in developing the approach to linguistics that he calls performative.
always “a certain pure and infinite equivocality which gives signified meaning no respite, no rest, but engages it in its own economy so that it always signifies again and differs” (Derrida 1978, 25), that wins out. To comprehend, Derrida writes, “is to lose meaning by finding it” (ibid., 26). To avoid such loss is to keep open the futural dimension of language.

Derrida’s performativity then does not really constitute a performative theory of language in the Austinian sense, but rather as différance holds out against particular performances every bit as much as it holds out against meaning as communication or reference. It is the very holding-out itself that constitutes the possibility of the encounter with the other in language. It is resistance as the possibility of community, and this is why in reading texts although we cannot avoid joining the debate that consists in thematizing, making-present and communicating, our utmost duty in reading is to demonstrate the performativity or testimonial aspect that is language itself in its temporal deferral. Translation thus marks the impossibility of ever reiterating différance, as iterability itself, and its utmost meaning then is the transcendence that simply marks the absence of meaning, the absence of the original and therefore the impossibility of translation.

The Meaning of Language as Loss of the World

All of Derrida’s readings of Célan’s poems, then, turn out to interpret them as speaking about language itself alone. We might imagine that, since for Derrida the text is to remain open to the other to interpret from his own singular dates, the legitimacy of this reading is guaranteed simply by its being an authentic reading of this poem from this particular perspective that is Derrida’s preoccupation with language. But we have seen that it is necessary to the marking of authenticity in reading that the particular interpretation pay
homage to resistance, to the ultimate illegitimacy of any reading to stand in for the original. Thus for Derrida there is a certain paradoxical legitimacy that is reserved only for the reading that marks illegitimacy by giving the meaning in simultaneously denying any save the demonstration of how language undoes what it says.

The paradoxical nature of this situation is to be found in the fact that the revealing of language as such can only come about where language is used idiomatically, where language speaks only singularity, dates and secrets. In other words, in saying general things ‘about’ language, language cannot reveal its deepest possibilities; for this it requires what seem to be singular events in the world in order to perform those possibilities, and these turn out to be illegible. In the reduction of the singularities of which language speaks to the truth of language as such, poetic expression seems to lose any essential connection with a world that could harbor the singularities of articulation such that we might meaningfully learn anything about the world itself from or in language.

Derrida does indeed claim about language that “we do not finally know to what it is bearing witness”, and goes on to point out that “even if we can know a lot and learn a lot from it…we cannot know it” (Derrida 2005, 89) (italics mine), but it is difficult to see what this ‘knowing a lot and learning a lot’ could amount to. On the one hand, language does contain information and this we can absorb from language, but this is not the essential and not what Derrida thinks we can learn from language used idiomatically. On the other hand, it could be that we are spoken to from a singular date in such a way that our own secretive dates are somehow illuminated, but such illumination cannot be spoken of meaningfully, cannot be translated into any expression of any language. Thus we can translate such illumination only into what it says about how language cannot capture such illumination. The
way forward from here is to translate by marking untranslatability in the text, rather than to respond to what particular situations of translation might call for.

Going back to Derrida’s claim that every expression of language is always already a translation, it becomes clear that the non-identity to itself of language that makes language a system of iterability and repetition without original meaning to ground its legitimate translation, means that language can never anchor itself to the world. The expressions of language are referred only to language itself in its non-self-identity, and this means that language is infinitely creative and yet equally self-enclosed. The power of such a view of language to resist the specifically linguistic tyrannies of language is great, but is it necessary that language refuse to attach itself to specific meaning-possibilities in order to resist the dominating tendencies to which language gives rise?

Furthermore, it seems as though the instability of the original should force us to abandon the notion of translation as representation altogether. After all, if the condition of our forms of language is différance as a never-present deferral, and if this means that any sense of the original comes undone the moment we attempt to capture it in a translation, then Derrida’s insight that there is nothing identifiable and unitary to represent should force us to radically rethink what the very practice of translation might be. It seems that in Derrida’s own analyses it cannot represent or reproduce the original in any way, and so we might look to other very different senses of how translation might proceed. But Derrida holds onto the notion that translation can only be representation in using it as the paradigm of impossibility. But we might ask why translation could not follow, for example, the model of adaptation as suggested above, in using something like juxtaposition or mixtures in order to effect creative
transformations of the kind that Derrida seems to suggest but then claims must defer to a transcendent and impossible desire.

It becomes clear, however, that Derrida resists such possibilities because of his account of language as an order of pure signification that can never legitimately stop at any signifier but can no more legitimately stop at any meaning performatively conceived. Creative transformations would not solve Derrida’s utmost concern, which is the singularity of the other. In capturing the other in any expression of language, we have immediately transgressed the singular testimony that is what allows language as a generalizing system of exchange to work. And so we see that it is the unrepresentable nature of the other in language that guides Derrida’s discussions of language. And if the other is not representable in language, in Derrida’s view, then there is no way for otherness to be experienced by us except as the *resistance to representation*.

This seems to be another kind of impasse. Derrida’s explicit focus on translation as the site of the impasse, his focus on translation as impossible because it cannot represent the unrepresentable, seems to turn him away from the possibility – at times acknowledged in his own work - that translation practices might take radically different approaches. If the problem of translation is that simply reproducing or representing misses the creative possibilities of language, then it would seem that a good response would be directed towards finding new ways for translation to release the creative, productive power of a text to be translated. And indeed it seems that this is Derrida’s great concern, and that différance as play is supposed to preserve creativity and novelty in the face of the prevailing views of language as communication and representation. But we have seen that in Derrida’s account of translation as impossible representation, as resistance to a certain legibility, there is no
way for translation to move forward. If a good translation multiplies resistances to meaning, then it seems there is no way for translation – for any reading and writing practices, for that matter – to produce novel meanings, new ways of seeing the world that are in any way transformative.

If translation is to respond to the unfortunate reduction of the other in language to the role of equal partner in a transparent dialogue, and to respond in a way that both preserves otherness and simultaneously makes possible meaningful exchange, then it is clear that its re-thinking needs to take place in a far more radical manner. And as the crux of my critique of Derrida’s view of translation is the loss of a real relation with the world out of concern for the transcendence of the other, it is my contention that translation must be re-thought along the lines of a concrete engagement between language and world. This would mean re-thinking both how language gives us the world and how translation might be involved conceptually in thinking through that relation, but would also call for thinking about how translation as the site of difference might be seen as an opportunity for actively transforming our language practices.

It seems inevitable, then, that the right approach to language in this respect will be a radically pragmatic one such as Deleuze and Guattari employ. In the following chapters I will demonstrate that by giving us a rich account of the relation between language and the world that overcomes the problem of representation, Deleuze and Guattari bypass worries about untranslatability and focus instead on how translation can be reconceived along the lines of transformativity. While always also aware that language must resist its own homogenizing and repressive tendencies, Deleuze and Guattari find in this possibility of resistance the further possibility of disarticulation of the very forms of life, forms that are
dictated and reinforced in part by language. And disarticulation will make possible new forms of life, opportunities for radically transforming not just the possibilities of language, but the possibilities of our very world. This will require opening up the theory and the practice of translation to a wider account that takes it beyond the model of the interlingual inadequacy that so plagues the legitimate desire for the other.
In this chapter I will develop the concept of transformation as it appears in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. While Derrida falls in with others for whom translation is a core question that is never very far from the surface - Levinas, DeMan, Ricoeur, and of course Benjamin, to name a few - Deleuze and Guattari seem relatively unconcerned about the problematics of translation such as they are articulated in contemporary philosophy. As we have seen, this preoccupation for Derrida concerns the value of the translation problem as the site of impasse, of the necessary gap between and within each term of language that guarantees that every act of language is a failure. A failure that makes possible the gesture of language, to be sure, but a failure no less in that this gesture towards the other remains transcendent as a desire that can never be satisfied, as a striving beyond what is actually possible.

It is in this sense that translation is the meaning of language as such as structured by a fundamental impossibility. While Deleuze and Guattari seem to begin with the same observation about translation that occupies Derrida - that in translation we find that there is no ‘original’ to reproduce or re-articulate and so translation undermines claims about language as representing the world – the place of translation in their philosophy is significantly different. From their point of view, impossibility would be the ultimate discovery in translation only if the point of translation actually is to reproduce and re-articulate something, or indeed to reiterate différance, which holds its legitimacy within itself.
and apart from every expression. But theirs is a view that attempts to consider entirely
different ways for language to be meaningful in relation to a world.

Locating meaning in the deepest implication of world and language, Deleuze and
Guattari’s procedure for getting at the virtual in any expression reveals only the capacities of
every element of an expressive assemblage to be otherwise. This does not, furthermore,
amount to a general pronouncement about language as such, but involves the difference and
multiplicity that for Deleuze and Guattari is immanent to every expression and is the
opportunity for transformation into other concrete and productive assemblages. It is this
transformation that effectively replaces Derrida’s translation as the central preoccupation in
their concerns with language, and yet the terms couldn’t be more different. Transformation
is not a betrayal of the other, but is the very becoming-other that underlies every being and
that must be unleashed as a productive, creative and revolutionary force.

On the other hand, although the scope of Deleuze and Guattari’s analyses seems far
broader, at least in terms of their account of language they are working to shake us out of the
same dogmas and assumptions as is Derrida. Derrida’s deconstructive readings attempt to
reveal the other of language insofar as every text, every utterance, must repress the difference
that makes possible but simultaneously undermines its necessary pretensions to universality,
transparency and communicability. We will see that Deleuze and Guattari also conceive of
difference as a more fundamental element from which stable identities are constructed, and
which therefore guarantees that no structure is inherently stable.

But while each can be seen as motivated by a general sense of the injustice that
language can effect through its power to efface differences, Deleuze and Guattari have a far
more positive approach to this danger that involves their most basic conceptions about
language. And ultimately this must be our concern: what can an analysis of language tell us about our forms of life and how they might be better? As such, both Derrida and Deleuze/Guattari are concerned with novelty – with how to get beneath the false beliefs that we have about language and the ways that these limit our possibilities of existence and out of the immense power of language create something new and better. And it is this power that each claims to have discovered that differs so importantly.

For Derrida the power that conditions all language is the primarily destabilizing force of différance. We have seen that because meaning in language – and therefore all meaning – is infinitely deferred to the transcendent, to what only ensures that no expression can call itself definitive, we get what amounts to a negative analysis. The best texts, the best uses of language, are those that undermine language itself – on the borders of illegibility - and offer us glimpses of its fundamental alienation, from the world and from itself. In contrast, Deleuze and Guattari offer an immanent analysis that recognizes no transcendent focal point for meaning that cannot itself come into language.

In these two chapters, my central purpose is to articulate Deleuze and Guattari’s treatment of language and meaning as an immanent account that is focused on transformation rather than translation. It is my contention that while the analysis of translation for Derrida functions within language only in order to demonstrate its impossible other, for Deleuze and Guattari transformation indicates a level of analysis that goes deeper than language itself to where expression is deeply implicated in the material world. Difference for Deleuze and Guattari does not leave us with the injunction not to represent the other but forces us to see that both other and self are positions that limit the capacity for becoming-other that inheres
beneath all such formal terms. Thus difference points us to an underlying transformativity that reveals the capacity of every form of life to be otherwise.

In this chapter I will give a general outline of several crucial elements of Deleuze and Guattari’s view of language as the becoming-expressive of the physical world. Part of the function of this chapter is to introduce my reading of various technical terms that Deleuze and Guattari use, and part is to sketch the basic outline of how language is implicated in the world in their view. This will allow me to give some preliminary indications of why it might be valuable to replace Derrida’s problem of translation in language with Deleuze and Guattari’s capacity for transformation in language, and to set the groundwork for the following chapter in which I will significantly fill out the details of the transformativity that Deleuze and Guattari see in language, in contrast to Derrida’s untranslatability.

**Expressivity: Assemblages, Strata, Territories**

The general thrust of Deleuze and Guattari’s treatment of language can be seen as the attempt to get beneath all particular investments in which language is caught up, as well as beneath the ‘scientific’ accounts that are constructed in order to give such investments the illusion of necessity, which accounts are themselves tied to a certain political order of things. As we will see, ‘getting beneath’, however, is not a matter of getting to a neutral ground upon which any phenomenon rests. To say that all investments of language are political is, in very broad terms, to say that every expression of language gets its meaning or value from its function in the exercise of some particular force or power. Deleuze articulates this familiar claim in his book on Nietzsche: “a phenomenon is not an appearance or even an apparition but a sign, a symptom which finds its meaning in an existing force” (Deleuze 1983, 3). This general
sense of language as political broadly construed simply amounts to the fact that no construction or use of language is neutral.

It is in order to capture this sense of force as that which gives meaning to all things meaningful that Deleuze and Guattari introduce the notion of the assemblage (agencement). An assemblage is a way of looking at things in terms of a force that brings heterogeneous elements together and ‘plugs into’ the way in which these elements can order themselves towards a given function, as machines. The point of the assemblage is both to give us a concept that ‘explains’ things without reference to a transcendent idea or essence and to show how any element in any assemblage is only a function of its role and that its role might be otherwise if put into relation with other parts. The notion of assemblage captures the meaning of any element in its relation to the whole, in other words, but expands that relation to include its relation to all other possible wholes in which it might function.

Only by assessing social forces in terms of assemblages can Deleuze and Guattari locate forces that put elements into play but without themselves defining those elements exhaustively. Specific forms of organization of parts will necessarily hold in check the inherently creative forces of life that Deleuze and Guattari call *puissances*. This is to say that the shaping of *puissances* into determinable forms will always have at least a side that is turned toward the more specifically political power that Deleuze and Guattari call *pouvoir*. To say that all language-use is political in this sense is a somewhat more ambitious claim: it is to say not only that language is never neutral, but that it always takes on a repressive, homogenizing form. We will see that although Deleuze and Guattari believe this to be inevitably a feature of language, it also carries with it the power to perform a disarticulation of such forms even while having no other way to manifest itself.
This is because in order to shape the potentially chaotic life-forces, stabilization and homogenization must be called into play. This is simply because there is no other way to shape things; the very act of shaping or forming is necessarily a stabilizing, a homogenizing insofar as elements are selected for their ability to take on a unity together. There are no puissances without pouvoir, just as there is no condition without symptoms. But power as pouvoir is always a capture of the creative force of becoming into one limited perspective and as its very activity is one of repressing puissances, it will simultaneously attempt to establish itself as primary or exhaustive, as resting on stable ground.

While this is only one side of any assemblage, it is the side that is generally the point of identification, the way that elements come together in recognizable form - it is (necessarily) how we define things. Consequently, the stable, homogenous aspect of assemblages tends to be the only one that we see, tends to cover up the fluid and heterogeneous side and to relegate it to secondary status. This is the general point that any philosophy of difference has to make: if we see only homogeneity and stable identities then we conceive of difference as the difference between such forms – relative differences, whereas from the other side absolute difference appears – the differentiating force itself out of which identities are constructed from heterogeneous elements and made to appear homogeneous. We can legitimately see things both ways, but the latter shows us the real capacities of our forms of life to be otherwise, whereas the former merely reinforces existing structures and therefore acts necessarily as a self-perpetuating force of conservatism. Deleuze and Guattari’s method of revealing both a fundamental heterogeneity and the necessarily homogenizing activity of our forms of life is to see them in terms of assemblages.
For this reason Deleuze and Guattari construct an elaborate account of the ways in which stability and homogeneity are formed, and articulate this primarily through their notion of stratification, which has both a positive and a negative aspect: “there…occurs upon the earth a very important, inevitable phenomenon that is beneficial in many respects and unfortunate in many others: stratification” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 40). Deleuze and Guattari characterize strata as modes of capture for singularities and intensities, and as the forming of matters into hierarchical systems, and it becomes clear that the negative side of strata is this hierarchical structure characteristic of pouvoir.

The hierarchical nature of the strata means that elements of matter are subordinated to an organizing, superior force, such that their capacities for creative self-production are cut off. The dominating force posits its own goal and thereby regulates ‘allowable’ relations, which limits the capacities of elements to enter into other relations that are subjugated by different forces and organized towards different goals. And as ‘judgments of God’, strata give a systematic order to things that is consistent and comprehensible because heterogeneous elements are taken up by a single explanatory principle.

Deleuze and Guattari recognize three main categories of strata: the inorganic, the organic and the alloplastic (anthropomorphic, or social). To illustrate why these should be seen as stratified, let us take the example of the organic. The notion of the organism as metaphor, as DeLanda demonstrates, involves the assumption of “relations of interiority” between parts and wholes (DeLanda 2006, 9). In other words, the working of the whole and the way that each part fits into that structure is what defines each of the component parts, resulting in an organic totality that subordinates each of its elements to the function of the whole. Each element is thus ‘captured’ by the organism that supposedly defines it, and the
relations between elements, their function in the totality, appear necessary and thus unalterable. In fact what they are captured by is the view of living things as organisms. This is the particular restrictive definition that functions in the realm of the biological, but such a notion is also extended metaphorically into the other strata; in the alloplastic, for example, the Aristotelian/Hegelian notion that the body politic is an organism is particularly pervasive.

To view life in any of its manifestations from this perspective is unnecessarily limiting, and Deleuze and Guattari name these groupings of strata in order to expose their rigid hierarchies. This very division itself between the inorganic, the organic and the anthropomorphic covers over something that overflows such categories. If we see everything in terms of these strict divisions, then we fail to see a more complex picture of the forces that cut across them and that reveal possibilities of combination that would not be possible if elements remained in their categories: living things as organistic, social processes as anthropomorphic, etc. The interaction between living things and social processes, for example, has enormous potential in the realm of ecological advances\textsuperscript{19}, and such possibilities are blocked by the separation of the living world from the social\textsuperscript{20}.

Beyond this tripartite division, Deleuze and Guattari write that “stratification in general is the entire system of the judgment of God” (DG 1987, 40). In this way they contrast transcendence and immanence, where transcendence is precisely the ontological schema critiqued by Heidegger, a system not necessarily employing a transcendent God but at least employing the device of explanatory superior principle that

\textsuperscript{19} See for example Deleuze and Guattari and Ecology, ed. Berndt Herzogenrath
\textsuperscript{20} The metaphorical extension of the organism to the social realm does not, for example, bring them into productive contact, but is a sterile comparison that is indicative of the way that they mutually reinforce their respective stratifications and so serves to keep them apart in all analyses.
God functions as. Immanence, on the contrary, involves the ability of elements in relation to be self-organizing and to function together without the need of a transcendent principle\textsuperscript{21}. Stratification closes that possibility off by capturing matter hierarchical in explanatory systems that posit a superior principle.

For Deleuze and Guattari such stratified transcendence is not in fact ‘illusory’ in contrast to an immanent explanation that captures the way things really are. As illustrated above, such structures of \textit{pouvoir} are the only way that life can be manifest, the only way that something identifiable can emerge from chaos, the only way that the critical distance that we need for thinking can come about. And because they are not primarily interested in what is ‘true’ but rather with how things work – and what kinds of explanations get things working more productively - they see both transcendence and immanence as functioning in a very real way.

The deception is where the transcendent way of seeing things also implies that this is the \textit{only} way to see them. Thus to free things up for an immanent account is to see the transcendent as merely one kind of explanation, and therefore as set against a background of greater possibility. This greater possibility involves the capacity of elements to escape their stratifications and self-organize into yet other relations. In fact Deleuze and Guattari believe, following Nietzsche, that the very search for truth is a particular investment in transcendent structures, since truth itself replaces God as an organizing principle. As Nietzsche shows in his \textit{Genealogy of Morality}, the claim of absolute status for truth is a way to entrench a particular hierarchy that has its own history in terms of a succession of forces.

\textsuperscript{21} The notion of self-organizing systems is evidenced in thermodynamics and further articulated in complexity theory, which Deleuze and Guattari draw upon heavily. This influence has been elaborated by DeLanda, and Protevi and Bonta, among others.
On the other hand, the strata are necessary insofar as they form matter – in a loose sense we might say that they make sense out of chaos. Stratification is the way that matter is always already formed, and as such the material world already implies the ‘coding’ that articulates what would otherwise be pure chaos. For this reason the point is not to try to bypass the strata but to analyze them to see what overflows them, inhering in them but eluding capture. Because stratification in general is the way that we do conceive of things, we need to further analyze what underlies such presuppositions. Therefore, when Deleuze and Guattari discuss the difference between the strata they are treating each homogeneous organization as something real, and therefore worth investigating, but also as something that might be otherwise – the investigation of which might reveal deeper investments and might therefore loosen them up from such commitments for more productive and creative functions.

It is in a similar fashion that Deleuze and Guattari analyze what they call ‘territories’. While territories imply modes of capture, they also provide the very conditions for deterritorialization. And as with strata, there is no sense in seeing territory as merely negative: Deleuze and Guattari see territory as a helpful mode of analysis that attempts to see a certain commitment to ‘being-at-home’ in all of our forms of life. Since such a commitment will never be outrun, the trick is to recognize movements of territoriality as also implying the capacity for deterritorializations and reterritorializations and to analyze the relative degrees of escape that these enact.

If territory is the need for home, the desire to establish a habitus within what is otherwise inchoate and overwhelming, deterritorialization in Deleuze and Guattari’s account seems to indicate not a way of avoiding the desire for habit and familiarity, but a creative re-
working of the terms of being at home, an undoing of habit through close attention to what habit is built upon, its virtual ground. All reterritorializations, which are the recapturing of various elements that have been deterritorialized, ‘have the value of home’, they suggest. So while they begin by analyzing territories as spatial coordinates through which a domain is established, territorialization will ultimately be any organization that manipulates the material at its disposal for a purpose to which it subjugates those elements in a structure that is established as having some stable ground. It is through analysis that brings the processes of territorialization into view that we begin to see ways to deterritorialize in creative ways.

Deterritorializations are only possible through the way in which territory is linked with expressivity. The claim is that when components of a ‘milieu’ cease to be merely functional and take on ‘expressiveness’, they establish a territory. It is not that a species desires a given territory and marks it accordingly, but that there is already a “territory-producing expressiveness” (DG 1987, 315) that turns functions into the markers of a territory. This is to say that the movement away from chaos and towards order is a movement away from specific transitory functions towards what is characterized as having “a temporal constancy and a spatial range” (ibid).

