

Stretching Language to Its Limit: Deleuze and the Problem of *Poiesis*

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Abstract

Here I begin with Lecercle's assumption that language is a "problem" for Deleuze, who like Beckett wants to demonstrate the limits of (literary, poetic) language yet can only do so by writing. In "He Stuttered" Deleuze says truly experimental poets stretch the two (initially associative and syntactic) axes of *langue* to a point "far from equilibrium" where they begin to "stutter" and words (like atoms) begin to self-divide and redouble. After exploring this model and Deleuze's related discussion of Beckett's narrative praxis of "exhausting logical possibilities" in "The Exhausted," I point out that although he specifically rejects "metaphor" as a term tied to classical semiotics, and in his discussions of Beckettian exhaustion and the stuttering *langue*-machine (which vibrates the classical metaphoric-metonymic axes beyond recognition) does seem to overthrow semiotics, Deleuze's own discourse seems constantly driven by metaphorical language. For instance, the notion that beyond *langue* lies "silence" is itself a poetic (metaphorical) rather than "logical" one, as is the argument that Beckett's inclusive-disjunctive "non-style" tries to "give the possible a reality that is itself exhaustible." In a final section I show how a model based on the background noise (not sound/silence) of information theory can be fruitfully compared with Deleuze's vibrating-*langue* model, and suggest that the former may actually be a simpler, more "efficient" model.

Keywords:

Deleuze, Beckett, language-models, stuttering, exhaustion, semiotics,
metaphor, syntax, poetic speech, word-atoms

Deleuze's problematic conception of language and its limits has been noted by Lecerclé in *Deleuze and Language* (2002). Lecerclé begins with the assumption that language is a "problem" for Deleuze, who like Beckett wants to demonstrate its limits but can only do so by writing. (1-2).¹ That is, Deleuze is forced to address the "philosophical . . . problem of language, in its two, paradoxical aspects of the philosopher's necessary resistance and hostility to, but also obsession with, language. . . . My contention, of course, is that the ghost of repressed language unceasingly returns to haunt Deleuze . . ." (7, 129).

Lecerclé ends his book with a discussion of Deleuze's late theory, in *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Paris 1993²), of "style" as a writer's capacity to "make language stutter" (113). In the last section of her *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation* (1999), Olkowski also focuses on Deleuze's "problem of language" in relation to his theory of style as *langue*-vibration, as set forth in this same "stuttering" model in *Essays*³:

Make the language system stutter—is it possible without confusing it with speech? Everything depends on the way in which language is thought: if we extract it like a homogeneous system in equilibrium, or near equilibrium, and we define it by means of constant terms and relations, it is evident that the disequilibriums and variations can only affect speech. . . . But if the system appears to be in perpetual disequilibrium, if the system vibrates—and has terms each one of which traverses a zone of continuous variation—language itself will begin to vibrate and stutter. (Deleuze 108, Olkowski 229)

Deleuze had of course for many years been breaking away from Saussurian and Chomskian semiotics, indeed from (post)structuralism with its focus on meaning (signification) and interpretation. In *The Logic of Sense* (1969) his Stoic theory of language takes "meaning" as a virtual event, a surface effect of *langue*; the infinitive Verb—its paradigm the verb "to become"—is now seen as expressing

¹ "The paradox is reiterated in Deleuze's essay ["The Exhausted"]. The text naturally deals with the exhaustion of language in Beckett's television plays . . . [i.e.] the point where language reaches its limit, vanishes. . . . But [in the essay] Deleuze deals with a text where only a vestigial form of language remains by constructing a theory of its (presumably absent) language" (2).

² Deleuze died in 1995; the English translation of the 1993 Editions de Minuit *Essays* appeared in 1997.

³ The innocent phrase "'stuttering' model" presents a key Deleuzian ambivalence since it could mean both a "model of stuttering" and a model that "itself stutters."

the entire range of language, as the virtual “event of language.” Developing further this idea of language as fundamentally (verbal) action and event, Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1982) set forth a fully pragmatic language-theory based on *mots-d’ordre* (order-words, commands).⁴ This theory is much indebted to Austin’s speech-act theory (or