But why is it that this temporal and spatial territorialization implies (indeed, presupposes) expressivity? In their analysis of what they call the ‘double articulation’ of matter, where the first articulation is that of content and the second that of expression, Deleuze and Guattari describe the form of content as ‘coding’ and the form of expression as ‘overcoding’. Where territorialization involves both of these movements, overcoding would seem to be the distinguishing feature of territoriality - as opposed to “the momentary determination of a center” (DG 1987, 311) - because it tends towards “phenomena of
centering, unification, totalization, integration, hierarchization and finalization” (*ibid.*, 41). It is the establishment of the *permanence* of the center.

To use one of Deleuze and Guattari’s own examples illustrating this transition to expressivity, a fish may change colour as an immediate effect of some impulse, but it is when the colour ties the fish to a territory, or indicates to others that it belongs in this way, that it becomes expressive (*ibid.*, 317). This is a beautifully clear example of what Deleuze and Guattari are describing here: the changing colour of the fish might be a mere physical effect, and as such is part of a physical system, but insofar as it breaks away from merely reflecting the physical and establishes something on the order of permanence and totalization — insofar as it indicates something with the value of home - it becomes *a sign*, and as such establishes a distinction between a physical and a semiotic system.

If the expressive is what overcodes, then it is already working within what Deleuze and Guattari call the ‘free margin of the code’, already exceeds the content that on the stratified side it appears tied to. In explaining territory, they refer to the ‘milieu’ as that out of which a territory is drawn, forces of chaos that are in fact already materially formed (the first articulation of content, which is just to say that matter is never unformed) but are as yet free of hierarchical and totalizing expressive articulations. From a certain perspective, then, a territory is constituted primarily by *decoding* — by appropriating for itself fragments of various codes in a stratifying movement towards permanence, as the organism shapes itself from the primordial soup which is already formed in various ways but which it appropriates by incorporating heterogeneous elements into its own functioning. The emergence of the organism out of the primordial soup is not a mere development that could have gone this way and this way only, in other words. Expressiveness is the relative freedom that the territory
has to organize the milieu differently. And there is no need to posit a conscious will here – Deleuze and Guattari are simply making the point that there is no necessity to the particular way in which expressivity forms a territory out of matter.

This demonstrates the extreme double-sidedness of expressivity. On the one hand, the expressive is what overcodes in the sense of giving a totalizing, homogenizing articulation to matter, hierarchizing by establishing a deep center of permanence and making it seem as though such an organization were necessary. On the other hand, what makes it possible for expressivity to manipulate content in this way is its very freedom from the raw material it works on – we might say that overcoding is also decoding insofar as it is a power of self-expression, and not merely a direct expression of the material that dictates its form and of which it would be a mere reflection, as the impulse of a fish may turn it a certain colour to reflect its internal state.

This free margin, which Deleuze and Guattari also call the ‘surplus value of code’, captures what they mean by the virtual: the fact that expression can detach from content as the very power of content to express itself – to articulate itself beyond its raw fact of existing – means that within every actual there is the capacity to be otherwise. As a territoriality decodes and puts to work heterogeneous elements of its milieu, those elements are not reducible to their role in that territory, they remain open to other sets of relations. It is this capacity to enter into a multiplicity of external relations that makes possible phenomena determined as this or that thing or identity.

The virtual, then, is difference itself, the self-differentiating force that underlies our necessarily homogenizing and totalizing hierarchies of identity. Deleuze in his earlier work *Difference and Repetition* is particularly concerned to contrast the virtual with the possible,
in order to show that the virtual precedes the possible/actual distinction (Deleuze 1994, 211-15). Where the possible resembles the actual and differs only in its not having been realized (and therefore in not being real), the virtual is itself real, and though not actual also not resembling the actual. The virtual inheres in the actual as its ability to be otherwise, but remains real in the sense in which a capacity is a real feature. The virtual is actualized in one respect, in a particular set of relations that put into effect particular capacities of each element of an assemblage, but the virtual also inheres in that actualization as the capacity for all the other real actualizations that can be effected in other sets of relations.

The virtual most importantly differs from the possible in that the possible can only be realized in one pre-established manner, on the basis of resemblance and through a simple realization, whereas the actualizations of the virtual cannot be anticipated, because they are the results of a thing’s virtual capacity and the external relations into which it enters. This is akin to the manner in which a phenotype is an expression of a genotype, but there is no actual resemblance between them on the basis of which one could anticipate the phenotype from the genotype. The phenotype expresses one capacity of manifestation of the genotype as an effect of its concatenation with environmental factors, but such results cannot be exhaustively predicted because we can never know in principle what the effect of the particular genotype will be in its expression within an environment. We have to wait and see what happens.

The problem with the possible/actual relation is that if we think of the actual as resembling and exhausting the realm of the possible, then the set of all possibilities (including those not yet actualized) are built upon the principles of the actual. In other words, our conceptions of what is possible are structured by the nature and principles that we
derive from phenomena themselves, and so the as-yet unactualized phenomena that we consider possible are already anticipated, already structured by our knowledge.

This was also Derrida’s point. And the value of the virtual/actual distinction as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari is like différance in that it allows us to recognize the possibility of novelty, since absolute difference as grounding/ungrounding the principles of all phenomena can always result in phenomena that refuse to obey such principles. The distinction between différance and the virtual, however, is in the fact that the power of the virtual comes not from expression as an autonomous system, but is immanent to a ‘rebellious matter’ itself. Expressivity is the rebelliousness of matter, insofar as bodies can express themselves in different ways, insofar as they contain multiple capacities of relation.

We can of course easily ignore novelty and explain new phenomena according to old principles. It is only when we allow the genuinely novel to destabilize the old principles and force us to rethink what we think we know that a genuine scientific revolution comes about. But we can more easily suppress the rebellion of matter, subordinating it to our pre-established field of allowable expressions. When experimental science brings about novel results that cannot be contained by current forms of expression, they might momentarily disrupt the coherent systems of knowledge that are in place, but we can always refuse to recognize the full implications of major disruptions and simply widen our net a little to account for rebellious phenomena – this is what reterritorializations are. On the other hand, we can take the opportunity that destabilizing effects offer us to see the essentially unstable nature of things. The perspective from which we view the expressive, then, will determine whether we believe that our expressions reveal the necessary and essential nature of things or whether we see beneath these to their virtual capacity to be otherwise.
The Investments of Language: Regimes of Signs

What the above shows is that the self-movement of expression is a process of breaking away from the constraints of merely reflecting content but at the same time is only possible as a free articulation in relation to content. Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of language, which they adopt from the linguist Hjelmslev, shows that expression and content are both independent and have a relationship of mutual presupposition. As an objection to correspondence theories of language that get the relationship of language to content entirely wrong, but no less as an objection to a Derridean view that leaves out content altogether and conceives of expression as autonomous, Deleuze and Guattari’s reformulation of this relationship is one in which semiotic and physical systems neither reflect one another nor act causally on one another, but work in fact ‘on the same level’.

We saw above that the assemblage is a way of seeing the working-together of heterogeneous parts, and here we see that in fact the assemblage cuts across the distinction between semiotic and physical systems, allowing us to see them as heterogeneous but also as working together in the same field. And analysis in terms of assemblages is a radically pragmatic one, as Deleuze and Guattari emphatically state in the following passage:

We call any specific formalization of expression a regime of signs, at least when the expression is linguistic. A regime of signs constitutes a semiotic system. But it appears difficult to analyze semiotic systems in themselves: there is always a form of content that is simultaneously inseparable from and independent of the form of expression, and the two forms pertain to assemblages that are not principally linguistic. However, one can proceed as though the formalization of expression were autonomous and self-sufficient. Even if that is done, there is such a diversity in the forms of expression, such a mixture of these forms, that it is impossible to attach any particular privilege to the form or regime of the “signifier”. If we call the signifying semiotic system semiology, then semiology is only one regime of signs among others, and not the most important one. Hence the necessity of a return to pragmatics,
in which language never has universality in itself, self-sufficient formalization, a general semiology, or a meta-language. Thus it is the study of the signifying regime that first testifies to the inadequacy of linguistic presuppositions, and in the very name of regimes of signs. (DG 1987, 111)

Here Deleuze and Guattari express their dissatisfaction in part with a Saussurian structuralism that they see as persisting in postmodern accounts of language - at least insofar as such theories see language as the semiotic system that accounts for and structures any other possible semiotics. Language as taken on its own, as having the power to account for meaning independently of a world, fails to see the bigger picture. And the bigger picture is one in which the ‘signifying regime’ is merely one among various possible semiotic systems, where the commitment to language as signification is already a particular investment of language, and one that doesn’t get deep enough to see the meaning of language as tied to the world. This is not just to say that the meaning of language cannot be captured within language, which is where Derrida’s analysis leads, but that the source of meaning in language is not a power of language alone, but a power of language and the world in mutual implication.

The various regimes of signs that Deleuze and Guattari distinguish each express particular forms of stratification in which expression is subordinated to a dominant formalization that defines a ‘field of sayability’ – or what counts as meaningful expression. The two that Deleuze and Guattari are most concerned with are the ‘despotisms’ of the signifier (the signifying regime) and the primacy of the subject (the postsignifying regime). The latter is particularly entrenched in our language, insofar as we imagine that the distinction between a speaking subject and the subject of which they speak is a precondition for the functioning of language. But despite the long philosophical tradition of the
subject/object dichotomy, Deleuze and Guattari don’t see any reason why the subject ought to be considered anything but a function of language. Because they believe they can identify different regimes of signs, they point to a deeper level at which semiotic meaning must precede all of the assumptions entrenched in each particular semiotic system. In order to give us perspective on these limited views, and in particular in order to move us beyond the account of meaning that recognizes an individual speaker with an intention to communicate the contents of her mind, Deleuze and Guattari make the distinction within the vocabulary of assemblages between ‘machinic assemblages of bodies’ and ‘collective assemblages of enunciation’.

To begin with, the collective assemblage of enunciation indicates the social aspect of all language use, but not simply in the sense that the way we understand and are allowed to use language issues from its historical and cultural conditions. Collective assemblages should not be seen as the socially conditioned ways that we manipulate language, but are the way in which the elements of expressions can come together such that they overflow the very bounds of subject and object. Contrary to the dogma of the postsignifying semiotic, it is from out of collective assemblages that there results “the determination of relative subjectification proceedings, or assignations of individuality and their shifting distributions within discourse” (DG 1987, 80), and it is these resulting determinations that then structure the rules about what is and what isn’t a legitimate use of language, what is or isn’t a legitimate expression of identity.

The point here is that rules for what can constitute a legitimate identity have already taken for granted a view of language that depends upon a competent subject with something to say. But the particular enunciations of a so-called subject can also be seen as drawn from
a social milieu that remains out of the subject’s grasp. In order to illustrate this, Deleuze and Guattari take indirect discourse as the privileged view of language. In their comments on Kafka and other writers they demonstrate that free indirect discourse, as having “no clear, distinctive contours”, is in fact what all language really is. Language is not a matter of reporting the world, what a subject sees and experiences in it - it is a matter of reporting speech itself, what we have heard others say, and so of drawing our enunciations from the already-social world of language. Language is, as Deleuze and Guattari say, a matter of “hearsay” (*ibid.*, 76).

Obviously we are not always explicitly reporting what someone else has said, and this is why Deleuze and Guattari point specifically to free indirect discourse, which is where the contours are smoothed out. Following Bakhtin, Deleuze and Guattari propose that all of language is essentially hybridity, out of which our homogeneous forms are organized. They describe this reality thus:

> Direct discourse is a detached fragment of a mass and is born of the dismemberment of the collective assemblage; but the collective assemblage is always like the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which I draw my voice. I always depend on a molecular assemblage of enunciation that is not given in my conscious mind, any more than it depends on my apparent social determinations, which combine many heterogeneous regimes of signs. (DG 1987, 88)

The contours may be smoothed out, but this is only because the ‘murmur’ precedes its division into the differing statements of various subjects. Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation of indirect discourse does not indicate that I report the contents of the minds of others rather than those of my own, it is that prior to the determination of an “I” and of the very notion that there is some thing to communicate, there are forms of expression that circulate both the actual statements from which I draw my enunciations and the particular determinations that
regimes of signs carry. But beneath such particular constraints ‘I’ and my voice, my proper name, have the capacity to distribute themselves otherwise. Semiotically - but also outside of the rules of any one particular semiotic. Not only are there various semiotics that presuppose a certain ordering of bodies, but Deleuze and Guattari assert that all semiotics that actually structure our language use are mixed. There is usually a pre-determination of the subject, and usually evidence of the ‘interpretosis’ that they associate with the signifying regime, as well as elements of the two other regimes that they specify – the pre-signifying and the counter-signifying - but also claim as being part of an arbitrary list. At any given historical and geographical point, they claim, we will find new semiotics and different mixtures dominated by one particular semiotic, but it is never the case that there is only one ‘pure’ semiotic system in play. “There is no general semiology” (DG 1987, 136), Deleuze and Guattari assert.

This is important because it is necessary to see that the use of various semiotics is never a consciously regulated decision by any social collective, but is the way in which our language-use is determined and delimited by particular forms of expression (as pouvoirs, or territorializations) of which we are for the most part unconscious. The very perspective from which we see language use as a matter of a consciously intending-to-speak subject hides what we might call pre-conscious commitments – determinations that we commit ourselves to every time we use language.

In order to counteract such unconscious entrenchments of regimes of signs, Deleuze and Guattari need to articulate a vocabulary that will indicate that which undercuts every such commitment. Thus for them what underlies every semiotic, and every statement insofar as it follows the rules of various semioticizations, are ‘machines, assemblages and
movements of deterritorialization’. The point is to step back and begin to see how different semiotics, as well as individual statements, fit into social and material machines that organize them towards some usage. Not only will this help us release our forms of life from pre-determined limitations, but will also release creativity for as yet un-thought forms that might issue from virtual capacities that have been inhibited by forms of acceptability.

Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate a semiotic force that runs beneath all particular linguistic expression, but as the very expressivity of the physical world this force can only be discovered through a pragmatic procedure. Thus language will indeed be a matter of the speech-act. And like Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari will respond to Austin by demonstrating that the speech-act is not merely one possibility of language, but the meaning of any expression of language. And thus far, indeed, Deleuze and Guattari’s account of indirect discourse looks a great deal like Derrida’s iterability, indicating a realm of language beyond the subject as well as the sense in which it is the conjunction of forms of language in the social realm with the particular speech-act context to which it is appropriated that makes meaning.

But it is Deleuze and Guattari’s view of language in terms of the duality of machinic assemblages of bodies and collective assemblages of enunciation that draws a deep division between the two accounts. While Derrida focuses on the notion of a pure performativity, Deleuze and Guattari focus on the illocutionary in particular – “that which one does in speaking” (DG 1987, 78). In order to see this distinction it is necessary to illustrate Deleuze and Guattari’s account of the precise way in which language and the world produce meaning in mutual presupposition as a matter of machines and assemblages.
An Account of Sense: Content, Expression and The Order-Word

In order to illustrate the relation of language to the world Deleuze and Guattari use an example taken from Emile Brehier’s study of the Stoics that contrasts an intermingling of bodies where a knife cuts flesh and the statement ‘the knife is cutting the flesh’ (DG 1987, 86). We tend to think that the latter statement represents a corresponding state of affairs, such that ‘the knife is cutting the flesh’ indicates a correlative fact in which a knife cuts flesh. But as we have already seen this correspondence theory could not be right because there are many different ways to indicate such a state of affairs. The particular statement ‘the knife is cutting the flesh’ indicates one option, and forces us to see things from that limited perspective. One could also say ‘the flesh is being cut by the knife’, or possibly, ‘x is cutting the flesh of y with that knife’, all of which are different in a significant enough way to make us ask the question about sense. Enough at least to make us notice that there is no objective correlation between the statement and the state of affairs, and that the statement carries with it the necessity of a subjective choice about how the particular mixing of bodies is meaningful. This is to say that language appears at this juncture to necessarily make subjective choices about so-called objective states of affairs.

Furthermore, we are still faced with the basic problem of correlation. Even if it could reflect objectively, how exactly could this statement ‘mean’ that thing, since there is no resemblance between statements and things? Certainly we can show that conventionally established rules connect certain objects or states of affairs to given expressions, but if we must go through ways of meaning in order to get to states of affairs, how do we get to a state of affairs in its objectivity in order to regulate it by attaching a convention of language? Deleuze in The Logic of Sense describes Frege’s mysterious ‘sense’ as that within which we
are already situated when we try to explain meaning in terms of designation, manifestation or signification. When we attach the sentence ‘it is raining’, for example, to a given state of affairs, we already know what the sense is of what we are designating with this language. But this extra question of sense is not reducible to a state of affairs, and it stands apart from anything that can be fully ‘captured’ with specific terms of our languages.

Derrida addresses the problem of meaning by telling us that any utterance or inscription gets its sense from its context along with the iterable form that we recognize as already meaningful. Derrida would agree with the Austinian suggestion that the meaning of the claim ‘I declare the meeting open’ is that the meeting actually begins (Pym, 1992). This seems to demonstrate the way that language is implicated in the world and in this sense Deleuze and Guattari would seem to agree. But the problem with Derrida’s appropriation of Austin is twofold: firstly, his notion of the ‘iterable form’ does not explain sense in its relation to content any more than Frege did, and secondly his view that context can never be saturated defers contextual meaning in fact to iterable form and its transcendent futuricity.

Even if Derrida agrees that the meaning of an utterance is what that utterance does in a real world, the crucial singularity of the speaking itself can never be captured in that act. The speech act explains how we do use language meaningfully, how meaning is possible in a provisional way, but for Derrida the crucial insight is that interpreting language in this way is already a transgression of the speech-act as first and foremost singular testimony whose iterable form can never be reduced to a real-world context. This is why Austin’s discussion of the promise is a better example for Derrida’s purposes. When we promise it is true that the meaning of our speech-act is the set of responsibilities to which we commit ourselves. But because the full responsibilities of a promise can never be circumscribed, it is in fact the
performativity of the promise itself as gesture towards what can never be fully realized that alone gives us the meaning of language. The promise is the structure of all language-use, not just a handy example. Any inscription or utterance follows the structure of the promise – is a promise - as an impossible commitment to the other whose meaning is always yet to come. Thus iterable form as never determined holds the place of the other that outstrips any contextual explanation. Sense is not ultimately explained in its relation to a world, but in a relation to an impossible otherness that holds the world at a remove from language.

Deleuze and Guattari, on the other hand, want to explain language with an account of its effects. This is not simply a context, because although the circumstances must be right in order for an expression to do what it is supposed to do, the fact that language can intervene means that it can do more than what is expected by circumstance. Because they are concerned with content, with exploring how in fact matter might be released from the stratifying side of expression and thereby be given the opportunity to self-express in novel ways, Deleuze and Guattari need to rework the form/content problem, the problem of how language expresses the world. If Derrida solves it by ultimately taking the world out entirely, Deleuze and Guattari can be said to rework the relationship much more radically. The question of form and content cannot be solved, they propose, because it is a bad question – it is framed incorrectly. Instead of form and content, they propose content and expression.

This is ground that we have already sketchily covered above, in fact, in exploring Deleuze and Guattari’s scientific discussion of territorialization and the emergence of expressivity from content. In terms of language, this discussion is important in the way that it conceives of both content and expression – physical and semiotic systems – as having their own forms or formalizations. Deleuze describes the world as “a compound of bodies –
bodies interpenetrate, force each other, poison each other, insinuate themselves into each other, reinforce or destroy each other, as fire penetrates iron and makes it red, as the carnivore devours its prey, as the lover enters the beloved” (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, 63). As the forms of content, these can be seen as the codings of the material world, and all we can say about bodies on their own is that they mix and act on one another for various immediate usages. The carnivore devours its prey in order to be fed, to stay alive. This is not without its own form or code (if we think of coding as including the very basic organization of aspects of the environment for specific ends) – the particular form of life in terms of nourishment that a carnivore requires – but it is without significance. It is expression that produces significance insofar as an animal becomes territorial, and begins to establish a system of meaning that is distinctly semiotic, as illustrated above. On the alloplastic strata these are called institutions, the totalizing substances of expression that effectuate regimes of signs along with their stratifying, self-perpetuating tendencies.

In this way, we see that physical and semiotic systems are actually different, independent of one another. Expressivity itself, as we saw, is this capacity to break away and self-perpetuate beyond content. But it is still an expression of content in some way. To explain this – to account for a Fregean ‘sense’ – Deleuze and Guattari discuss the Stoic notion of the ‘incorporeal transformation’. While bodies mix in their own formalizations, expressions also have formalizations that ‘intervene’ in those mixings and effect them in real ways.

The intervention of expression divides bodies in an entirely different way that is incorporeal. They describe, for example, the way that bodies age as a natural physical process, and yet the significance of the aging process and therefore the aging process itself is
changed by semiotic formalizations when we attribute to bodies language like ‘age of majority’ or ‘retirement’. To be considered of retirement age is a semiotic formalization and yet its way of changing the significance of an aging body also affects that body in its real implication in a world. A ‘retired’ person might now be denied access to work, for example, or be given special rights and privileges that change the landscape of what it can and cannot do as a body.

This also raises anew the issue of pouvoir, and the notion that every form of life, every assemblage, is already political. Deleuze and Guattari introduce the concept of the ‘order-word’ in this context. The French term is ‘le mot d’ordre’, and indicates several things: a military type of command – the imperative, that is; the order that is imposed on something, as in ‘the order of things’; and something like a ‘slogan’, that which is said only in order to perpetuate what is redundant because everyone already knows it, but which must not be questioned. Deleuze and Guattari’s use of this term, which they call “the elementary unit of language” (DG 1987, 76), indicates that all language-use, while not always explicitly imperative, always also carries with it a certain command to follow a given set of rules or to accept a particular way of ordering things.

To speak or write, in other words, is to pass on a coding that must be obeyed. One can question the information one is given, but one is not supposed to question the “semiotic coordinates possessing all of the dual foundations of grammar (masculine-feminine, singular-plural, noun-verb, subject of the statement, subject of enunciation, etc.)” (ibid.). Such dualisms of grammar are not told to students, rather students are told information that is encoded by the formations of grammar. Even where students are formally taught grammar, the presuppositions on which grammar relies – that of subject and signifier, for one - are
never explicitly raised. As ‘simply’ the medium in which information is transmitted, grammar is not ‘at issue’, it is taken for granted and not supposed to be subject to questioning. It is the foundation upon which language is supposed to work, and as such is commanded in that it must be obeyed if one is to function properly.

It is not that subjects generally use grammar consciously in this way. It in fact relies on the way that in using language we unthinkingly transmit the rigid stratifications of a particular conservative world-view. This is the point of the ‘slogan’ connotation; language use in general passes on surreptitiously the command to follow the rules on which its particular form is established. This order-word is the central reason why for Deleuze and Guattari language always takes on a political form, as repressive and conservative. And if our very forms of subjectivity, for example, are seen as effects of forms of grammar that are essentially repressive, then we ought to be concerned with what is happening here.

The point of conceiving of sense in terms of assemblages was described above as cutting across the subject-object and the physical-semiotic divides. These divisions gave us no way to solve the problem of sense. According to the allowable determinations of subjectivity (that there be consciousness of a world, at the least), the problem of language is always of how to connect a speaking subject with a world, and seeing language as signification in itself leaves us with no account of how a world can come into language. It is these unsatisfying terms that seem to lead to the difficulties in correspondence theories. But again Deleuze and Guattari see the problem as being framed in a misleading way: if we ask how does a subject express an object through language then we fail to see a possibility that is deeper than this very dichotomy of subject and object, and if we ask how language can communicate to us a world without seeing that deeper implication of world and language,
then we fail to see any possibility beyond that of correspondence. In going beyond these distinctions, the analysis in terms of assemblages gets us beyond the false problem of how a subject connects language to the world.

The concept of assemblage is thus a way of demonstrating that sense can only be satisfactorily and effectively accounted for insofar as content and expression are seen as operating on the same level. Deleuze and Guattari refer to “the functional independence of the two forms”, which, they argue “is only the form of their reciprocal presupposition, and of the continual passage from one to the other” (ibid., 87). This notion opposes itself not only to correspondence theories of meaning but also to any notion that there is any hierarchy such that either content would determine expression – as in ideological accounts where the superstructure is determined by the material level - or expression would determine content in a linguistic idealism where the forms of language would exhaustively determine the forms of the material world. As illustrated above, each has its own form. But because this latter possibility sounds a little too close to what Deleuze and Guattari are describing, it is important to note that while language is meaningful by intervening in the world, it is also the case that the world is meaningful by intervening in forms of semiotics. More specifically, it is an indiscernibility or interchangeability that captures the relationship that Deleuze and Guattari are after.

This interchangeability can be expressed in a number of ways. Deleuze’s sole-authored earlier work The Logic of Sense is concerned in part with sense as that which is already presupposed in any particular account of how language works. One aspect of this view in particular is carried over into A Thousand Plateaus in the passage cited above regarding the possibility of indiscernibility. It is what Deleuze there calls “the paradox of
regress, or of indefinite proliferation” (Deleuze 1990, 28). This is the observation, which we have also seen with Derrida, that we can never say something and say the sense of it at the same time. There is always a deferral where we try to name or say the meaning of or designate that which we have just said. But in looking for the sense of our expressions, and in the fact that this gives rise to an infinite regress, we notice that ‘the name saying its own sense is nonsense’ but all the same is not meaningless. This is what Deleuze attempts to demonstrate in his reading of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*. Like the notion of the ‘square circle’, we have a unrealizable object that nonetheless has sense insofar as it can for example be distinguished from a triangular circle. It is already located within this mysterious ‘sense’ that Frege pointed out, and that includes nonsense.

*The Logic of Sense* is mostly concerned with the event, which I will explore below, and as expression of the event it is true that there is a sense that can never be quite captured, a point that Derrida also argues. But here Deleuze’s more immediate conclusion is that the regress “testifies both to the great impotence of the speaker and to the highest power of language: my impotence to state the sense of what I say, to say at the same time something and its meaning; but also the infinite power of language to speak about words” (Deleuze 1990, 29). It is Deleuze’s contention that it is at the border between things and words that we get sense. Language cannot speak about itself without invoking this border: indefinite proliferation demonstrates that it is only by referring to pieces of language as objects (nominal entities) that we find meaning, but such meaning is not a function of language alone nor a function of objects alone but happens only by way of the distinction. We get meaning in using language to speak about words as objects.
This might look like a theory that gives us language as speaking about words and not about actual things, but this is not in fact the case. Deleuze is merely pointing out that sense does not conform to the strict limits of good sense and common sense, but underlies such decisions about what is properly meaningful as the capacity for language to straddle the word/thing border. What he is pointing to is not a capacity for words to describe things but a capacity for words to become objects. What distinguishes nonsense – and therefore sense - from meaningless sounds is that we can speak about them, even if what we are speaking about is not a realizable object such as the square circle. Before they signify some specifiable thing, language has the capacity to reflect on itself as object, and it is only in this capacity that it is able to distinguish sense from meaningless sounds.

Objects can also have a word-capacity, can be signs. Thus a line-up constituted by bodies can function as a sign that a restaurant is full, just as the sign that tells us to stop at an intersection can also be used as an object since it is also a physical body – all signs in fact are also physical bodies. And this is what carries over into the language of *A Thousand Plateaus*: that words can be taken as things – nominal entities - and that things can just as well be taken as signs indicates that rather than there being language on the one hand and things on the other, meaning depends entirely upon the way that an element is made to function.

The difference between physical and semiotic systems is a real distinction because they perform different general functions and must be analyzed as such. But analysis in terms of the assemblage or machine gives us the usage to which any element is put and this is what is crucial – not what things are but how they function within an assemblage. Things can function as signs or as particles (Deleuze and Guattari point to the scientific fact of
interchangeability between sign-function and particle-function) and in this way the assemblage allows us analysis of what precedes the word/thing distinction, what gets us to the level at which things can function as things or can function as signs in putting their expressive capabilities to work. In this way the problem of how content comes into expression dissolves.

And this is why it is a pragmatics of language that must underlie all of what Deleuze and Guattari then see as incomplete analyses of language: world and language only give rise to sense insofar as they are mutually implicated in assemblages that function by playing off the difference between content and expression. Language has sense only because we can make it into an object that we can speak about and content only has sense insofar as it can become expressive, but what underlies both of these options is the ultimate indiscernibility itself of physical and semiotic systems. The very notion of the assemblage depends upon elements working definitively and not interchangeably as sign or as particle, but Deleuze and Guattari claim that this is only one side of the assemblage. Its cutting edge of deterritorialization is turned towards the very indiscernibility that can be captured in the notion of what they call pure Matter/Function.

In order to substantiate these suppositions about language, Bonta and Protevi cite Deleuze and Guattari’s engagements with complexity theory. Their articulation of this particular content/expression relationship in terms of the scientific background that inspires Deleuze and Guattari is extremely helpful for understanding this relationship. For this reason, I cite a lengthy passage in which they articulate this engagement:

Deleuze and Guattari accomplish this [the rethinking of sense and reference] by reminding us of the findings of complexity theory, which show that at critical thresholds some physical and biological systems can be said to ‘sense’ the differences in their environment that trigger self-organizing processes. In
this way signs – thresholds sensed by systems – are not only conceptualized as occurring beyond the register of the human and even the organic, but are also understood as triggers of material processes. The problematic of the external reference of the signifier, which so troubles post-Saussurean doctrines, is thus bypassed. Signs are no longer limited to linguistic entities that must somehow make contact with the natural world, and sense or meaning need no longer be seen as the reference of signifiers to each other. Rather, the ‘meaning’ of a sign is a measure of the probability of triggering a particular material process (my italics). (Bonta and Protevi 2004, 4).

We can see in this not only why ‘signs and particles’ need to work on the same level but also how the distinction between them is what produces sense. Because in expressing itself a physical element becomes expressive as territoriality, as we saw above, there is always a disjunction between corresponding physical and semiotic systems. We saw that expression is already a deterritorializing force because it is in excess of its contents, does not merely reflect but actualizes one or several among multiple capacities of each of its physical elements and does so in conjunction with other elements in making a new assemblage. It ‘captures a fragment of the code’ and decodes it for a new function.

To further illustrate this it will be helpful to return to the incorporeal transformation and to expand upon an example that Deleuze and Guattari provide (which they take from Foucault). The set of bodily relations that make up the order of possible criminal actions are related to the judicial semiotic system. The criminal action takes place between bodies, but the judge’s sentence instantly transforms the agent into a criminal, a transformation that will have a great deal of significance for his body. But it is never the case, Deleuze and Guattari seem to imply, that forms of content and forms of expression work entirely in conjunction. It is not an exception but a rule that they state when they claim that

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22 They would also say that the sentence in such a case turns a particular assemblage into an agent.
“[s]ometimes the semiotic components are more deterritorialized than the material components and sometimes the reverse” (DG 1987, 87). Inventions in the field of the semiotic might give rise to new conceptions of a physical system, but the reverse is also possible such as when particles have experimental effects that force their semiotic expression to loosen up, to deterritorialize. This disjunction explains the actual movement within semiotic and material systems, as in the following example:

[a] criminal action may be deterritorializing in relation to the existing regime of signs (the earth cries for revenge and crumbles beneath my feet, my offense is too great); but the sign that expresses the act of condemnation may in turn be deterritorializing in relation to all actions and reactions (“a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth”) [Gen. 4:12], you cannot even be killed. (ibid.)

This kind of claim is familiar from Nietzsche (and maybe more so from Deleuze’s book on Nietzsche); that it is the difference, the relative quantities of each, that determines the force or movement that transforms both. A judicial system may be unequipped to respond to a criminal act in a manner that keeps everything intact, which would require that semiotic system to respond to the greater force of the material system, or vice versa. One will always force the other out of its strict codifications.

The reason such movement seems so slight in our actual systems and institutions is because these ‘escapes’ of the virtual from the actual states of things can always be reterritorialized rather quickly. Thus if Deleuze and Guattari hypothesize that it is always the case that the different quanta lead to movement in the system, it is also evident that systems ‘adapt’ and that if they happen to be deeply entrenched systems, state-powered institutions in particular, they will adapt with the least noticeable effect possible. They miss the
opportunity, we might say, for the genuine change and novelty that is called for, that inheres within them.

Let us summarize what we have established thus far regarding Deleuze and Guattari’s view of language, in order to begin to apply it more pointedly towards a discussion of transformation in language. First of all, language is seen as being involved in two different kinds of power, forces of *puissances* and forms of *pouvoir*. The latter indicate, for one, the way in which any expression of language always operates as an implicit assertion of its own power, and this limiting and conserving force always functions as an unseen redundancy within the very use of language: the order-word. Insofar as we use language we unconsciously transmit its rules and constrain language to the limits of our particular semiotic systems. To recognize the variety of semiotic systems within which expressions of our language are made meaningful is to see that beneath these particular systems there must be that which allows language to be meaningful in a more basic way, in a way that doesn’t rely on the investments, for example, of a subject or of signification.

Insofar as we can see regimes of signs or semiotic systems as stratifications that perpetuate their own rules we can also see them as having the ability to stratify only because they have the capacity for deterritorialization. This is to say that the function of expressivity in doing more than simply reflecting a physical world, in being the actual self-expression of the physical world, gives it the capacity to be expressive in multiple ways. To see the other options within a territory, or to see the bare capacity for it to be otherwise, is to see the virtual within the actual, to see the absolute force of deterritorialization, or *puissances*.

Accordingly, Deleuze and Guattari locate the source of meaning in the mutual presupposition of content and expression - the indiscernibility of the two on a level plane.
means that their specific meaning is determined by that which precedes the distinction of word and thing, a machine in which interchangeable elements function either as expression or as content. The value of getting to this interchangeability will be to release the productive and creative capacities of language that have hitherto been restricted by incomplete analyses of language that take a particular political investment (in the subject/object dichotomy or in signification, in particular) and apply it as the limit of what language can do. This also, as we have seen through an analysis of the incorporeal transformation, serves to limit what bodies can do.

Before moving on, there is one further objection that needs to be considered. Deleuze and Guattari claim, following Bakhtin, that ‘free indirect discourse’ is the primary form of language. Like iterability, this means that rather than referring to or reproducing what we see or experience, language is a matter of saying what we have heard said (DG 1987, 80). But does this not avoid any real engagement with the world, merely recycling forms of language in sign-chains? In fact the notion of indirect discourse is easily reconciled with the notion of language as intervention in mutual implication with the world. It is the particular forms of language that circulate, and indeed within each voice, Deleuze and Guattari claim, are a multitude of different voices from which an “I” might emerge, but the way that we use these forms of language constitutes the real meaning in a given context. While Derrida wants to show with iterability that ultimately no meaning can be decided, for Deleuze and Guattari there is no such suspension. Free indirect discourse does not ultimately mean that language floats above any possible context but only that our forms of language are not true expressions from the interior life of an already-constituted “I”, but are rather exterior to the way the I experiences the world. But what is key for Deleuze and Guattari is that particular social
forces are already at work – and perhaps at war - in the forms of language, reinforcing their various rules within each expression. Derrida would not really disagree with this, but is more concerned to suspend any definitive interpretation. But to suspend this would be to limit the power of what language might be allowed to do in the world, other than suspend meaning.

It should not be underestimated how important the question of what language and bodies can do is for Deleuze and Guattari. If language is always a form of pouvoir; its cutting edges of deterritorialization hold the power to undo their own forms and to release a no less than revolutionary force that would shake us out of our complacent implication in a world whose passive tendency is to keep things as they are and repress all rebellious elements under what is illegitimately established as unquestionable. What this amounts to is the question of the play between being and becoming. I will now look at Deleuze’s evaluation of Plato’s account of these in order to see that it is becoming and transformation itself that we ought to be seeking when we analyze language using the pragmatic procedure that Deleuze and Guattari advocate.

Becoming and the Event

In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze uses the concept of nonsense in order to enact a reversal of Platonism. He argues that Plato recognizes a duality between “that which receives the action of the Idea and that which eludes this action” (Deleuze 1990, 2). This is not the usual duality explored in Plato, that of the Idea and its copy, the type and the token. On the one hand Plato makes this latter distinction but also, Deleuze observes, recognizes the duality within the empirical itself that indicates something that escapes the action of the Idea. So if the Idea can only be instantiated in things that are limited, Plato also recognizes “[p]ure becoming, the
unlimited, [as] the matter of the simulacrum insofar as it eludes the action of the Idea and insofar as it contests both model and copy at once” (*ibid*). Deleuze sees Plato as ultimately repressing this becoming by relegating the simulacrum to the status of erroneous representation, but nonetheless the struggle in which beings as genuine copies win out over becoming as false copies is enacted in Plato such that becoming is never entirely erased from the text. It troubles things. And Plato even wonders, Deleuze points out, about the ‘peculiar relation’ that becoming would have to language.

It is this relation that Deleuze takes up in the rest of the work, in which he first develops an account of the incorporeal transformation, which he believes to effect the reversal of Platonism. If the primary distinction that Aristotle takes up from Plato is that between substance and accidents such as states of affairs, quantities and qualities, the Stoics reconceive of the corporeal as including all of these things at the same level: substance is a being, but so is a state of affairs or a quality or quantity. All of these things exist – they have a *bodily* existence. From this perspective there is only one unlimited corporeality in which various mixings of bodies are constantly morphing, with no pre-established forms into which such becomings must fit. But our languages and the conventions of grammar tend to cut things up in the Aristotelian way – nouns and adjectives specify things and pin down the qualities and quantities that they distinguish from substance itself. It sees strict and logical divisions between bodies that bodies must conform to if they are to be meaningful. Thus the Stoics imagine also a different role for language. If language merely tells us things as they are, then we imagine that the world really is as our language tells us it is. But the Stoics imagine that language is intricately connected to the becomings that leak out of things and
their qualities. Language takes an active part in events of sense that are the *effects* of the mixtures of bodies, hovering at the surface of things.

We name the quality of a body as being green, for example, but there is also the ‘becoming green’ that cannot be reduced to the secondary quality that we call green. Becoming green, or ‘to green’ is not an existing entity but the *effect* of the various ways in which the tree and its environment interact - chlorophyll interacting with sunshine, etc. ‘Becoming green’ does not exist as a body in the Stoic schema and correlatively it cannot be cut up into the noun/adjective type of designation – it cannot be pointed out as a thing. It is a process, a becoming, an event – a verb (in the infinitive), Deleuze suggests. Because it is now entirely bodies themselves that “assume all the characteristics of substance and cause” (Deleuze 1990, 7), the Platonic Idea is banished to the realm of effects and is nothing other than an incorporeal result of the various mixings of bodies.

No longer does the transcendent idea give the meaning of things; the becoming of the simulacrum insofar as it does not mimic or represent anything, but becomes in a bare encounter of its elements and their capacities to work together, give rise to a sense. This revelation effects a reversal of Platonism for Deleuze, but of course Plato banishes this becoming to the imperfection or incompletion of beings in order to maintain the strict order of things under the transcendent direction of the Idea. Deleuze wants to fully release the force of becoming that he reads as a constant disruption to the Platonic order of things. It ‘returns to the surface’ in Deleuze’s reading – becoming as a surface-effect, and as that which overflows the categories to which beings are limited in the Platonic order of things.

Deleuze credits the Stoics with being the first to develop a philosophy of language. The becoming that overflows the limits of beings is not merely *designated* by a verb, but in
some sense is a verb, insofar as language is implicated in this very process. This should already be clear from the above discussions, since we have seen that it is in becoming-expressive that material systems achieve thresholds of meaning where instead of just mixings of bodies they become mixings of bodies with a specific significance. The greening of the tree is an event that both semiotic and physical systems enter into. As a matter of language this greening is already a picking out of salient features: it is not the aging of the tree, for example. But in recognizing this very act of distinguishing through language we see the way in which language participates in the process: the becoming-green is simultaneously a becoming-language, a becoming-significant. It is not simply a becoming that is a physical and necessary process and this is because the freedom of the margin to become in multiple directions is a matter of the relative quanta between semiotic and physical elements. No physical system can become without the deterritorializing force of expressivity. Thus the greening of the tree is an event of language even if, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, it is ‘attributed to bodies’.

What is especially fascinating in Deleuze’s discussion here of the Stoic reversal of Platonism is the sense in which he claims that the Stoics “displace all reflection” (Deleuze 1990, 6). If philosophy for Plato is contemplation and reflection on the way things are, the genius of the Stoics, as Deleuze reads them, was to have demonstrated that things might be otherwise, by effecting a ‘new distribution’ among beings and concepts. In the very demonstration that things could be cut up differently, in other words, they demonstrate a freedom beneath beings that indicates an inherent capacity of beings to be otherwise. And a capacity to be otherwise indicates a capacity for becoming, an essential transformativity that
underlies the rests and stops, the divisions of grammar, that congeal becoming into beings, into recognizable phenomena.

Thus instead of a Platonic contemplation of essences through a language that can only insufficiently capture them, the first philosophy of language (that of the Stoics) demonstrates that language in fact has an active role in the development of ideas and that for this reason reflection misses the real value not only of language but of thought. If there is an inevitability to the way in which language arbitrarily divides things up and allows/forces us to see the world in its rests and stops, it is also the case that we can manipulate the particular ways in which we perceive things and always remain vigilant over the becomings that reveal a deeper sense in which language participates in transformativity. In this sense language in its expressivity is the capacity for the order of things to always be otherwise.

Transformation and Translation

Plato prefigures the later Christian idea that human language is ‘fallen’ in his dialogue the *Cratylus*. In this dialogue Socrates postulates a ‘language of the gods’ where words somehow directly express the essence of things. This Ursprache would transcend all differences between languages and all difference in language as such between signifier and signified. The human world that must content itself with a material language and with minds that do not know the essences of things attempts nonetheless to establish an onomatopoeic language that would mimic the form of the divine language in its ability to *directly* express.

This human language attempts to discover a deeper connection between words and things - Socrates describes how the sound of lambda, for example, mimics things that are liquid, as the sound of omicron mimics round things. But this is already confused, as such
‘mimicking’ is already on the order of signification and designation and as such implies the
distinction and separation between designator and thing designated. But this attempt
nonetheless indicates, Socrates seems to suggest, humanity’s vague knowledge of language
as direct expression – a sense of the ‘pure language’ that would relegate signification and the
conventions of language to an essential alienation from essences, from the world of ideas and
the instantiations through which we might come to know them. Deleuze reads in this
dialogue the eruption of the strange dual power of language to both cut up and delimit bodies
in conventional ways and to overflow any such categories of being in its capacity for
becoming. And it is this power of becoming that must be released in our forms of language
if we are to get out from under the power of language to limit our world.

This gives us a first preliminary conclusion regarding the status of translation in
Deleuze and Guattari’s work. Or rather, its negative status; where for Derrida translation is
the privileged point of analysis of language because it demonstrates the unbridgeable gap
between language A and language B, for Deleuze and Guattari it is transformation that
demonstrates what is essential in language because it reveals language in its capacity to undo
the distinction between language A and language B, to undo every and all distinctions that it
itself has imposed. To look at language’s capacity to undo its own forms is to see it in this
very process of disarticulation, and to see a language X – what Deleuze and Guattari as we
will see will call a becoming-minor of language – as overflowing every particular language
as a homogenizing division that attempts to cover over this inherent capacity.

In Plato’s Cratylus particular languages are seen as the ‘material’ out of which
meaning must be formed, but this always alienated process must at least attempt to mimic the
things that are formed by essences. In this way languages are theoretically translatable
insofar as their ideal state is the expression of essence, and essence transcend the material world out of which languages are formed. For Derrida when we take transcendent essences out of the picture we are left with alienated language left completely to its own devices, but now getting its meaning from the other in language as alienation itself, as the refusal to reduce the other to the designations and divisions of things insofar as we see that they are already structured by the inherent violence of language.

The other makes language work only by transcending its particular investments in a movement of desire, but if the world is always already interpreted by a necessarily invested form of language then getting beyond particular investments is getting beyond the world itself. This is why Derrida’s ‘performativity’, while it leaves behind the total transcendence of a God that would be the unambiguous source of meaning, can be said to maintain a ‘quasi-transcendence’ through différance as the non-originary origin. Derrida recognizes exactly what Deleuze and Guattari do in this respect, but his way out gives us only the meaning of language itself as alienated from things, striving towards the unconditioned Idea as the undecidability that structures our decisions through the ultimately unknowable postulates of practical reason.

Deleuze and Guattari’s immanent analysis of language, on the contrary, puts the idea and language back in the world by directly inversing the Platonic schema. To see language in its essential becoming, in the disarticulation of its own forms, is to see it in its profound implication within a material world. Thus language has material – sonority, vocal chords, mouths and tongues, for example – but also functions expressively and as such indicates a commutativity of its particular investments: mouths can be for eating or for speaking.
Cutting across the division of words and things are assemblages that put material to work functionally, in various transformable ways.

Thus the distinction between different languages and the very inadequacy of any expression of language to say what it means that would indicate an untranslatability gives way to a transformability as the becoming of language that underlies all of its particular forms. Difference in language, then, is no longer a matter of expressions being inadequate to the other that we desire in the performative dimension. Difference for Deleuze and Guattari indicates the sense in which language cannot be reduced to its invested forms but is also the capacity of these investments to become otherwise by virtue of their own material power.
We have seen that Derrida discusses all forms of reading - interpretation, adaptation, commentary, etc. - on the model of translation as impossibility. All language is translation insofar as an essential inadequation makes communication impossible and simultaneously makes possible the separation between reader and text, between speaker and listener that structures an authentic relation. There is only room to interpret the text because the text does not interpret itself, is not directly self-communicating, but holds back an irreducibility, an unreadability, a futurity, that for Derrida is the impossibility of a meta-language, the lateral nature of all translations that makes them always insufficient approximations. In this respect Deleuze and Guattari would seem to agree with Derrida, as is evidenced in the following passage:

Speech communities and languages, independently of writing, do not define closed groups of people who understand one another but primarily determine relations between groups who do not understand one another: if there is language, it is fundamentally between those who do not speak the same tongue. Language is made for that, for translation, not for communication. (DG 1987, 430)

The broad point of agreement here is that the very notion of a ‘common language’ seems to contradict itself. If we can communicate without residue, as we imagine a speech community does, then it could only be because we already understand one another perfectly. What, then, would we be communicating to one another? Language seems to be the necessary effect of our not being able to understand one another - the necessarily inadequate attempt to do so. Language as translation, on the other hand, captures the sense in which
there is a crossing over, a going out from the familiarity of our mother-tongues, that happens in every act of inscription or utterance.

Does this not show, then, that Deleuze and Guattari are primarily concerned with language as translation in exactly the same way that Derrida has proved to be? For if we substitute translation for communication, it would seem that we do so only to point out the communicative gap between speakers (or text and reader), only to show that language is possible because our expressions ultimately act as differentials that carry with them no certain indication of what they mean. But if both accounts recognize language as necessarily (at least from one perspective) a homogenizing, totalizing activity that effaces a fundamental difference, their demonstrated responses – as we are beginning to see - are quite distinct.

Derrida’s strategy is to put to work différance in order to destabilize the always-provisional forms of language, and the result as we have seen is a negative enterprise. We deconstruct in order to see what the text is hiding, and we know theoretically that what is being repressed can be manifest otherwise, but we get no productive results that could put difference to work in ways that create new functions and new forms of language. If Derrida’s texts themselves performatively use language in relatively novel ways, what they perform is the demonstration, over and over again, of the fact that language cannot communicate or tell us anything about the world. The other of language can be demonstrated only negatively in the self-differentiating activity of language itself that can never capture it.

Deleuze and Guattari reframe the very question about communicability of the world such that we need not begin by assuming the absolute distinction between world and language. They ask rather ‘how is it that a world comes to be expressive?’ ‘what is the process in which physical systems become semiotic systems?’ Thus when Deleuze and
Deleuze/Guattari discuss the other of language, the outside of language, this is not negatively defined as that which simply cannot come into language, but is a positive matter of *life*. Stretching language to its limits will be about seeing where it turns into life. Insofar as language is considered only in itself, its other is opposed to it as life – as what language in itself is not - but if we can see language as a particular form of the becoming-expressive of matter, then we see its capacities as preceding the distinction between life and language. Language is a becoming-other, a transformative capacity for dissolving its own boundaries and stratifications and intersecting with other more and less fluid assemblages.

Getting here is a matter of putting language to work. This we see clearly in Deleuze and Deleuze/Guattari’s treatment of literature, where they both praise those writers who put language to new functions in their work and consider their own process of critique as the positive and pragmatic enterprise of exploring ways of reading that will put these texts back to work in the most valuable way. What they would save the texts they read from are not incorrect readings but sterile, ineffectual interpretations.

Deleuze and Guattari propose and demonstrate a procedure of pragmatic analysis the point of which is to trace language back to the abstract machine of matter and function, where expression might be released from its rigid limits in the strata of language and freed up for experimentation with forms of life. At this most basic level translation is not a particularly productive problem. In a flux of forces where content and expression are formally interchangeable, there are no stable points of language yet on which to measure the inadequation that gets us to translation as impossibility.

As we have seen, what we get instead is transformativity, which allows us to look at the real and singular assemblages in which expressivity transforms with content for
productive functions. And where Deleuze and Guattari do discuss translation, it is not untranslatability in which they are interested but quite the opposite see a fundamental translatability as a special feature of signifying language as overcoding. This puts their analysis, in some respects, in direct opposition to Derrida’s.

What we will see is that untranslatability, as Derrida views it, and as modeled on interlingual translation, represents a relatively insignificant fact about languages insofar as they are already stratified. On an inter-semiotic level, on the other hand, language appears in the very form of translatability. Deleuze and Guattari argue that a misunderstanding about this latter point is what leads to imperialisms of language, and from their point of view, Derrida’s sense of language as signification in itself falls into this camp.

In this chapter I will extract an implicit critique of Derrida’s analysis of untranslatability primarily from Deleuze and Guattari’s text *A Thousand Plateaus* by contrasting it with their own view of an essential translatability in language. I will also show that even the inter-semiotic translatability (or transformation) that they point to in their pragmatic analysis of language gives way to a deeper analysis in terms of abstract machines. This deeper level is where we get to the real relation of language to content, and here it will become clear that Deleuze and Guattari’s implicit critique of translation as a guiding problem focuses on the way that such an analysis is still an abstraction of content.

Furthermore, the role of language in the machinic world that they describe is not all-encompassing and as such its particular contributions to meaning must be understood in the context of a larger network of connections into which particular forms of language enter. In other words, language is not central to Deleuze and Guattari, as the model for all other forms of expressivity. The notion of abstract machines as singular and multiple – in opposition to
the notion of *one universal* abstract machine of language that structures all other expressive forms - illustrates the ultimately creative conjunction between matter and expression, and forces language as difference to yield novel and functional results through experimentation with the capacities of language in the world.

*What is Language? What are Languages?*

Deleuze and Guattari are concerned to demonstrate the specific role of language in relation to expressivity in general. And it is clear that expressivity cannot be reduced to language or signification. Expressivity takes on a different form in each of the main divisions of strata, and it is only on the alloplastic or human stratum that we find language. Deleuze and Guattari are attempting, by means of this analysis, to reveal the particular limits and capacities of human language by locating it in the larger context of expressivity.

It is the relation of content to expression that defines each stratum as distinct from the others, and this relation as Deleuze and Guattari describe it is a matter of a margin of latitude between content and expression. The margin of latitude that each stratum demonstrates indicates a type of self-movement as self-expression, with varying degrees of deterritorializing power. If the non-organic stratum is defined by expression as directly reflecting the identity of a formed content, the organic and alloplastic strata are distinguished by the relative independence of expressivity from its particular content: the capacity to function as a sign, as we saw in the previous chapter, is what constitutes this margin of latitude that is a deterritorialization, a relative freedom of the code from its territory. The sign function relies on inherent capacities in bodies and the ways in which these are drawn out by sets of external relations. The ascending strata multiply the freedom of expression
from bodies through greater levels of deterritorialization that have more potential to put bodies to work in diverse and creative ways.

What makes the organic and the alloplastic strata capable of achieving a relative independence from their content is their linear form, Deleuze and Guattari suggest. As capturing the content/expression relationship in singular ways, the organic and alloplastic strata are defined by genetics and linguistics, respectively. Where the non-organic is tied to its three-dimensionality, as a reflection of the surface\textsuperscript{23}, the \textit{linearity of the genetic and linguistic codes} makes them capable of expressing content with greater degrees of freedom. Deleuze and Guattari call this the “detachment of a pure line of expression” in order to indicate that expression here becomes capable of functioning on its own, without being tied to matter as determining its form the way that the non-organic is. The genetic and linguistic elements that make up meaning must be interpreted, in other words.

On the other hand, Deleuze and Guattari are quick to point out that the genetic code cannot be considered a language, and that the distinction between genetics and linguistics is equally important. This emphasis seems to be commonly overlooked. Commentators make

\textsuperscript{23} Deleuze and Guattari describe the growth of a crystal in this respect, but DeLanda gives an example that is rather more explicit and therefore helpful for the non-scientist in describing how the non-organic is capable of expression: “[w]hen atoms interact with radiation their internal structure creates patterns in this radiation through the selective absorption of some of its wavelengths. In manmade photographs this pattern appears as a spatial arrangement of light and dark bands (a spectograph) which is correlated in a unique way with the identity of the chemical species to which the atom belongs. In other words, the absorption pattern expresses the identity of the chemical species in the form of physical information which can be used by astrophysicists, for example, to identify the chemical elements present in a given celestial process” (DeLanda 2002). He goes to helpfully compare this kind of expression of identity with a set of fingerprints that perform no biological function on their own (and only do so if taken up by social agencies such as law-enforcement). We could also illustrate this distinction with Deleuze and Guattari’s example of the colour of a fish as directly expressing an internal state on the one hand or functioning as a sign on the other. But the fish as an organism is already defined by its capacity for territoriality.
much out of Deleuze and Guattari’s view that language is only one among various kinds of social assemblages, and that language is therefore not central in their analysis of social assemblages. This is true, and investigating why this is the case is my central purpose here. But the common de-emphasizing of language in various interpretations seems to miss the sense in which language has the greatest capacity of all forms of expression for deterritorialization and for inventing new forms of life\textsuperscript{24}. Language is not the model on which all expressivity is conceptualized, but it does display special capacities that as we will see give it a singular power for disarticulating power-structures. Perhaps the usual emphasis in this regard means to forestall the misguided view that Deleuze and Guattari are post-modernists. But it seems clear that while language must be put into its proper perspective, such a perspective serves to explain how language functions in the highly specialized role to which Deleuze and Guattari assign it.

The genetic code is like language in that it is expressed as linearity, giving it the ability to function on its own and to gain relative freedom in its functions. The way in which the genetic sequence can express itself as proteins is not exhaustively pre-determined by its matter, because the linear sequence has a surplus-value. The capacities of each gene are effectuated differently according to the combinations into which the genes enter with one another. The linear genetic sequence has virtual capacities that it holds back when particular sequences actualize them in given ways, while an entity tied to its three-dimensional form does not contain different capacities of relation – various ways of reproducing itself. This seems to capture the sense of linearity that Deleuze and Guattari are after.

\textsuperscript{24} DeLanda, for example, (2006) puts his emphasis on the distinction of the inorganic from the organic and alloplastic and glosses over the difference between these latter two. LeCercle (2002) does a better job of describing the particular power of language in its decentralized role.
But the genetic code is unlike language because its linearity is *spatial*, whereas the linearity of the linguistic code is *temporal*. This means that genetics is ultimately not like language in the most important respect, which amounts, Deleuze and Guattari propose, to the fact that the alloplastic stratum – language – can ‘represent’ all the other strata. The genetic reproduces itself through internal combinations, and thus remains free only in relation to its own material. But translation is the specific capacity of language that in its higher degree of freedom from content allows it to overcode all the other strata – in other words, not just to transcode but to translate.

Deleuze and Guattari describe this as the sense in which language can freely reproduce not only itself but all other elements of the physical world, as the ability of language to achieve ‘Welt’, where an animal can only construct an ‘Umwelt’, an environment. Language has the ability to give what they call a ‘scientific’ picture of the world and not merely achieve an Umwelt insofar as Unwelt simply implies an unconscious territoriality. An animal, Deleuze and Guattari seem to suggest, ‘interprets’ its surroundings in the way that it puts them to use, the way that it moves within them and around them. Its particular functions and patterns define the significance of that environment differently, but there is no consciousness of that freedom and so in some sense no freedom. The making-significant of an environment that an animal effects in its construction of an Umwelt is simply a manipulating of those elements in ways that help it achieve its own ends. Human language distinguishes a Welt from an Umwelt by its capacity to reflect on the significance of things themselves, apart from their immediate role in an animalistic existence or subsistence. Language can select a world from a reflective distance from out of the elements of all strata.
The fact that in language we must perform a ‘formal synthesis of succession’ means that the meaning of a succession of linguistic components does not give up its own meaning. We saw that the matter in which the genetic code is encrypted also does not determine the exact form of expression, but as a spatial linearity the self-ordering of parts remained within the genetic code itself. Language’s temporal linearity indicates a content that cannot give rise to meaningful expressions (such as we could see the proteins that result from combinations of genes) by simply combining in different ways, but requires a synthesizing movement that comes as if from the outside.

In order to explain this further, Deleuze and Guattari invoke the distinction between form and substance. If the substance of language is primarily vocal substance (it could also be written, of course), a series of noises that on the one hand could be seen as just that, the forms of language are not mere combinations of these, such as was the case in genetics. Form and substance may be two different ways to see the same thing, but in the alloplastic or human realm of expressivity that is language the distinction is crucial because it points out the translating activity that is a matter of form actively synthesizing substance into distinguishable expression. Whereas in genetic reproduction a content becomes expressive by reproducing itself through various possibilities of self-combination, content that would become expressive in a distinctly linguistic direction calls for forms of expression that can actively synthesize its combinations. Language can translate elements of any stratum into its own terms only because what it means to become linguistic is to be highly deterritorialized from any direct or immediate self-expression.

Deleuze and Guattari point out that this is what leads us to believe in language as keeping to itself all the power of meaning. Language’s capacity to translate in this way
seems to indicate the fact that language simply imposes meaning on matter that remains indifferent. And it is the case, they state, that in coming into language things gain a specifically linguistic meaning – in their view that goes without saying, while the general post-modernist view takes this to be the whole secret of language. Because even if this is the case, it should not lead us to believe that there is no significance to things outside of their linguistic expression.

What we should learn, rather, from the distinction between the linguistic and the genetic forms of expression, is that the alloplastic stratum must invoke an absolute distinction between content and expression in order to function. It is only because language has an ability to function on its own that it can develop forms of expression that can synthesize matter. In other words, only because language can develop ‘systems’ of meaning, such as a Saussurian system that works through differences without its forms being tied essentially to any particular things designated, can it make meaningful expression out of sounds and letters. If forms of language had essential meanings, after all, it would be difficult to see how these meanings could be transmitted through a sensible form. It is because language, unlike genetics, can be entirely a matter of convention, that it can synthesize otherwise meaningless sounds and marks on a page.

We know already that Deleuze and Guattari see language as meaningful only in relation with a world, but this particular meaningfulness that makes up a human world requires that content and expression be independent in order that they might relate to one another. At least, this is how they must be seen from the side of the alloplastic stratum. On the cutting edges of deterritorialization of the strata, on the other hand, we will rediscover capacities of language by looking at it through the lens of the becoming-expressive of matter.
But this insight will allow us to go back and see the high level of deterritorialization as both evidence that content and expression are not ultimately independent and as the particular opportunity that such a perceived gap between content and expression can effect by way of transformation.

When Deleuze and Guattari call translation the power of language to construct a scientific view of the world, we should not imagine that this amounts to a neutrality in language that would amount to the apolitical. In fact, what the high degree of deterritorialization in language as a system of signs means is that in the gap that makes meaning out of a physical world linguistic meaning is subject to appropriation by various forces. If the superlinearity that is characteristic of language is immanent to it as a form of expressivity, this does not indicate that language is actually self-enclosed – it is in fact neither self-enclosed nor mimetic. It means rather that we need to be careful of the ease with which linguistic expressivity can be hijacked. In fact, it is always hijacked by a force, and in one sense this can only be a form of reterritorialization.

We have seen that Deleuze and Guattari analyze language in terms of regimes of signs. The term *regime* carries with it the notion of an ordered system that functions as regulator, where such regulation also must continually reinforce the unquestionable structure that feeds it, as the educational system props up its own absolute value by transmitting the order-words that determine the limits of what we may question.

As particular formalizations of expression regimes of signs are at the same time both more and less than language. They cut across any possible definition either of language as such or of a language. If language as such is defined by temporal linearity as its condition of possibility, individual languages “are defined by constants, elements and relations of a
phonological, syntactical, and semantic nature” (DG 1987, 140). Neither of these definitions can capture regimes of signs. Certainly regimes of signs are what allow languages to function, and as such they ‘utilize’ the constant elements of languages in order to function. But a regime of signs also depends upon the internal variability of languages.

In other words, the fact that constants in languages as determined by the order-word are specific ways of cutting up a continuum of becoming means that constants can be located along that line in which alternate choices appear. A regime of signs is an order of redundancy as reinforcing the value of a particular set of constants (the constants that reinforce subjectivity, for example) and no such regime, as an imposing of a certain order to things, would be possible if that set of constants were the only possible set. It is the variability in language and the need for a coherent system that requires a regime to reinforce one particular choice as the dominant choice, as the ‘proper’ functioning of language.

A regime of signs is not a language, then, but is the power that reinforces a particular view of language. Regimes of signs ‘mobilize pragmatic variables proper to enunciation’, incorporeal transformations in which language intervenes in the world. A regime of signs is a particular way of putting the variability of language to work for its own specific ends by limiting and ordering the set of all allowable interventions – even if ‘its own ends’ are simply the imposition of this way of seeing things. Thus a regime of signs is not simply co-extensive with language as such because there cannot be only one regime of signs - the very definition of a regime of signs presupposes multiples, variability. And this is where content and expression come back into the picture. Because language can detach a line of expression and ‘represent’ the other strata, it can appear entirely free from any particular content, any essential relation with content, and as such can appear indifferent, neutral.
Let us pause for a moment and consider what Deleuze and Guattari are saying about translation here. Translatability, as they have described it, is the distinctive ability of language as the expressivity characteristic of the alloplastic/human stratum. In this particular stratified view of things, then, content and expression appear as independent from one another as possible, the particular distinction of the alloplastic being that expression can appear autonomous and can function with a high degree of deterritorialization.

Now every form of expression for Deleuze and Guattari is the manifestation of some power. Even the ability of the crystal to grow is a power, but it is a power that is restrictively tied to one form of content and so to one substance of expression (in other words, as tied to its own three-dimensional existence, it’s only substance of expression is an extension of that very three-dimensionality). The high deterritorialization of language in the linearity of alloplastic expressivity means that expressivity is not tied to any particular matter and can reproduce itself indefinitely without seeming to rely on content. But the functioning of language in this way is also driven by a force, or forces, and they turn out to be forces that latch onto particular and limited ways of establishing the meaning of statements through the incorporeal transformations they allow.

Why is this called translatability? Deleuze and Guattari characterize this also as the ability of language to ‘represent’ the other strata, but they are always careful to hold back the full implications of representation. To ‘represent’ in the analysis they have given is not really to legitimately stand in for or to bring that which is represented into view, or any of the common senses of representation. What they mean here is simply that human language as deterritorialized has enough latitude to talk about things and thus appears to represent things. Particular social forces, then, form regimes of signs that serve to appropriate things to the
particular assemblages that they sanction and to their regimental orders as imposing the unquestionable basis on which they function as the appearance of indifference. To say that language has the special ability to translate, then, is to say that any power that takes up language is the power to decide what things mean. Language as power translates for its own specific purposes the meaning of everything.

But of course Derrida would agree with this analysis to a certain degree. Certainly for Derrida language is always a form of power and insofar as we do translate we are always simply appropriating or reducing the other to the same. Insofar as translation is practically possible, in Derrida’s terms, it is indeed a show of power, a force dominating its world and interpreting within the limits that it establishes itself and refusing to be ‘disturbed’ by what lies outside those limits. And also for both Derrida and Deleuze/Guattari it must be the case that things cannot be otherwise than this general structure of power, in a certain sense. If all actual use of language is force, then meaning is always a function of which force wins the battle, or the outcome of a compromise or diversion. Derrida’s différance can be made to disturb this order where meaning is always established by the dominant force, but it remains a disturbance within an order that cannot be changed.

Deleuze and Guattari have a different solution. It is true that in human language the dominant force establishes the dominant order of things, the way that we see language and use it and subsequently the way that we see the world and act in it. But the actual order of things imposed by dominant forces is only the surface-effect of the virtual, and the virtual might be put to work not simply to disturb the dominant order, but to reveal a becoming that does not exhaust itself in the future hope of things being otherwise in an indeterminate way.
Rather it enters the dominant order into a becoming in which its own greater capacities for freedom and productivity are released.

If for Derrida untranslatability indicates the sense in which language will never be able to tell us anything about the world, for Deleuze and Guattari it is translatability that is the very force of language to create a world. It is not simply a matter of recognizing this as always illegitimate, but of getting to better ways to form a world. And these will be about putting to work the virtual, releasing the transformational power of a thing’s capacities, entering assemblages into becomings that simply give them greater freedom.

It should not be thought at this point, however, that greater freedom implies in itself *better* forms of life. Deleuze and Guattari rely on a Nietzschean ethics where greater value is a function of being more life-affirming and productive and this will be the measure of the results of any experimentation. But in Deleuze and Guattari’s view good sense and common sense, insofar as they tell us what is proper in language, are extremely limiting to the capacities of language to enter into the world and to contribute to the destratification of such a world in which greater freedom means a wider field of experimentation in which we might discover forms of life that affirm and create in positive and productive ways. Thus greater freedom is the only way to open up the field of language to its greater capacities to be better, life-affirming or more just.

*Pragmatic analysis*

But language in this essential becoming-other in which its revolutionary capacities might be unleashed is not obvious to us insofar as we operate already within regimes of signs. It is necessary to analyze existing forms of language down to the machines, assemblages and
semioticizations that underlie them. This Deleuze and Guattari describe as a pragmatic analysis with four different stages. The four components of this analysis in their proper order are: generative, transformational, diagrammatic and machinic. And here we see that although the point is to get beneath the already formed orders of language to a transformativity that indicates that existing forms of language might be otherwise, this is only the second of four stages of analysis.

So the point is not simply to get to the abstract sense of expressivity in general, which shows that forms of language might be located on a much wider field of possibility, but to get to the real ways in which actual forms of language are parts of assemblages that are otherwise, virtually speaking. This is at the very least a willingness to let go of the model of a dominant grammaticality as what makes language function. To see the capacity for language to function outside of our forms of grammar is to see its capacity to function outside of all signification, and to redistribute the elements of subjectivity, for a start. For this reason, Deleuze and Guattari describe their pragmatic analysis in distinct opposition to what they call the Chomskyan abstract machine of language.

This notion as described by Chomsky assumes that there is a universal form of grammaticality that is innate in humans and that is necessary in order for language to function as meaningful. This relies on no particular relation with the world. This is what Deleuze and Guattari mean when they say that the Chomsky abstract machine of universal grammar is too abstract – it abstracts content altogether in describing the conditions for expression. On the other hand, it is also not abstract enough, they claim, because it takes a particular investment of language in the form of grammaticality as universal, and so both does not cover a wide enough territory in what it allows us to count as meaningful and covers
up the particular investments of regimes of signs by claiming a scientific neutrality for language. Deleuze and Guattari want to get to an abstract machine that describes the workings of language on the most general level, but does so by describing semiotic expression as the self-articulation of content that is always subject to a particular force.

We have already seen the rough outlines of the first two steps of pragmatic analysis in the foregoing discussion. Firstly, generative pragmatics is the analysis that Deleuze and Guattari perform on language as regimes of signs. If we tried to analyze forms of expression without analyzing the particular social-semiotic forces that drive them, then, Deleuze and Guattari argue, the “syntactic, semantical and logical elements [of a statement] would remain totally empty universal conditions” (DG 1987, 149). Thus we can look at a statement and consider it not just as a representation of a state of affairs, but as redundantly reinforcing a particular investment of language.

Deleuze and Guattari use the example of the statement “I love you”. This part of the analysis would show that the meaning of this statement is different according to the regime it is taken up by: the “I love you” in the regime of subjectification relies on the understanding that there is a subject out of whom the statement issues as the origin of the meaning – it is the emotional life of an individual that the statement confirms, and confirms as isolated from other subjects, projecting a relation that has already taken for granted the terms of the relation. In the signifying regime, on the other hand, the statement is seen as initiating an interpretive chain – the statement ‘means’ nothing that we can point to, but rather implicates us in a chain of signification, perhaps in a Derridean sense forming a kind of promise that makes us responsible for what we can never quite grasp. But regardless of how we analyze particular semiotics the very fact that there are different ways to analyze this statement points
to different general and systematic assumptions about how language means. These are regimes of signs.

That there are multiple regimes of signs that can be identified demonstrates quite clearly that no one of these on its own can give us the kind of general explanation of meaning that could account for all possibilities of all regimes. In this view, Derrida’s chain of signification, then, is merely one among many regimes of signs. And here Deleuze and Guattari would have to agree that there is a distinct untranslatability. As already appropriated by a regime of signs, as already a formed expression, every statement represents a particular temporal and spatial quantification of forces and cannot therefore be ‘equivalent’ to any other point. But this is just to say that there is difference, rather than essences, beneath the ‘stable’ forms of language. This is a given, for Deleuze and Guattari, but doesn’t tell us much about what difference in language can do, other than not represent.

For this we need to keep going. The second transformational step involves the translation of pure semiotics into others. While semiotics are always mixed there is at least a point to isolating them in order to see how they work. Here Deleuze and Guattari describe the various kinds of translations that we find between the particular regimes of signs that they have identified (though, again, they claim that the list is arbitrary and many more could be named). This certainly relies upon the ability of language to represent the other strata that we have just examined, because this translatability is a function of the deterritorialization of language such that we must look at it through regimes of signs in order to see by which outside force it is being appropriated in each instance. But the translations here are specifically inter-semiotic translations, and it should be clear by now that all translations in the linguistic world must be primarily inter-semiotic in this way. If it is always the force
behind a particular semiotic that gives a particular meaning to statements, then any translation that would be a significant transformation – that would access the transformativity that underlies any particular force – must move to a new semiotic, or to a new combination of various semiotics.

If the point of generative pragmatics is to show negatively that no regime of signs is exhaustive of the potential of language, the point of transformational pragmatics is to show the other side of that coin: that there is something that runs through all possible semiotics, “one would look at what passes and does not pass in such a transformation, what remains irreducible and what flows” (DG 1987, 147). What remains irreducible for Deleuze and Guattari is what performs the kind of resistance that Derrida illustrates, but for very different reasons than those given by Derrida. For Derrida resistance indicates what cannot be reduced to the same – meaning as accessible from the point of view of language as a universal, transparent common ground, or meta-language. For Deleuze and Guattari what resists appropriation by novel forces is what remains committed to a certain order of things, what remains at the level of pre-established forms of expression, and cannot release its virtual capacities for entering into other relations. We have already seen how translatability is a function of the human insofar as expressivity here is highly deterritorialized, so it must be that what resists is what has reterritorialized most convincingly.

To resist inter-semiotic translation, then, is to believe in one’s own limits as absolute, to believe that the regime of signs that gives a statement its meaning is the only way to understand language. So while it seemed before that to translate was a negative if inevitable
operation that allows the human to appropriate and ‘interpret’ anything at all\(^\text{25}\), translation now appears in a positive light. What ‘flows’ is what can be accessed at the virtual level and can be appropriated to new, and therefore potentially better, forms of life. And the point of translative analysis is to get to this virtual, this capacity of a form of expression to break free from the particular view of language in which it is ensconced. What is most translatable, then, is language that is self-consciously aware of its own particular investments, of the inevitability of the fact that it props up some sort of assumptions about how language works. This would allow it to play with that investment, to help it come undone by experimenting with what flows through its particular forms. What is untranslatable is what is already formed and believes in its own form as the limit of its capacities.

This is not really as abstract or strange an account of translatability as it may at first seem. If we think of translatability as first and foremost a matter of transformativity, then the point is obvious. What is most transformable is what is aware of its own capacities for variability. The difficulty is in thinking of translatability in terms of transformativity, for we might imagine that what is most transformable is the least translatable, because its fluidity makes it impossible to ‘capture’. The polysemy that any term of language carries with it is, in Derrida’s analyses, what makes it most resistant to a translation that must simply choose one meaning and in doing so leaves out many other possible meanings that Derrida shows are part of the play of differences that make up the possibility of any singularly conceived interpretive meaning. This is Derrida’s concern in his analysis of the polysemy of the pharmakon, for example, in “Plato’s Pharmacy” (Derrida 1981b).

\(^{25}\text{This indicates the negative aspect of language for Heidegger as an activity that tends to drown out the way that things speak for themselves.}\)
In fact, the poetic use of language as Derrida describes it is the most untranslatable form of language precisely because as unconfined by traditional forms of grammar and propriety, it fails to express anything identifiable outside of the singularity of its expression. But this seems to Derrida to only point to the impossibility of transforming it because it defies the very grammatical conventions that would assign it an identifiable meaning that might be translated. But Deleuze and Guattari seem to take this same point about the poetic as resisting grammatical expectations and use it to show that these are the most transformable uses of language and for that very reason most productive for inter-semiotic translations, because it is not confined to any particular investments of language.

If we can assume that the value of poetic expression is that it cuts across and plays with the various investments of language – the investments of subject and of signification, for example – and we can say that something like an order issuing from a governing authority to a governed people absolutely respects the limits of a certain grammaticality (and expects that to be respected in the interpreting/obeying of the order), then it is clear in contrast that the meaning of the poetic expression demonstrates a high degree of deterritorialization from any investment of language and so a high variability in the ways it can be read.

If the meaning of a text is the way that it functions in the world then the ‘variability’ of its language is a matter of how many ways it can be put to work. A direct order relies on there being only one way. And if we bring this observation back to the question of inter-lingual translation, it is in fact obvious that highly poetic language can enter into foreign languages in a myriad of almost unrecognizably different forms, whereas the difficulty of translating an order can be a real stumbling-block to what is to be its proper and only function.
Is this not simply, however, a level on which Derrida would agree because what we are examining here is *practical* translatability whereas Derrida is concerned to disturb this with *différance* as the *theoretical* impossibility of translation? Perhaps, but for Deleuze and Guattari this theoretical/practical distinction dissolves. If a translation is ‘meant’ to be a representation of something that cannot be represented, then practical translatability must indeed be brought back to the sense in which it is in theory untranslatable. But if this is not the point of translation in the first place, not its function in a world that Deleuze and Guattari see as made up of functioning machines, then there is no significance to the distinction. The point of translation is to transform, to put existing forms of expression back into their virtual capacities to be redirected to other and better forms of life. The real disagreement here is that while Derrida would agree in the openness of the form of the poetic, for him this points to betrayal. Deleuze and Guattari have no such reservations.

Inter-semiotic translations, then, put the elements of their particular forms of expressivity to new functions. The translations that Deleuze and Guattari examine show the ways in which various elements of a semiotic can flow into other semiotics, and this demonstrates that which cuts across particular regimes of signs. Mapping the actual translations is a matter of revealing the capacities for expressions of language to function outside of a particular regime of signs. Accordingly, we get different kinds of translations between different regimes of signs.

The kinds of inter-semiotic translations with which we are probably most familiar are the translations between the signifying and the pre-signifying regimes. Deleuze and Guattari describe this pre-signifying regime as ‘primitive’, and as having much in common with ‘natural’, non-signifying expression: “thus forms of corporeality, gesturality, rhythm, dance,
and rite coexist heterogeneously with the vocal form” (DG 1987, 117). Here the
deterritorialization that provides a critical distance and a free margin consists not in the
ability of the signifier to appear detached and refer only to other signs, but consists in the
distinction between different territorialities in which the sign codes and decodes investments
of the body.

In this regime the sign does not signify a meaning, with only the value of home, but
an actual spatial territoriality: speech, like dance and other forms of corporeal expression,
performs the coding and decoding of the geographical coordinates within which forms of life
are organized. Deterritorialization consists in the fact that there is a sign function, but it
works without the assumptions of subject and signification as prior conditions of language.
It is the tribe that is created out of the sign-function here, and if there is a sign-function it is
not a matter of language meaning things but of language making things meaningful.

The translations into the regime of the signifier, then, import certain elements of the
pre-signifying corporeality – though not much, Deleuze and Guattari would seem to show –
into its own terms for its own purposes. A dance that in the pre-signifying tribe had
significance insofar as it tied a people and a way of life to a territory now “often exhibits a
consciousness-related or mimetic translation, accompanied by a power takeover by
significance and subjectification” (ibid., 138). This is evident in the fact that the ‘meaning’ of
the dance is now open to interpretation by any and all individuals and seems to detach itself
from any inherent connection to the actual movements of the body, from the real
participation of the body in the development of significance.

Translations can go the other way, as well, as when primitive cultures transform
elements of the Christianity imposed upon them into their own ways of meaning. And as we
have seen, they identify four regimes of signs - though there are certainly more – all of which have their own specific procedures for translating and ways of being translated according to what flows and what does not. This helps us see where the greatest capacities for deterritorialization lie, and to put them to work in creative ways.

Deleuze and Guattari do not mean to say, as is so often heard, that such translations – particularly those of pre-signifying into signifying regimes - constitute distortions or illegitimate appropriations of some original context. Doubtless the translation of African song and dance into signifying regimes loses much of the original significance, and perhaps some of the richness, but this loss is not really in itself a concern for Deleuze and Guattari. It is not that they want to deny the fact or the tragedy of colonial violence, but that they ultimately want to evaluate translations, as any form of language, by whether or not they produce something life-affirming and not by whether or not they fairly or accurately represent some original that they transform.

To begin with, it is in these kinds of inter-semiotic translations, which translate not languages but regimes of signs as different functions of language, that we begin to see possibilities for language that go beyond representation. So representation can no longer be the one guiding normative function of language. The general value of inter-semiotic translations as a tool of analysis is that they enable us to see that beneath the actual is a virtual that consists in bare capacities. This cannot be seen within any one regime of signs, but can only be found between them in the becoming in which one is translated into the other. Here we get to see not the ‘meaning’ of language but different possible functions of language.
It is true that when we want to translate we find that the so-called content of the expression disappears and we see that any notion of the content relies on a prior differentiating force that we cannot capture. And if we stop here we get the impossibility of representing the differential force. But if we see instead of a destabilizing différence a virtuality that simply sees in every expression its capacities to enter into other sets of relations with various different results, then we do not seem to have betrayed anything. For in Deleuze and Guattari’s view there is no singularity without a multiplicity of relations in which singularity might be expressed as an element of a functional assemblage. It might be that in the African dance that original context is lost, but translations that put to work other capacities of the various suggestive elements of songs and dance simply show that there is more to these forms of expression than the immediate context in which they initially get their significance. As long as the translation puts those capacities to work in productive ways, it is a positive enterprise. What this means is that the kinds of problems that we might look for in, say, Western appropriations of non-Western forms of life, would not be along the lines of a failure to accurately represent. The problems we want to look for instead would be found where such appropriations fail to put to work the most interesting transformative capacities of what they claim to translate.

The third and fourth steps of pragmatic analysis get us beyond this bare transformativity. The reason that the transformative or translational level is still not deep enough is because content can still be abstracted from the analysis. It is more profound than the generative component of the analysis because every semiotic presupposes translatability, but it must give way to a component that incorporates the singular kind of relationships that expressions have to matter. In this respect Deleuze and Guattari comment that
transformational analysis is “limited to metamorphoses internal to the form of expression, even though the form of expression is not adequate to account for them” (ibid., 145). It seems at this inter-semiotic level as though it is the emptiness of linguistic forms that allow them to transform into yet other forms. But this doesn’t yet give us language as it is implicated in what is not principally linguistic. As long as we see language as a system capable of detaching and forming a system of signs we fail to see its source in the wider capacities of an asignifying semiotic.

The diagrammatic and machinic components of this analysis are what bring to light this asignifying expressivity. If there were regimes of signs that could be characterized as pre-signifying, signifying, counter-signifying and post-signifying, the possibility of there being multiple ways of signifying points to that which precedes any particular kind of signification. And here is where we see the possibilities that lie outside of what we normally think of as language as signification. But an asignifying semiotic is not what we would imagine – it does not return us to the inorganic where expression merely reflects its matter without any gap between signifier and signified. Rather it is the potential for language to deterritorialize to the extent that it not only abstracts content but also abstracts form itself.

The third and fourth components of the analysis, the diagrammatic and the machinic, are the most abstract we can get in language – abstract in a positive sense.

It might seem strange that just where we want to get content back we get the ‘height of abstraction’. It is a matter not only of abstracting as far as possible from expression (where the actual forms of expression are no longer assumed to be the only possible forms of expression and so are freed from expressing any particular content) but now also of abstracting as far as possible from forms of content, so that we might get to the pure capacity
for expression that inheres in matter beneath any particular form of content - the pure intensities of matter that underlie its extensive forms.

Deleuze and Guattari assert that “[t]he diagram contains the most deterritorialized content and the most deterritorialized expression in order to conjugate them” (ibid., 141). And we already see what this means; we get here not any particular form of content or any particular form of expression but the raw ability of any element of an assemblage (though we are dealing with singular assemblages and not assemblages in general) to function either as sign or as particle (as a semiotic or a physical component). This is expressivity not insofar as language itself can function as a sign for a thing, but expressivity that shows language to be multiple systems of various kinds of sign-functioning. This is an analysis of language in its ability to construct what is entirely novel, right down to the level of the indiscernibility between expression and content. As Deleuze and Guattari put it “[w]riting now functions on the same level as the real, and the real materially writes” (DG 1987, 141).

The third and fourth components of pragmatic analysis are similarly two sides of one coin, a convergence that becomes clear where Deleuze and Guattari describe the diagramming of abstract machines. A virtual diagram sets out the capacities inherent in any assemblage. It is abstract because it gets to the level of pure capacity, yet singular in that these are the capacities of matter, and of particular actualized expressions of matter. The pragmatic analysis to which we subject an expression of language first examines the particular effectuation of language that is taken for granted in it, then examines what flows through the expression as transformability into other semiotics, and now takes those transformative capacities and tries to see them in their implication in a virtual matter-function
continuum where content and expression can no longer be distinguished. Substance becomes matter and form becomes function.

In the examination of language this means that there is no longer a formal distinction between vocal substance – sound – and the form of expression as the ways that we formally articulate this substance (or indeed written substance and the meaningful formation of characters). As matter becoming expressive, the abstract machine indicates a singular potential of its elements to enter into semiotic and physical relations, but from beneath all signifying activity. It is where we can get at the very redistribution of functions over matter, since as we have seen it is in functioning in particular assemblages that matter becomes expressive, becomes significant. Seeing language in this context is releasing its power to create a new reality.

The point of specifying abstract machines in contrast with essences is that the capacities diagrammed for any assemblage do not specify a limited set of possible becomings or transformations or new sets of relations into which the elements of an assemblage may enter. This is where we get novelty – if a diagram merely gave the set of possible transformations then it would be an essence that limited and regulated the outcomes by resemblance – recall the possible/virtual distinction as described above. Because any sense of an essence is in fact derived from knowledge of the thing that is supposed to participate in the essence, essences become a way to circumscribe all possible relations in advance. The way that the differential diagram of an abstract machine sets out virtual capacities leaves open the possible new assemblages that will result from the actual relations into which an assemblage enters. The abstract machine is abstract because it does not limit the future by tying it to re-cognizable actuality, but it is singular because it specifies the differential
capacities of a singular, historically situated assemblage. Abstract machines are multiple, as they are not unchanging essences but are inherent in specific assemblages, but as drawing ‘cutting edges’ of deterritorialization and decoding from within the actual. They are singular for the same reason: ‘abstract’ here does not indicate a general form of the machine but the abstract capacities of a specific machine.

Abstract machines are creative by setting constant values in variation with themselves and reconfiguring their materials to access zones of indiscernibility between content and expression. As pure Matter-Function, the abstract machine is itself neither physical nor semiotic; in this respect we might say that it indicates the raw potential of matter to be expressive, and at this level of analysis we get a glimpse of the sense in which this can happen in entirely unanticipated ways. If we can identify various abstract machines as creations of a new way of distributing the functions of expression and content, then we know that none is necessary, and that new realities might be yet to come.

Deleuze and Guattari name the Einstein abstract machine, the Bach and Beethoven abstract machines and the Galileo abstract machine, among others. This is not a matter, they claim, of creative individuals thinking up new ways to look at the world, since then we would have to explain the relative importance of individual genius and social and historical factors. Regardless of how these distribute, these names specify a revolutionary re-ordering of elements of the basic structure of reality. The ‘discoveries’ of both Einstein and Galileo changed the self-expressive capacities of matter itself.

We might say that in fact Einstein and Galileo changed our way of seeing matter, but this is only if we believe that matter is indifferent to the ways in which it is seen, or that it is informed by essences and that our goal is to get closer to the truth of these. If instead we
take Deleuze and Guattari’s view that matter is already formed content where various mixings of bodies display capacities for relating to other bodies through their ‘degrees of intensity’: “resistance, conductivity, heating, stretching, speed or delay, induction, transduction…” (*ibid.*, 511) then the picture looks very different. An abstract machine is the discovery of a new potential for matter through experimentation that expands the field of what matter can do, of how it can express itself.

What makes it possible to experiment on matter is the deterritorializing effects that an abstract machine puts into place as a function of the indiscernibility between content and expression. At the level of quantum physics, for example, what matter is is now seen as dependent upon how it expresses itself. Here we need not take for granted, then, any particular ordering of the world through language, since the goal is to see the capacity that matter has for self-expression. And if we recall the claim that expression is the prediction of a certain outcome of the physical system and the semiotic system in relation, then we see that the deterritorializing power of expression over matter might be made to trigger yet different material effects, but not in isolation from the physical system itself. The prediction can alter the outcome but cannot invent it out of thin air: the greening of the tree indicates that language intervenes in the process, but we cannot simply turn the tree red by saying so. Language is both a participant and an effect of physical processes. At the level of language as invoking all of the determinations of subjectification and signification, however, this capacity for active engagement with physical processes is limited.

For this reason we also need a view of language that can see itself in its own capacities for disarticulation. If we imagine that language, because it is always already formed, cuts up reality in pre-established and prejudicial ways, ways that don’t let matter
‘speak for itself’ entirely, then we see this as a limiting condition and need to find a way out of it. But if language is always a matter of the order-word, how can we use language otherwise? The trick, Deleuze and Guattari seem to be suggesting, is that if we recognize language as the order-word rather than as representation, then although we cannot stop using language as order-word, we can also see the order-word as a password. In this context they propose that the study of language should have as its goal “to transform the compositions of order into components of passage” (*ibid.*, 110). And in this sense we get to the expressive side of the abstract machine and its ability to see its own deterritorializing power, its own power of becoming that does away with representative thinking.

Although Deleuze and Guattari have described the abstract machine as achieving a zone of indiscernibility between content and expression, they maintain that there is a sense in which the distinction remains, but is transformed. It persists now as the distinction between the intensities of matter (content) as described above and the tensors or traits of expression. If we see matter in terms of its capacities for self-articulation then we see it in terms where matter and expressivity are indiscernible and remain to be determined. If we see expression in its capacities for deterritorializing matter, then we also find this zone of indiscernibility that finds language in its role as the pure expressivity of matter in function.

This helps us see the pass-word beneath the order-word because it allows us to see the transformative capacities of language in relation to its very matter. This is why we have the Bach machine and the Beethoven machine: great artists create new ways of combining matter and function and composers who are great in this respect provide a model for language as non-representative. Mozart does not ‘imitate’ birdsongs, for example, but enters vocal or
instrumental substance into a becoming where both the bird and the very capacities of the instruments become-other in this relation.

We have already seen that when we get to the virtual the distinction between substance and form dissolves. This means that at some point vocal substance is indistinguishable from expressive form – the voice itself, sound itself, expresses, but in an asignifying way. This is “expressive material that speaks for itself and has no need of being put into a form” (DG 1986, 21)). Music ‘suggests’ that vocal and instrumental substance can be expressive without being signifying, and that this is in fact its highest power – Deleuze and Guattari wonder if language might not be the same. For if language were to find a way to recognize within itself a self-expressive matter, then it would not be tied to any particular ‘order of things’ in which forms of expression are ensconced. This is the value of, for example, the writers that Deleuze and Guattari celebrate such as Roussel or Ghérasim, poets who play with the sound of language, experimenting with the ability of sound to be expressive without playing a signifying role.

It is in The Logic of Sense that Deleuze first points out what he calls the tensors of language. The verb in its ability not to capture but to participate in the becoming of language is one example. Another is the indefinite article. To say that the tree greens is to specify a thing as the subject of the sentence, which then must be seen as describing the thing. But ‘a tree’ can be seen not only as a thing but as the way in which language participates in things: a tree is one way that language distinguishes what is salient and so participates in the becoming-tree of a feature of the world.
Deleuze and Guattari discuss the role of the tensor as one of pushing language to its limits:

“[w]e witness a transformation of substances and a dissolution of forms, a passage to the limit or flight from contours in favor of fluid forces, flows, air, light, and matter, such that a body or a word does not end at a precise point” (DG 1987, 109). In seeing how language participates in the event of the greening and treeing activities we see that in designating a tree as green we have cut up things in a certain way. To see this is to actually see beyond this to where bodies participate in a limitless corporeality without determinate sense. It is to see them as becomings – the simulacrum that Plato banishes – as having a sense that can go in multiple directions at once, overflowing the logical boundaries of good and common sense.

This is how expressivity is released from all order-words and becomes pure movement or relation, pure difference freed of the forms of order that impose identities. It is never quite possible to capture this event of language, but this movement of absolute deterritorialization can be glimpsed in relative deterritorializations, lines of flight from the habits of territory – but only if we look at them from the right side.

In A Thousand Plateaus Deleuze and Guattari develop the notion of tensors in terms of the ‘atypical’ expression. They directly oppose this to Chomsky’s view that the condition of language is a universal innate grammar that functions by invariable rules of combination of the elements of language (rules of syntax as represented by Chomsky’s trees). Certainly Chomsky would readily admit that we do break rules and that all meaning is not lost in such cases, but would have to argue that if there is meaning to be salvaged it is only through reference to the constants of language, the rules that establish what the correct usages of elements of language are. On the contrary, Deleuze and Guattari propose that it is the

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26 As Kafka does, but Deleuze and Guattari also mention a number of authors they consider minor; in this way: Beckett, Godard, Luca, among others.
atypical expression that is the condition of possibility of the typical or correct forms. What they mean by this is that it is the variability of language elements that makes possible a concretization into a set of rules, which we then come to think of as necessary or universal/innate.

To elaborate, it seems that the very fact that expression is articulated along with content means that we can never decide what forms of language are allowable based on language alone. What forms are possible will be a function of what becomings are possible between language and the world. And this is a matter of experimentation, of the deterritorializing effects that matter and expression might have on one another with outcomes that cannot be predicted. To decide in advance what is possible in language is to decide what is possible in the material world: this is why Deleuze is so interested in Spinoza’s question about what a body can do - and ‘we still don’t know’ is his answer. And we will always ‘not yet know’, it would seem.

Thus the study of grammaticality as the condition of language is a way of limiting not just the ways in which language might be expanded but the deeper pragmatic role of language. It is not surprising that in this respect Deleuze and Guattari turn to the artistic uses of language. It is not that language cannot play a part in the world of science, for example, in the ways demonstrated above, but that the poetic and literary uses of language seem to have the greatest capacity for deterritorializing language away from its traditional normative functions. In scientific investigations it is uncommon for language to be allowed a creative role. We will see below that Deleuze and Guattari are primarily interested in literature in this respect, but for the moment let us take a look at poetic expression as they discuss it in relation to Chomsky’s grammaticality.
As an example of agrammaticality, Deleuze and Guattari consider ee cummings’ line “he danced his did”, and oppose the view that if there is any meaning here it is because we can trace the agrammatical expression back to a grammatical one from which it has supposedly deviated, such as “he did his dance”. Their opposition to such a view focuses on what they call a line of variation. It is not that “he danced his did” is a variation on “he did his dance”. Rather, it is the atypical expression that forces us to see the line of variation on which both typical and atypical expression are placed. Then it is the line itself that is the virtual, the way that in a continuous line of variations, the so-called constant can be glimpsed as a particular kind of effectuation of the capacities of a form of language. From this perspective its sense does not come from a syntax-determining tree, but from its potential to order a world in a singular way. If the other expressions on a continuum are ungrammatical, the line itself is agrammatical and only specifies the becomings that various forms of grammar might enter into by transformation.

This view depends of course upon a view of the poetic that dispenses with the notion that poetry simply represents a world, or represents thought or concepts. But Deleuze elsewhere articulates the notion that the function of art is to create percepts and affects; in other words to invent novel relations of content and expression such that we might experience things differently. Poetic art, then, is valuable in its ability to not simply represent the world that is, but to create a possible world through the percepts and affects that it offers readers. Regardless of the tenability of Deleuze and Guattari’s general theory of art, this seems to be the only notion of poetry that is rich enough to account for what makes it different from other uses of language – language used solely as communicative through representation, for example, such as is common in philosophy and science.
It is not that the distinction can be made so clearly in actual expressions, but we tend to say that when philosophy or science begins to use atypical constructions of language in order to expand experimentation in new directions, outside of what we already know and can say in language, it becomes poetic. Often this is observed pejoratively, but a tradition at least since Heidegger has recognized the positive capacities of language as creative. Deleuze and Guattari radicalize this by developing a notion of language as abstract machine that demonstrates language’s ability to release the revolutionary forces of language to effect change in our world.

We will return to the political aspect of this, but for now suffice it to say that poetic expression insofar as it displays the capacity to offer us radically different ways of ordering the very matter of our world, not only gives us new possible worlds but constructs virtual worlds out of which we find the potential of our existing world to be otherwise in actuality. This may be a broader use of the term ‘poetry’, which could cover a poetic use of language that even occurs in scientific thinking where there is a demonstrated willingness to stretch language beyond its usual boundaries. It returns the poetic to ‘poesis’, the properly creative aspect of language, which Deleuze and Guattari think we can get at through this procedure of bringing the intensities of expression into radically new conjugations with intensities of matter as described above.

_Becoming-Minor_

This analysis does not conclude that language does not need invariables and constants, systematicity or rules (of syntax, semantics and pronunciation) in order to function. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari specify that these are exactly what define a language. This is why,
when they develop the concept of minor language that they find in Kafka and others, they warn that it is not possible to identify a minor language in contrast to major languages. Rather, they advocate a procedure of entering a major language (the only kind by definition) into a becoming-minor.

This is a matter of getting beyond extensive language to its intensive capacities. We have already seen how the indefinite article and the infinitive as well as atypical expressions in general can play the role of tensors. If Chomsky’s universal grammar is supposed to be sufficiently universal to account for any given natural language then it reconciles the differences between them, reduces them to universal forms. But Deleuze and Guattari see natural languages as already constituted on pre-established forms, and grammaticality therefore as a particular way of ordering things that keeps certain kinds of power in place. For this reason they would entirely agree that all languages could be determined and limited by a strict grammaticality that functions universally. But this function is not the condition of possibility of language, but the power of language to limit our world.

When Deleuze and Guattari discuss the becoming-minor of languages, then, as a way of ‘releasing a foreign tongue within a language’, they point towards a potential that languages have for variability, but this potential does not follow the divisions of natural languages themselves. If we see beyond defined languages to the various conceptions of how language functions, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest in their Kafka book, and see those as propping up certain political orders, then what must be set in variation is not necessarily

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27 Though Chomsky himself has expressed uncertainty over what this means for translation – it is not as simple, at least for Chomsky himself, as saying that universal grammar implies universal translatability (Chomsky 1976).
the particular expressions of our languages insofar as they are different from those of other languages, but the particular functions of language that cut across language groups.

As examples of such ‘functions’, Deleuze and Guattari cite Henri Gobard’s division of language functions into vernacular, vehicular, referential and mythic. Different expressions of different languages might be shown to have the same functions, and it is these that must be isolated in order to see how it is that language functions by repressive political powers. The problem with Chomsky’s view is not his particular view of how grammar works but his claim that his is a scientific and therefore apolitical conception of language.

This is why Deleuze and Guattari are interested not in the inadequacy of language A to language B but in Pasolini’s notion of “Language X, which is none other than language A in the actual process of becoming language B” (Pasolini, quoted in DG 1987, 106). A language works by way of constants that are chosen (arbitrarily, but regulated by systematic relations) from a continuum of potential constants, which means that any point that is chosen as the ‘correct’ form is a singular point, repeatable in form but not primarily representing content by a sign relation such that the same content might be transferred to another language. Language can appear to function in this representative way, but if we take this to be the way that language in general means then we fail to see how representative language functions to order things in its own way.

In this sense, to imagine a universal translatability between languages by virtue of their correspondence to things is to fail to see that anything at all might be otherwise than the way that our grammatical forms force us to see them. On the other hand, to say that between languages there is an untranslatability that comes from the inadequacy within language whereby there is always a distinction between the saying and the said, while it rejects the
correspondence theory, is also to fail to see any way other than correspondence that language can be a meaningful expression of a world.

Derrida and Deleuze/Guattari both agree that the foreign language inheres in every so-called major language, and that this calls to view the fact that the divisions of languages play out on a larger field in which they must be seen as arbitrary or political – the way that languages are established in order to impose the rights or territoriality of a certain group over minority elements, for example. But for Derrida the presence of the foreign within the political borders of every language is a matter of demonstrating that no term of language can be substituted for any other because there is neither content nor meta-language as mediating factor through which forms of expression could correspond. Untranslatability captures this sense in which the only authentic meaning in language is the performance itself of language, and insofar as this aims to resist language as communicability it appears as the illegible, the unrepresentable.

Deleuze and Guattari are interested, as is Derrida, in the event of language, but it has a different sense for them. The event of language is not the mere performance of speaking or writing, but the sense in which language itself develops in tandem with a world. Thus translatability for them is the particular capacity of language in its sign-functioning, but only such that this sign-function relies on content. As we have seen, they conceive of this in the terms of transformativity, the ability of language to effect a world - even to create a new reality - in its mutual becoming with matter. This ability comes from its deterritorialization that is also its ability to appear autonomous from content.

This means that the order-word, the only way that language can function, can also be a password insofar as the wide margin of latitude between content and expression on the
alloplastic stratum affords the opportunity for recognizing these very ordering capacities themselves. The event whereby language articulates itself in mutual becoming with a world is the transformative capacity of this very relation between content and expression, and as such this event, these always-singular, multiple becomings that reverberate through both, indicate not just transformable expressions but transformativity itself, the virtual capacity for every expression to be set in variation and into a becoming-other. This in turn can be seen as possible on the condition of an indiscernibility in which language is returned to its capacity to reconceive of the very terms of reality by effectuating its functional relation to matter as intensive capacities that are effectuated on the border between physical and semiotic systems.

The presence of the foreign within language, then, does not make language as form of expression inadequate to language as the event, but allows passage from language as form to language as event. As demonstrating that language as event is the differential condition upon which forms of language are possible, it remains only to invent new uses of language as yet unanticipated in their particular forms but already diagrammable as real capacities.
In this final chapter I will develop Deleuze and Guattari’s views on language and transformativity in relation to the capacities of literary function, with a focus on their readings of Kafka. I will describe their treatment of literature as the privileged medium for experimentation with the transformativity of language that might release its virtual capacities for change in the real social and political world. I will then contrast Deleuze and Guattari with Derrida on the notion of a future politics, framing the discussion in terms of how they see the role of language in the political world, specifically poetic and literary language. I will argue that Derrida’s specific conception of language as temporally deferred is what leads to an ultimately unproductive sense of political alliance as resistance from a transcendent source, where Deleuze and Guattari’s version of a future politics as driven by the immanence of desire – a spatial deferral - remains open to novelty and also gives concrete direction for the proliferation of forms of experimentation with language that would produce real change.

**Intensities and Becoming**

Deleuze and Guattari considerably flesh out the role of deterritorialization in their discussion of Kafka, where they argue emphatically that the life and the works of a writer cannot - should not - be treated as separate issues. And the reason for this is in the notion of assemblages, for the assemblages of enunciation and the machinic assemblages of bodies in which ‘Kafka’ is involved are manifold and distribute their elements in various directions. Thus Deleuze and Guattari treat Kafka’s letters as an equally interesting element to be studied, while emphatically rejecting any psychoanalyzing of Kafka the man as a way into
the motivations of the texts. What they describe in contrast is a Kafka machine, where the various writings, including the diaries, get their value from a collective function that works to escape the traditional social and literary forms that would limit creative capacity.

This involves a certain procedure in language for the discovery of ways of escape. As Deleuze and Guattari read it, the Kafka machine creates lines of escape from career, conjugality, domestic life, bureaucracy, the law in its traditional form, etc. If escape is the movement of deterritorialization, it is not necessary to leave the territory, they point out, not a matter of freedom from the territory in which one finds oneself. In a sense there are no other choices one can make but these forms of life, at least in the present. So it is an issue of escape by transforming the territory and the way that it limits creativity. The point is to enter language and its implication in these structures into creative becomings that undo the very order from which assemblages seem to get their meaning. In Kafka’s works it is the becoming-animal with which Deleuze and Guattari are fascinated, and which they describe in the following manner:

To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs. (DG 1986, 13)

If the Kafka-effect is a specific kind of escape from all form, then certainly one element of the forms to be deterritorialized are notions such as Kafka the man, a subject who might be Oedipalized, whose effects might be recaptured by the machine that inserts them back into a familial interpretation. Or Kafka’s works, as opposed to Kafka the man, which might be taken to signify in a given way. Here the notion of ‘intensities’ is one element in
their attempt to see beyond things and qualities, or extensive magnitudes (Boundas 2005). Both the writer and the works can be seen as this or that kind of person or thing, but then we are already simply reinforcing the ‘interpretation machine’ and reducing the resistance that the intensive capacities of the Kafka machine might offer to our usual ways of seeing things. To get to a continuum of intensities is to get beneath all signifying activity, all activity that takes a thing to be such and such, thereby already having made the assumption of the integrity of the subject or object, which can only go in certain directions. To undo such assumptions, as Deleuze and Guattari describe it, is to get to where “there is no longer anything but movements, vibrations, thresholds in a deserted matter” (DG 1986, 13).

Becoming-animal might be one kind of becoming among many that Deleuze and Guattari describe, but it has a particular significance in Kafka’s work. If there is a becoming-animal that Kafka’s work demonstrates, Deleuze and Guattari put this concept to work in developing the creative capacities of language. Animal noises are a common occurrence in Kafka’s work, and Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of these particular becomings-animal shows that their value is in the manner in which they reveal the animal within the human, the asignifying within the signifying.

This is one of Kafka’s operations, one that through language effectuates a disarticulation of its particular ways of signifying – its semiotic regimes – but simultaneously capitalizes on the capacity that human language has to deterritorialize and therefore recreate forms of language and the forms of existence to which it orders life. Good writing will use the power of translation – that margin of latitude – in order to undo its own translations, its own necessarily repressive orders.
In this context Deleuze and Guattari describe several passages in Kafka’s works where sounds lose meaning but continue to vibrate, to move things along. Gregor becoming an insect, for example, gives way to a kind of humming that has no sense and yet can be read as actually *effectuating* the process of metamorphosis. Language as signifying, as we have seen, is a reterritorialization of sound on the order of sense. Sound is used as material for the production of the order-word, and the world of sense, Deleuze and Guattari point out, works only by distinguishing the speaker (the “subject of enunciation”) from the subject-matter (the “subject of the statement”). Now both expression (what can be meaningfully said) and content (how bodies can be legitimately divided, eg. as subject and object) are presided over by a good sense and a common sense that distributes its orders in a language. The capacity of language to participate in transformations of the world is held in check insofar as language is put in the service of these orders.

Kafka, as Deleuze and Guattari read him, works to deterritorialize sound from sense. The question concerns how language might be made to do things without remaining restricted to already-meaningful forms of language, and the objective is to “liberate a living and expressive material that speaks for itself and has no need of being put into a form” (DG 1986, 21). At some point in his metamorphosis Gregor begins to receive only vibrations instead of hearing articulate words, as signifying language starts to come apart. Kafka, they claim, experiments in this way with bringing language to its limits in sense and entering words themselves into a becoming-animal through the release of their functional capacities: “the words themselves are not ‘like’ the animals but in their own way climb about, bark and roam about, being properly linguistic dogs, insects or mice” (*ibid.*, 22). If it is impossible for
words to be meaningful by resemblance to things, Deleuze and Guattari imagine that words in fact can become what they mean, can function as their content functions.

Beneath the stultifying order of sense, Kafka experiments with language that no longer has to content itself with describing the world. Kafka’s effectuation of Gregor’s becoming-insect is not a description of a man leaving behind his human form and taking on animal form, but is a becoming in which man and insect enter into a zone of indiscernibility and form a new block. The language that Kafka uses does not merely describe this, but puts into effect the transformative capacities of language to effect such a becoming by disarticulating the ‘human’, repressive function of language. In this sense, the becoming is not simply a fictional account, but the language of the novel itself enters into a becoming where it becomes asignifying, and contributes to the disarticulation of language as representation.

The point of this account of the Kafka machine, the point of entering language into a becoming where it flees the necessity of all given formalizations is to put up a certain resistance to the idea - indeed to the habit - of reproduction. For if the material out of which we form our world is already organized into subjects and objects then we have only to do with the ways in which these relate, pre-established identities where difference is only the difference between these. This, for Deleuze and Guattari as much as for Derrida, is not genuine difference and therefore cannot produce significant novelty\(^\text{28}\). Since genuine difference precedes identity, is a matter of the differential relations of forces, for Deleuze and Guattari it must precede any formalization.

\(^{28}\) It is like, as Deleuze and Guattari note in another context, the electoral system where you are allowed to vote for either party, but not allowed to vote for political change, ie., change in the electoral system itself.
In this reading it is not a matter of Gregor the man turning into an insect, but rather a way of demonstrating how it is that Gregor the man – and the very concept of subjectivity – is articulated and invented within our forms of language. A disarticulation of Gregor’s identity is simultaneously a disarticulation of the language in which this identity is formed. Deleuze also develops this notion in *Logic of Sense*, where his analysis of the nonsensical language of *Alice and Wonderland* is seen as in part a dissolution of Alice’s very identity. In the *Metamorphosis*, Deleuze and Guattari draw our attention to the free indirect discourse that seems to represent the social forces that would dominate forms of life. Thus there is a narrative voice that reinforces the particular social and familial expectations to which Gregor’s family conform. Within the very process of narrating the story this voice, this language, precipitates the rules of propriety that Gregor is breaking. Escape can only take place by disarticulating that very language. But it becomes clear that escape from the rules of language must also be an escape from the subject as determined by those rules.

If disarticulation takes place on the order of subjectification, there is a disarticulation on the order of signification that seems to work simultaneously in Deleuze and Guattari’s analyses of literature. The use of language as signification as described by Deleuze and Guattari calls for interpretation, since if language signifies then a work of literature must point to something outside of itself as its meaning – a transcendental signified at the very least. If the function of language is to illustrate or tell us something about the world, then we must interpret the meaning of the text in terms of a signified. The meaning of Gregor’s transformation, then, would have to be some sort of message that tells us, for example, that modern humanity is becoming small and petty, insect-like. The text then functions metaphorically: Gregor’s transformation represents this or that state of humankind.
Deleuze and Guattari are not supposing that writers do not write like that, but the writers that they value do not. Kafka is exemplary, they suggest, in the way that he kills all metaphor, all symbolism, signification and designation. Writing that needs to be interpreted in these ways could not actually effect any significant change in the order of things, Deleuze and Guattari are arguing, because it simply represents a state of affairs, gives the reader a message. And it must be the case that for Deleuze and Guattari such writing not only represents a state of affairs but on a deeper level reinforces an existing order, unconsciously using language as order-word. It seems particularly ironic where this kind of writing would use language in this conventional way as a vehicle for criticizing negative aspects of the contemporary world. The real power of the literary is in language as function, the intensive capacities of language to reveal convention as just that and to thus open up a margin of latitude for changing convention.

*Immanence and Writing*

It is in this activity that Kafka, according to Deleuze and Guattari, reveals himself to be a writer of immanence. In the section of Kafka entitled “Immanence and Desire” Deleuze and Guattari specifically oppose the interpretation of Kafka’s *Trial* as representing the transcendence of the law. This, they claim, would be to see Kafka as endorsing the very Derridean view that “the ultimate instances [of justice or the law] are inaccessible and cannot be represented”, and that this can be attributed to “an infinite hierarchy belonging to a negative theology” (DG 1986, 50).

Because Kafka experiments with the functions of language, Deleuze and Guattari see him as affecting the capacity for real change from within language’s function in a world. If
Kafka is merely one example of a great writer with his particular methods of escape, he exemplifies what Deleuze and Guattari see as the challenge of writing: “[w]riting has a double function: to translate everything into assemblages and to dismantle the assemblages. The two are the same thing” (ibid., 47). Recall that to be able to see everything in terms of assemblages is to be able to analyze a territoriality or a system of habit as the product of its internal forces in their self-organizing capacities. Thus to analyze things as assemblages is to simultaneously see the ‘system’ break down in being exposed as contingent rather than necessary.

If institutions such as the legal system seem to appear necessary and transcendent, the dismantling of the immanent components of the system as a machine reveals that external relations between elements of a system make up an emergent identity. If internal relations imply the necessary functioning of the organism, external relations effectuate instead contingent machines where it is the relation between parts and not the intrinsic meaning of parts that produces historically situated machines for specific ends (DeLanda 2006). On the one hand we can see the law-as-transcendence as a machine, and in doing so can see that it is self-organized to a specific function and that that function is merely its own perpetuation as a necessary structure. In this respect Deleuze and Guattari suggest that Kafka is part of the Kantian reversal that sees the law no longer through the Greek notion that it gives materiality to a transcendent Good, but as “the pure form on which the good such as it is depends” (ibid., 43). The machine of the law as transcendence functions to convince us that the law itself is absolute and therefore indisputable.

If Kafka subscribes to this as one possible conception of the law, his purpose in depicting it as such is not to represent this as the way things are. Rather, the other side of
being able to see the law as transcendence-machine is to be able to ‘translate it into an assemblage’. Thus if we recognize the law as a historically constituted machine functioning to reinforce its own authority, we can already see it as contingent. We can see the machine as made up of relations between parts that might just as easily be dismantled and entered into yet other sets of external relations. This is what Kafka does, and also what Deleuze and Guattari do with Kafka.

This is why translating everything into an assemblage is the very process of disarticulation. If we think that some transcendent power is what makes the machine work, then we will believe in its absolute authority. But if we can show how the machine works in terms of the external relations between its parts – in terms of an assemblage of self-organizing elements – then there is no reason to believe in any transcendent authority. This point of view furthermore allows us to see that it is particular desires that drive the transcendence machine.

Kafka’s text appears to ‘represent’ justice, and in this enterprise there is only frustration, which is why it can be read as representing or describing a justice that is transcendent and therefore whose reasons remain out of reach to the actual procedures of the law. But of course the justice system would not work if we knew that its decisions were arbitrary, subject to chance and to the desires that drive every piece of the mechanism. The very notion of justice as a unified thing relies on transcendence, and so we must always begin by assuming a transcendent conception of justice in order to dismantle it.

There seems to be a concomitant point about language here: the ways in which language does function rest on ‘hidden’ assumptions that can be translated into assemblages in order to reveal that the hidden assumption is contingent and that language can be made to
work otherwise. Language cannot do without some form of order-word, as law cannot do without transcendent authority. This means that we must begin from here and work back through a dismantling: what meaning or sense or function could mere animal noises have without being the active disarticulation of the good and common sense of human signification? And similarly, without beginning with a notion of justice as transcendent, a description of the particular mechanisms of the law would not, in Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis, be recognizable as elements of a unified legal system.

On the transcendent reading the frustrations of K could be seen as the difficulties of coming to terms with a law that transcends and remains hidden, where Justice itself determines the particular judgments of law but where the mechanism that translates Justice into law remains necessarily obscured. But as we saw above, if this were the case then it would furthermore remain a matter of Kafka’s novel representing this transcendent structure, and leaving it thus intact. Rather, they argue, Kafka uses this notion of law or justice as transcendence as part of what they call the “superficial movement of his work” (DG 1986, 45).

This image of the law functions as the assemblage to be undone. Kafka does indeed represent justice and law as being transcendent, he describes it this way and describes a character who believes (at least initially) in an absolute distinction between Justice and the particular desires of its participants. But the law as transcendent begins to come undone along with the structures of representation. For how can we represent a law that in reality is distributed among all of the various participants, both individual and collective, that make up the mechanisms of law’s procedures? The superficial movement is one of representation: the necessary starting-point is a transcendent law as represented in a novel. But when we
translate this triad into an assemblage, everything begins to come undone - an unrepresentable law-machine must find a new way of working with language and the novel can no longer be seen as functioning metaphorically to merely tell us how things are.

As we have seen, Kafka’s process is not that of critique, which would simply perpetuate the representation of the law as transcendence, serving only to show that it is a false transcendence. The important point for Deleuze and Guattari is not to show that anything is false – the transcendence machine, if it functions, is perfectly real – but to show that it doesn’t function in the way that we think it does. The law-as-transcendence-machine functions indeed, but its function is not that of dispensing justice. Rather it functions to dispense a certain order to things, keeping people believing in the hierarchy of justice – ultimately a political project.

This is how Nietzsche describes the institutions that develop out of the Judeo-Christian tradition in his Genealogy of Morality. Initially there to serve the interests of particular individuals or groups, they become self-perpetuating machines whose only function is to maintain their own repressive powers. And for Nietzsche too the solution was not to be found in an attempt to turn away from such structures, but in the process of revealing the forces beneath and attempting to turn them to more productive uses. This is clearly the insight that Deleuze and Guattari see in Kafka, including the kinds of solutions with which he experiments.

So it is necessary to work through the transcendent reading of Kafka to an immanent reading. This works on two levels, as we have seen: the transcendent reading would be to see Kafka as believing that the law is transcendent and to see his work as representing this state of affairs. The immanent reading is not just to read Kafka as believing that the law is
immanent but to see the Kafka-machine as actively dismantling the value of language as representative and entering language itself into the immanence on which language and social structures exist side by side in reciprocal presupposition.

The view that justice is immanent, a matter of a ‘moving desire’ in contrast to the hierarchical structures of transcendent law, is another kind of deferral. The frustrations of K are explained by the fact that because we believe – or need to belief – in some good reason for the procedures of the law, in some transcendent and homogeneous Law itself that we might lay hold of, the truth about the legal system always eludes and frustrates. The law, in Deleuze and Guattari’s view, is spatially deferred, it is in fact contiguous, happening “always in the room next door” (DG 1986, 18). This is how K experiences ‘the law’ – as contiguous but right there next to him, rather than looming above as the Unknowable. If desire is for an infinite transcendence it is an always unfulfilled desire, and then language cannot represent the object of desire but in attempting to represent can be disrupted by it, inadequate to it. But Deleuze and Guattari think that K succeeds in escaping the law as transcendence and enters into “the mutual immanence of a decoded law and a deterritorialized desire” (ibid., 52).

In the transcendence story desire is reterritorialized in getting the ‘value of home’ from a beyond, through a negative theology that tells us that the infinite can give us nothing but the undecidable, that our proper home is our alienation from any earthly home. In place of this K discovers the desire ‘to be in contact’ with justice. Still a delay, it is nonetheless a “perfectly positive and active delay” (ibid.) because its procedure is the undoing of the machine. To be in contact with justice, an immanent justice that is distributed in every step of the procedure itself, is to be active in the process of dismantling its appeal to a higher order. And this amounts to being active in the process of pushing the limits of what ‘justice’
can accommodate. If we can never be entirely rid of the illusion of the unity, homogeneity and transcendence of justice, translating it into the terms of the assemblage is a matter of loosening the ways in which this illusion can restrict the actual procedures of justice from finding new capacities in specific situations.

The Political and the Literary

But how does language function in dismantling the transcendence machine if all that we can say about it is that the procedure of dismantling the transcendence machine requires a use of language other than representation? We saw earlier that Deleuze and Guattari’s Kafka experiments with deterritorializing sound from sense in order to effectuate a becoming in which language as asignifying has the capacity to enter into the very becomings of a world outside. If the language of *The Metamorphosis* is among those texts in which Deleuze and Guattari detect the deterritorializing experimentation of language, here we have to do with the notion of the literary in general. And this is a notion of the literary in which “the machine of expression precedes and anticipates content” (DG 1986, 55). This brings us to the question of minor literature and the political role of the literary.

In several diary entries Kafka discusses the possibility of a minor literature, which would distinguish itself from a major literature in its capacity to create a ‘national consciousness’ rather than finding itself limited by an already existing one. Kafka sees the role of literature as distinctly political, in this respect. Deleuze and Guattari seize on this idea, and discuss it in terms of their sense of the relationship between content and expression. What they permit the designation of minor literature consists of works that express three
characteristics: “the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation” (ibid., 18).

These three characteristics work in conjunction, since it is the deterritorializing capacities of language that allow us to see collective assemblages of enunciation beneath the cults of the subject and the signifier. Furthermore, it is only a language with this deterritorialized quality that exposes its speakers to the political in every one of their expressions. On the one hand, Deleuze and Guattari are pointing out the fact that one can speak a ‘major’ language without language itself being under consideration, but one who does not have a major language to speak – the language of masters – is brought face to face with a political situation each time they speak or write. But this should not be seen as an always unfortunate position. There is a deterritorializing power to a specifically deterritorialized language.

Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari propose, is working with a particularly deterritorialized form of language: Prague German. Kafka writes as a Czech in a language-community that is officially German, in which for the most part German is in fact the first and often the only language spoken by people generally and yet in the Czech community it could not be mistaken for a ‘mother tongue’, a natural and territorialized language. The deterritorializing capacities of Prague German, in Deleuze and Guattari’s view, come from its very alienation from any ‘natural’ sense of being-at-home. If a national consciousness is taken for granted in a language that is ‘maternal’ and can be ‘expressed’ in a literature that represents the forms of life of a people, such a people can hold onto myths of a unified and homogeneous identity. Such identity can never be certain for the speakers of a minor language, and as such they are
not even a people from this perspective, they are only those who are deprived of a natural mother-tongue that would make them a people.

But just as K’s ‘success’ can be seen as abandoning desire as transcendent, here we can see the potential that not being allowed to take for granted a representable identity can give to a literature. Writing in Prague German necessarily has the significance of a political act, because without a national consciousness that is taken for granted, one is always inventing the minor one against the major. A minor literature thus works within a major language, so Kafka’s work can be seen as disarticulating the assumptions of identity that the German language would ‘naturally’ instill. Deleuze and Guattari discuss the way in which Kafka’s language is bare and sober, deprived of the elaborate and complex forms of a language with a long literary tradition.

It is also the case that as languages evolve they homogenize and fall into more regular and consistent forms and combinations (McWhorter 2001). This must be what Deleuze and Guattari mean when they discuss the various forms of ‘discordance’ that have been documented in the Prague German in which Kafka wrote. Discordance in the forms and intonations of a language is the obvious result of a language being ‘distorted’ by its being transplanted onto ‘non-native’ soil, where the ‘native’ language is brought into contact with elements of other languages (Czech, in this case) and made to form a hybridity that has not yet had time to ‘normalize’ or homogenize. This kind of discordance and the sobriety that results from a language cut off from its living source, as it were, bring language closer to its capacity to unleash its asignifying functions, as the illusion of a natural language with necessary connections to a world that it describes comes undone.
Kafka, then, is writing in German, and from one point of view we could see this as an impoverished language, not as good as the major use of German at representing a (distinctly German) world. But on the other hand, Kafka’s work can be seen as doing something that the German language in its major use could not – drawing attention to the homogenization of language as a historical movement and thereby simultaneously calling into question the homogeneity of the forms of life that language is supposed to be describing. Because the minor use of language cannot take for granted that which it describes, then, it must invent a world, an identity, a people, out of its very forms of expression. This is not a bare creation ex nihilo, however, but an experimentation with the capacities of the German language for ordering its world otherwise. This is a freedom that comes from awareness of language’s translational and transformational capacities – its margin of latitude – but it is exercised as a dismantling of the very machines in which language is caught up. These are social machines, collective assemblages of enunciation.

This brings us back to the notion of indirect discourse, which seems to make clearer the point about collective assemblages. If we imagine that language issues from a subject, and on the order of signification, then it is simply a matter of individuals using language to communicate an independent world. This is why major literatures can be seen as apolitical, as involving only family dramas or private affairs, affairs of the heart, etc. This notion of the representative role of language allows us to take for granted that there are subjects with inner lives protected from the social and political processes of the outside. But in minor works the rupture of expressive forms from familiar meanings makes of even the most seemingly private affairs political statements “because a whole other story is vibrating within it” (DG 1986, 17).
This whole other story not only invents a new people but anticipates political
transitions through processes of defamiliarizing of language.
forces us to see the mechanisms of language as artificial, and simultaneously to see the
institutions of national identity and transcendent meaning as contingent, then we are returned
to the immanent field of desire that actually animates such machines. This is how the minor
writer ‘plugs into’ the social collective of which language is a part. And this frees us from
seeing things in the usual ways. Politically speaking, seeing things in the usual ways is
seeing institutions like law and religion and the state in terms of a kind of Hegelian story of
self-development. Seeing beyond this gives us a specific kind of opportunity for recognizing
social forces, which Deleuze and Guattari describe thus:

The creative line of escape vacuums up in its movement all politics, all
economy, all bureaucracy, all judiciary: it sucks them like a vampire in order
to make them render still unknown sounds that come from the near future –
Fascism, Stalinism, Americanism, *diabolical powers that are knocking at the
door* (DG 1986, 41)

The point here is that if we imagine that our institutions are built on transcendent
ideas that either remain static or develop in a logical or natural self-expression, then we will
fail to see the social forces that compose them as also capable of reordering themselves in
other ways. Fascism and Stalinism could not have been anticipated by political science by
way of an analysis of the essence of Marxism or communism and its natural self-expression.
But by plugging into the social machine of elements that make up Marxism – both the
collective assemblages of enunciation and the machinic assemblages of bodies - Deleuze and
Guattari believe that Kafka is able to anticipate the powers of the future as the virtual that
inheres within actual social collectives. This again, is a matter of capacities for external
relations and not intrinsic organic essences. For Deleuze and Guattari minor works have a
prophetic quality, able to anticipate the future since the future is itself an innovation out of the capacities that happen to be crystallized into present political structures and movements.

This possibility shows just how politically important Deleuze and Guattari believe minor literature might be. Because minor literature begins with expression, finding the desires that drive our present forms of social order through the reduction of language to intensives that plug it back into social machines, it can anticipate possible future forms of social order. A minor literature can do what political science can never do, with its tendency to conceive of social institutions as continuously developing upon one another within the limitations of representative thinking.

In other words, if we imagine that language functions only to represent to us political structures then we are not plugged into the social machine in which language is complicit in those very political structures, and we fail to see both how language helps to limit political institutions and how it might begin to help dismantle such limitations. The value of a minor literature is that it invents a people and a world against the dominant order because it cannot fail to use language in ways that expose the contingent and politically driven nature of all formalizations both semiotic and physical.

Deferral

The deferral that we saw in the notion of the justice system as immanent and contiguous could thus be seen in language as well. There is indeed a deferral in language whereby we can never say the sense of what we mean. But if saying the sense of what we mean is not our goal, then we might reconsider our goal in terms of function. What does a literary machine do? What could a new semiotics do? What might various experimentations with minor uses
of language do? Desire, then, is not a matter of deferral in the sense of relating language essentially to a transcendent (non)source that remains always out of reach, always yet to be decided. Rather, analyzing desire as immanent is a way of seeing the meaning of language in terms of function. To ask what a form of language does is to ask about the history of desires that have appropriated it – a Nietzschean analysis of debt rather than a Derridean analysis of guilt, as Smith points out in his analysis in terms of immanence versus transcendence (Smith 2003, 57). This is to return our uses of language to their transformative capacities in a real world.

This further illustrates the sense in which the deferral where the meaning of language as event is never quite present is not a matter of temporal deferral but of spatial deferral. That is, it is contact that makes language meaningful, the possibility of a contiguous relation in which meaning is always just out of my grasp, always over there or somewhere nearby. It is not present to me, not reducible to my intention or to transparent knowledge, but it is no more a function of something structurally beyond my grasp. Meaning happens in engagement with a world that I can never get outside of, and if I cannot say the sense of anything it is because the event of language is the very turning-point of the physical world in its becoming-expressive. That meaning happens in the interstices where words are things and things are words means that no one term, either physical or semiotic, can ever give me the very meaningfulness of what is said. This is the important sense in which meaning is always in a process of becoming. The becoming itself is not subordinated to what it is to become (or never to become) in a future that never arrives, but rather in spatial terms is simply always beside, always between one term and the terms with which it enters and is entered into functional systems. To enter language into becomings of this sort is to recognize
a spatial deferral – a virtuality – that leaks out of the terms under which we capture the virtual.

The minorization of language, as Deleuze and Guattari describe it, is a matter of “erecting the figure of a universal minoritarian consciousness, [where] one addresses powers of becoming (puissances) that belong to a different realm from that of power (pouvoir) and domination” (DG 1986, 106). The notion of puissances is decisive here because instead of empowering minorities, Deleuze and Guattari are concerned with releasing the creative and productive lines of escape for everybody. They argue that the standard (for example the standard European white male) represents Nobody, as it stands merely as an abstract category that in fact nobody actually realizes perfectly. On the other hand the becoming-minor that we might enter into through language is the potential becoming of everybody, the affirmation of difference in which centres of power are transformed into relations of difference that create new possibilities of identity. Puissances belong to everybody, but also distribute the bodies of subjects in new ways, allowing subjects to escape their usual ways of being captured by social identification. Pouvoir, on the other hand, is only ever a matter of the state, the institutions of the state, or the political regime, and are extracted from puissances as methods of keeping a certain organization to bodies through reference to the standard. They typically work through the myth of transcendence and absolute origin because it is necessary to hide from ‘everyone’ the fact that their supposedly fixed identities are merely particular expressions of desire that have succeeded in appearing necessary. This is the myth of ‘ideal body’ as we examined it above in relation to Derrida’s own discussion of the political. The solution here however is not simply resistance, but active escape through creative
transformation. Insofar as our forms of life continually reinforce the standard, Deleuze and Guattari write that we “lack resistance to the present” (DG 1994, 108).

That such powers of becoming – *puissances* – are not the same as the power that we associate with the exercise of political force and domination – *Pouvoir* – serves to sharpen the point that we are not simply concerned here to invent new forms of language. It is necessary to get to the absolute deterritorialization of language in order to release this other kind of power, a power that rather than simply inventing new forms of language allows us to conceive of language in an entirely new way. When it becomes clear that even state power is an effect of creative forces, it is possible to see other creative options. This is where Deleuze and Guattari develop the notion of a micro-politics, where localized and creative movements take over from monolithic structures of centralized power, and where such movements do not merely oppose the centralized power but effect lines of escape that produce new and diverse forms of life. Many aspects of Deleuze and Guattari’s micro-politics are already implicated in their discussions of language.

It is, for example, already an aspect of the micro-political when new and minor forms of language develop. If Black English, for example, has a long history of deviating from the norms of standard English, it is such ‘deviation’ in itself that reveals other possibilities within the English language. A way of speaking that is different in significant ways from the standard is part of what helps to forge a community – this is a reiteration of what we saw earlier where ‘expression precedes content’. But since the establishing of such a community tends to make a minor use of English into a language in its own right (defined by its very own set of constants), the potential for immediate reterritorialization is great.
What is important, then, is to set standard languages in variation with themselves, to create forms of expression that expose the rigidity of the rules and the joy of flouting them. As new political forms of life – grammars and their order-words - are produced out of such positive ‘deviations’, and as these proliferate, the point is to see them as no longer deviant in relation to a major or standard centre of authority that establishes correctness, but to see the possibility of a decentralized micro-politics where localized puissances are devoted to establishing functional and positive forms of life for the bodies concerned. Furthermore, such forms of life as animated by puissances rather than pouvoir, remain open to further transformation, remain a becoming-minor rather than an establishment of majority. This is where we get the passage itself beneath the order-words.

We have seen how Derrida, on the other hand, brings us to an impasse: we must translate and yet we can mark the impossibility of genuine translation in our very inscriptions, always called back to the unrepresentable meaning of language as performativity itself. Since this ‘performativity itself’ can never be reduced to what we say, representing the other in language is always a form of injustice. A form of injustice that must be performed, nonetheless, but as all language is made possible only by the quasi-transcendence of Justice itself – by its nature as an impossible object of experience – it is marked as trace in every necessarily failed translation. Meaning, then, is always left open for the future, never legitimately decidable in a present. We do decide, always in a present, but we are called by the future to leave the text open. The temporal deferral of language, whereby the meaning of any sign is deferred in an infinite chain of signification, is a deferral to a future that never becomes present.
The political community that such an analysis of language sanctions is one of alliance for the purposes only of resistance to representation by the majority. All that binds individuals is a shared refusal to put down roots, a refusal to share in an identity that would shore itself up with the illusion of the natural rights of language, with a mother-tongue that in its construction of intimacy would serve to exclude the other others. This is a political community that would be founded on its opposition to linguistic tyranny, to the political movements that take advantage of the power of language to convince us that what is is also what ought to be. Always to read in the text its repressed other, and always to discern in political structures the repressed ‘foreigner’, the hidden rebellion within the very movement of every political power, the very rebellion that makes it possible.

But as we have seen, the productive possibilities of such a future politics are limited. The power of language to effect change in the world remains held within this resistance to meaning. In our translation activities, then, we get no better direction than that we must mark any expression to be translated as always open to future reading. The authentic meaning of any text becomes the meaning of language as demonstrating only its incapacity for representation. The value of such analyses should not be underestimated, but they are only a first step to the kinds of productive translations that might issue from the analyses of Deleuze and Guattari such as they give us the power of language to transform our most basic reality, and not merely to translate a world already interpreted.

For Deleuze and Guattari a radically different account of how language means contributes to a far more productive sense of what can be done in language, politically speaking. The problem of translation as the attempt to reveal the other in language lies at a superficial level of their analysis. Indeed, inter-lingual difference can illustrate a general
difference in language that amounts to the impossibility of representation. But as an impasse, this only serves as an incitement to find a different way out. Deleuze and Guattari accordingly discuss the rhizome as the best way to conceive of the impasse. Instead of seeing the impasse as the dead-end, corresponding to the one way to conceive of a problem, we can choose to see it as this dead-end, and simply go back and choose another route through the rhizome, a different question.

The rhizome, unlike the tree, has multiple points of entry, and multiple shoots that can spring up anywhere, where the tree has a centralized trunk that all the various shoots must refer back to as their source. Thus the problem of representation, as analyzed by Derrida through translation, might be analyzed by Deleuze and Guattari as being limited to impasse because it conceives of itself in an arborescent mode. If we see representation not simply as the trunk the impasse of which leads us to a dead-end, but as a rhizome that forces us to see the very problem otherwise, then we have a way out. Deleuze and Guattari would indeed subscribe to a Derridean resistance to the presumptions of representation, but only by recognizing a line of escape from the very terms of the impossibility of translation.

We have seen the analytic method by which Deleuze and Guattari examine forms of language down to their very implication in a world. We have also looked at the way in which they see this power of language to create novel forms of life in the literary texts that they put to work. In this context, representation is one function of language, but it seems a rather sterile one, particularly insofar as it takes itself to be the only one. So on the one hand, our belief that language is only representational blinds us from the productive capacities of its others functions, and on the other hand, blinds us from the political agenda that language as representation furthers. This kind of political agenda refers not to a particular state power,
but refers to the regime that legitimates particular *forms* of power through reinforcing particular illusions about language. Recognizing representation as only one possibility of language frees us up to see both sides of the translational capacities of language: on the one hand its role in limiting political life to repressive forms of state power (*pouvoir*) and on the other its capacity to undo and recreate these forms by entering into the very becoming of a material world (*puissances*).

*What is a Good Translation?*

What remains to be considered is the question of what the measure might be of a ‘good’ translational enterprise. As discussed above, Deleuze and Guattari follow Nietzsche in aligning themselves with a project of producing forms of life that are better insofar as they are positive and not negative, creative and not conservative, life-affirming and not life-constricting, and active rather than reactionary. Our translational practices must be seen as machines and measured by their effectiveness in releasing the power of life to reach its fullest self-expression. This rather vague-sounding formula is in fact all that we can say about what is good. It offers us a way to evaluate better and worse based on the oppositions above, but it leaves open the ways in which forms of life might be manifest in the process of self-discovery through becoming-other. Deleuze and Guattari describe becoming-other in the terms of an exposure of the self to its own implication in contact with a world that is irreducibly foreign, and this by its very nature is good, in the Nietzschean sense of affirming the power of life to follow a path of flourishing by increasing the power of the differential – Deleuze and Guattari’s virtual. To enter language into becomings is to access the power of contact itself. And this is what translation can give us.
But does this notion of translation as an opportunity to transform really address Derrida’s explicitly ethical concern for the irreducibility of the other? Certainly not directly, since Deleuze and Guattari can be seen to have an entirely different orientation towards the ethical. Their objective is to find ways that we might increase the power of an assemblage to explore a greater range of capacities. But what happens when the capacities explored are capacities to do harm or to dominate or annihilate other forms of life? This is of course a large problem regarding the feasibility of a Nietzschean ethics, and one that I do not propose to fully address here. But in confining the problem to the question of translation, as the problem of opening language up to what might be beyond the already-anticipated, I think we can arrive at a preliminary justification.

If we imagine that a good translation is one that takes advantage of opportunities of contact, it does not at first sight seem as though we have precluded the possibility of forms of domination. A translation might be an opportunity for one language or culture or semiotic to dominate another. But then this cannot be said to represent a genuine becoming-other of either term in the exchange. If we imagine opportunities for contact as requiring a disarticulation of both terms through a new assemblage into which they enter, then we implicitly require that neither term hold onto any form of pouvoir with which it might dominate unfairly. If the point is to release puissances through the genuine becoming-other of contact, and if puissances is a matter of releasing the greatest potential for being transformed in positive ways, then assimilation or effacement of the other is ruled out.

Without extensively defending the power of life as an ethical measure, it must be added that the concept of life that Deleuze and Guattari are working with is not an egocentrism. Because the very self is subject to becomings in which it might be fragmented
into smaller machines or subverted to larger ones, there is no centrality of a self that life would serve. In abandoning the primacy of the self we need no longer see relations in terms of self-interest and sacrifice. If on the one hand we have an ethics that sees the value of sacrificing oneself for the other, of putting the other before the self, this alternative view would rather measure what emerges from a contact that incorporates elements of a self and an other in an unanticipated becoming in terms of its capacity to contribute to productive forms of life. This doesn’t solve the problem of ethics of course, but it must be asked what exactly is to be gained here from the respectful distancing of the other as beyond my grasp?

In terms of translation we can sacrifice, out of respect for the other, genuine opportunities for exploring the capacities of any term in any assemblage, or we can measure each translation insofar as it provides a good, productive solution to the particular problem or impasse at hand. And such solutions seem to require us to go beyond the terms of respect.

Finally, we might ask what happens to Derrida’s more specific claim that we need to acknowledge the singularity of suffering in the act of testimony. But there is no reason why this could not be incorporated into a Deleuze/Guattarean approach to translation. If their objective is to return language to more productive functions there seems nothing in this view that precludes recognizing the productive value of testimony such as it is, for example, in Truth and Reconciliation proceedings. If one function of language is to recognize the singularity of the other in her suffering, it is important to recognize that this is not its only function nor necessarily its most important. And also to forge new reconciliations is not to betray the testimony of suffering, but to also give it new hope for transformation into something other than suffering in secret.
What I have been above all concerned with in this study is how an analysis of language might get us beyond the *impasse* of translation. Translation is a problem that we confront increasingly in a globalizing world, a dilemma because as different cultures come into contact we must both attempt to find productive means of contact and encounter through translational practices and out of respect for difference must recognize a certain violence in these very practices. Derrida seems to give us a way to resist the reduction of the other, but this proves a limited response. In what follows, I explore various translation situations in order to practically demonstrate the positive responses that a Deleuze/Guattarean analysis might provide and the ways in which it goes beyond a Derridean impossibility.

As I have shown, Derrida’s analyses alert us to the inherent violence in translational exchanges. For example, we might take the problem of First Nations and European contact in Canada. It has come to be recognized over many years of disastrous relations that translation – almost exclusively into English and French – has served to ‘reduce’ the meaning of First Nations languages to what can adequately be represented in English and French. The obvious problem, then, is in translational practices that fail to capture anything of the other but what we can recognize as common to ourselves. Derrida offers a preliminary way to approach this immense political impasse.

In Derrida’s analysis the dilemma is in fact insoluble. The otherness of the other is the very thing that translation should reveal to us, and the only terms that we have for performing such translations are our own familiar terms, which necessarily represent the foreign to us as already recognizable. And yet we *must* translate – we must not simply ignore
or assimilate or pre-judge or isolate ourselves from the other. But if we recognize the (non)
origin of our very terms of familiarity – our mother-tongues – in an inescapable foreignness
that haunts every use of language then it seems we can avoid the most disastrous of the
outcomes of the translation problem. That is, we can avoid the *presumptions* that blind us to
the very violence of translation and convince us that there is no difference in language, that
all is translatable and that the other really is like us after all.

If at least we can be aware of the impossibility of ever getting at the otherness of the
other, then we can guard against the worst of language’s imperialisms. The idea of a
minimal community of resistance is not an empty idea, but a very good start to a way beyond
the impasse. It begins by recognizing the impasse, and this amounts to marking the fact that
language cannot represent what is other because what is other is irreducibly so, and therefore
that our presumptions to represent are inherently violent. Furthermore, we might conceive of
community across the lines of language, such that instead of English or French communities
and First Nations communities, we might imagine forming communities out of the
*willingness* to approach the other as irreducibly other, communities formed across the lines
and through the welcoming gesture of translation. But while this is a nice idea, it doesn’t
really offer any concrete response to the problems of the *actual* incommensurabilities and
resulting conflicts between groups, individuals or languages.

Let us look at how a Deleuze/Guattarean analysis might get us beyond this particular
kind of impasse. First we recognize that translation as representation cannot capture the
other – Derrida gives us this, and it is a given for Deleuze and Guattari – and then we see
what else language might do, not to represent the other but to find another point of contact
with the other. The problem, after all, is how to find meaningful and positive forms of life
that bring difference into contact without reducing it to the same. But if we recognize language as complicit not simply in the way that we see our world, but in the very forming of the physical worlds that we inhabit, then we might see a deeper meaning of translation, a more productive capacity for encounter with difference through language.

Then we can look at the possible lines of escape that might carry away the very homogeneity of both target and source, which in a new block of becoming transforms both in novel ways that respond to the singular events and problems at hand. Instead of seeing a general ‘translation problem’ between First Nations groups and Europeans as an insoluble incommensurability, we might see each singular difficulty of encounter as calling for creative and novel solutions that would utilize the transformative powers of what otherwise will be seen as two distinct and unbridgeable language communities.

The gap is unbridgeable, in other words, only if representation is the sole material for making bridges. This gets us to diagrammatic thinking, where we see regimes of signs as putting particular views of language to work but also as resting on an underlying relationship between semiotic and physical systems. So to analyze the particular semiotic systems at work in the specific enunciations of two groups in contact would be to see how each forms a world for specific ends and in complex ways. It would also be to get to the revolutionary force of the machinic, where we diagram the virtual relations between all the elements of assemblages both semiotic and physical. If the actual relations taking place are seen as assemblages, as external relations self-organizing and (in some cases more than others) calcifying into unproductive self-perpetuating institutions, then the elements of those structures might be entered more productively into yet other sets of external relations that produce emergent becomings.
Certainly there are examples of cultures coming into contact and entering into a kind of becoming that is not purely assimilative. The Cree and Francophone communities, for example, made up an emergent culture that we now call Métis, and whose language is a veritable hybridity of the two founding languages. One might study the way in which the emergent culture also changed the identities and the very world of both Cree and French components of this community, the manner in which elements of each were activated towards the emergent forms of life that resulted from this contact. But now that Métis is an accepted culture and language in its own right, it surely doesn’t have the same power to deterritorialize the major language in order to produce novel forms of life. As any culture does, the Métis eventually formed its own traditions and forms of conservatism. The point, for Deleuze and Guattari, is not simply mixing cultures, but allowing contact between different so-called ‘identities’ to force a minorization of dominant forms of social life, and this must be an active process always engaged in further becomings.

The challenge for a European colonizing ‘identity’ and First Nations, then, would be for each to expose their own forms of life and language to their inherent transformativity by entering into actual contact with one another. Since they are already in contact, wherever that contact is seen as a problem, we might substitute the notion of a general ‘translation problem’ with the singular machinic potentials for becoming-other that might be diagrammed. Writers like Derrida and Benjamin value the device of literal translation because they draw attention to the illegible nature of the foreign, and they do so by simply juxtaposing, showing that the foreign is different. It inscribes illegibility into the familiarity of our languages. But this kind of literal translation only shows us the translation problem as
impossible. If we want to get to translations that contribute to better forms of life and political organization, we must look to micro-solutions.

There is no satisfactory literature as far as I know that has diagrammed potential becomings between First Nations and European communities. It seems an immensely fruitful avenue for further research. But there are more and more examples of creative becomings between francophone and anglophone communities in Canada and these are described in several recent works on translation in the Canadian context. Notable among these is Sherry Simon’s *Translating Montreal*, (Simon 2006), which relates a history of translation practices that while having been dominated by the restrictive terms of an entrenched dualism of identities, reveals an emerging awareness of translation through the lens of productive contact. In particular in her chapter “Paths of Perversity: Creative Interference”, Simon documents a number of translation projects that, she observes, ‘take advantage of the situation’ by diverting the normative functions of their languages away from their intended goals. These translations are seen as ‘interventions’ into the life of the works they translate.

Simon also gets to the sense of interventions that do not remain constricted by language as signification, but that get at the political power of language in translation. It becomes clear through such ‘perverse’ translations that there is a choice to be made. A translation as utilizing the power of contact in its political implication, can either serve to reinforce the dominant and normative functions of language or can expose and recreate them by turning them away from their home and native land. Thus it is important to recognize those practices that go beyond the dualisms of francophone and anglophone and recognize that translations of Montreal writers are already conditioned by a linguistic and political
context of bilingualism, even of multilingualism, and in any case of contact. This becomes interesting in the case of Québécois slang, joual, which has presented a notorious translation impasse that has met with various approaches. A good approach, as Simon describes it, is one that pays close attention to the origin of joual as a political movement. This problem is interesting because one of the difficulties for translation has been that joual is full of anglicisms, and yet it also seems untranslatable because it is so distinctly non-standard and ‘foreign’ in its forms.

Simon’s discussion shows that joual is in fact a rare example of a genuine minorization of language. Where Deleuze and Guattari describe Québécois as a minorization of standard French, Simon’s analysis demonstrates that the process of minorization continues just as Québécois begins to look like a standard language itself. We might surmise, then, that its untranslatability consists in its high degree of deterritorialization comparable to Kafka’s German, the sense in which contact between two languages produces an emergent language that has no native soil. And Simon also demonstrates that joual is inarguably a political language, specifically a minor language that helped to create a minorization of Québécois identity in the form of parti pris politics.

Furthermore Simon’s narrative of the history of Montreal translations demonstrates the tradition of restricting the potential for productive contact and creative becomings through focusing on the irreducible fact of otherness. Translation might be seen as ‘welcoming’ the other through reduction or as ‘respecting’ otherness through literal translations, generally constituting a recognition that it is the gesture of translation that is significant, that constitutes the establishment of new relations between cultures. This seems in keeping with a Derridean approach. While Derrida would surely recognize the hypocrisy
of many of the particular forms of ‘respect’ and ‘welcoming’ that translation has taken on here, for Derrida the relation between others through language can only be meaningful as a gesture. A gesture that desires the other but refuses to bridge the gap between self and other, and so must keep a welcoming distance out of respect.

If the translations of joual were to be treated in such a manner, as the language of the other in an untranslatable otherness, destabilized only negatively by the awareness that our very own otherness is the condition of all language, then the results do not seem very productive or creative. What do we learn by recognizing that we cannot translate joual? It seems as though this approach to translation would work by demonstrating untranslatability through simultaneously reproducing and putting under erasure the normative functions of the source language. We learn that we cannot be sure that our normative functions are their normative functions.

On the other hand, if we see joual itself as a minorization of Québécois French, then we might take advantage of the situation to minorize the target language. Simon describes a translation of the joual theatre production “Les Belles-Sœurs” into Scots English in a production in Scotland and effectively demonstrates what Deleuze and Guattari would call a minorization of English produced as an effect of the minorizing use of joual in the context of Scottish theatre. The experimental approach of the translator was to leave some forms of joual intact, such as names, but also to intensify the capacities for creative expression in Scots English itself, as inspired by forms of joual as diverting normative functions of standard French.

The contact between joual and Scots English, Simon seems to show, need not be restricted to the reconfirmation of the identity of each as isolated and untranslatable, but
might extend into creative transgressions of joual into Scots English such that new forms might emerge along with a transformation of a national consciousness as defined against the dominant British identity. This is not a matter at all of transporting the forms of joual into Scots English, but of the very rebelliousness of joual from French intervening in the life of Scots English with a minorizing effect, an effect whose particular forms would have no necessary relation to the particular forms of minorization of joual. Joual as itself a ‘language of contact’ (primarily between French and English) could be seen as having released the power of contact itself, which might result in releasing the power of Scots English to set itself in variation with standard English.

A further point concerns the necessity of inter-semiotic translation. Because it is this that reveals language in its functional capacities, it is only by subjecting language to such translations that we get to the possibility of new and creative forms of life. Thus any translation that would be creative, that would access not the meaning of an expression according to one regime but the function of an expression according to language’s implication in the becomings of the world, would need to access the inter-semiotic.

It seems that this is exactly what is happening in the Scots translation of a joual production. What is translated for the Scots audience, ideally, is minorization as a function of language with a political significance. What measures the worth of the translation is not whether we now understand the original joual context but whether this translation has been put to work effectively in order to allow Scots to enter into becomings of a political reality developed as a minorization of English. Even if the translation does not change mediums and leave language altogether, its procedure of playing with the function of language reveals
that which is deeper than any particular semioticization. This is the sense in which it accesses the particular power of the inter-semiotic.

Certainly it can also be valuable to translate in the expected, inter-lingual sense, simply trying to represent a beautiful poem, for example, in our own language. This is not without value, but might be seen as a relatively superficial operation of language. The radical translations, the ones that would put the very power of the poetic to work, would force poetic language into inter-semiotic transformations by making it do something different. Although Deleuze and Guattari’s discussions of the particular translations in the regimes of signs they identify are fascinating and could be used as a guide to such operations, we needn’t follow these strictly. The point is only that we must subject the source text to a transformation based not on its meaning but on its function.

Translations that function in this way would put to work the virtual capacities of a text that are only partly revealed by the deterritorializing power of the original in relation to its own language and community. This is what Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of Kafka amounts to, in fact. By putting Kafka’s text to work as a set of philosophical possibilities they reveal on the one hand the power that Kafka might have had on his own community in his own time – specifically the power to force questioning of traditional forms of life in Prague and Germany and the power that such minor literature had to anticipate a Stalinist future. But they also show the ways in which such effects can reverberate into a contemporary context across vast geographical space. With this in mind, we might imagine that, for example, the dismantling of a legal system that Deleuze and Guattari direct us towards through reading Kafka might have enormous benefits to the First Nations groups who have been so oppressed by the transcendent appeals of our justice systems.
Consider a further example. It is not expressly political but shows the capacity of the literary to change at least social landscapes. *Venezia È Un Pesce* is the name of a ‘guidebook’ on Venice written in Italian by Tiziano Scarpa (Scarpa 2000), a work that encourages the reader to explore this vibrant city through the senses. It divides its chapters into parts of the body and what one might do with and for them in Venice. The particular way in which language is used in this book is not incidental to the way in which its form ‘disarticulates’ the usual understanding of what it means to explore a city. If this usual way is to use a guidebook as informing us of where to go and what to see, the language in the usual guidebook is decidedly referential. If such a book were called *Venice Is A Fish*, we might imagine this to be a metaphor – on a map Venice does indeed look like a fish. But what if the language that describes Venice as a migrating salmon that has been nailed down to its harbour with stakes of wood up to ten metres in length were not a metaphor? Seeing this as a metaphor seems to encourage us to think of the sense in which Venice resembles a fish. What if we could instead feel its fish-like qualities? What if the function of this book were to enter its language into a becoming with the city that transforms the way we read the book and transforms the city itself? What if this book could actually cause the island to become that which might rise up and swim away at any time?

This change in the way we read the language of a guidebook could in turn change the very sense of what it means to be a traveler, what it means to explore a foreign city, perhaps even of what it means to explore ‘home’. It could alter the very orientation that people have with their environment. But we tend to read by effacing even such creative translations of the usual meaning and use of a guidebook. It is possible to glean from the book a list of good places to go, and to get from the poetic language simply a nice description of the city. We
could use it in this decidedly referential and descriptive way, and thus miss the opportunity that it has given us.

Accordingly, we might translate such a book in the usual ways. The English translation that has been published has in fact performed a fairly literal reading with some obvious poetic license wherever there doesn’t seem to be an equivalent in English. It seems a fine translation – English readers can probably get just about what the Italian reader gets. If we recognize the creative potential of the Italian language book, however, then we see it as already a translation of the form of the guidebook. Its translation into a foreign language seems to carry the same opportunities and risks of effacement. The question would then be that of how a translation might find an opportunity that it has by virtue of being an explicit point of contact. This would require a translator sensitive to the capacities of the book itself as able to do more than simply tell a tourist where to go.

One of the things that Shaun Whiteside has done is to translate the subtitle “Una Guida” as “A Sensual Guide” (Whiteside 2008). The notion of sensuality is added. This is an interesting choice, one that seems intended to direct the reader to the fact that this is not really a guidebook. At the very least it makes of it an exception, not the usual kind of guidebook. It is possible that an English reader would never even make the association with a traditional guidebook, and take it as entirely a poetic tribute to a city that the writer loves. It would thus not end up in the guidebook section of the bookstore and would not generally be used as a guidebook. The opportunity for rearticulating what a guidebook does and so what it means to travel is lost. On the other hand, an Italian reader might be more inclined to take it as a guidebook, but as a supplementary one. A Venetian especially, or an Italian traveler already in Venice – Venice is the place where one is most likely to find a copy of
this book – might think of it as another way to enjoy the city after having already seen the sights and gotten to know the city in the usual ways. This also seems to miss the opportunity for productive translation.

So one preliminary suggestion might be that rather than ignoring the sense in which this book is a guidebook the translator might draw attention to it. It might be called simply “A Guidebook to Venice”, even dispensing with the poetic title. At the same time, and in order to dampen the possibility that we might take this as a traditional, if poetic, guidebook, perhaps many of the place names might be left out. Scarpa in fact leaves out all names of commercial references, and occasionally draws attention to this fact, as in the following passage:

But the true flavour of Venice isn’t sweetness. If you want to test its character, you must go into a bàcaro, a kind of inn. They are fewer and fewer in number these days. You’ll find the highest number of them in the calli near the Rialto market. I’m not going to tell you what they’re called because I’ve decided that in this book I’m not going to name a single hotel, restaurant, bar or shop. Partly out of impartiality, partly because we Venetians jealously guard our secrets, we don’t like to give away those few places that the tourists haven’t yet discovered. So take it as a challenge, a treasure hunt (Whiteside 2008, 59-60).

It seems as though this treasure hunt quality could be extended throughout the book, such that piazzas and palazzos that are named in the original would have to be similarly sought out and recognized through careful attention to the sensory effects of a place. This would require the English reader to genuinely explore the city through the senses, in a way that an Italian reader might not because of the very familiarity of the place and the language, the ease with which she might naturally recognize the places alluded to. And this demonstrates the way that an inter-lingual translation might access that power of transformativity that plays with the function of language, recognizing not only the guidebook-function but the way that the
particular language and strategy of this guidebook disarticulates the usual guidebook-functions and invents new ways to explore.

This sort of suggestion and any other that would put into play the function of the book might not be seen as constituting a ‘legitimate’ translation. But Deleuze and Guattari do not seem concerned, for reasons already made clear, with legitimacy. ‘Legitimacy’ simply indicates what is sanctioned by the dominant order of things, and if the point of our translations is to get beneath and beyond these restrictive possibilities, then legitimacy is what we should in fact be looking to flout. This is why Deleuze says that “all mistranslations are good – always provided that they do not consist in interpretations, but relate to the use of the book, that they multiply its use” (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, 5).

On the other hand, this example might seem trivial because it is not expressly political. But the very same kind of operations might be brought to bear on, for example, translations from First Nations languages into English and French in Canada. It has often been recognized that one of the difficulties in land disputes has been the fact that there is a distinct incommensurability between a European conception of land in terms of property and the traditional relation that First Nations communities have to land. This has been characterized as distinctly not a relationship of ownership or title – so First Nations communities initially had no sense either that they owned the land nor that it could be taken away from them. One needs a sense of property in order to conceive of land as alienable. Forcing the terms of land ownership upon these communities is clearly unfair, partly because they tend to lose land in disputes about ownership because this was not originally their
concern, and partly because a different relationship with the land is thereby imposed upon their very ways of life\textsuperscript{29}.

This incommensurability should not leave us in the position of simply recognizing that our inherently dominating, signifying ways are always acts of violence over what we might see in terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘pre-signifying’ ways. Rather, incommensurability seems a distinct opportunity for contact. Might it not be possible to imagine how contact between two groups with incommensurable ways of territorializing might be an opportunity for deterritorialization as an opening up of traditional forms of relating to land? Is it not possible that the very incommensurability of these systems, with no possibility of compromise, might force us to find capacities within each system that are drawn out in relation with one another? Might we not conceive of transformations through contact that constitute opportunities for better relations because they are in fact opportunities for each group to find within its ‘own’ sense of relation to land perhaps surprising and unexpected capacities? Might not such new possibilities also have positive ecological implications?

These sorts of experiments in translation might release us into a rhizome beyond the impasse of translation as impossibility. If we are only beginning to see the possibilities of creative transformations beneath the problem of translation, perhaps it is because our forms of language are only just getting out from under the weight of scientific conceptions of language that have forced us to think that the way we express the world necessarily corresponds to the way it is and must remain.

\textsuperscript{29} Paul Patton draws attention to this situation in the Australian context (Patton 2000), as does McNeil in the Canadian context (McNeil 1997).
Seeing language as function allows us to recognize that these scientific views are in the service of political powers. While Derrida forces us to see such political powers as ultimately illegitimate, and offers us a way to resist any linguistic tyranny by always deferring our translations to a future community, Deleuze and Guattari offer an analysis that releases the potential of language to disarticulate such political powers and enter into creative becomings that take advantage of the contemporary globalizing world and its ever-multiplying points of contact.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


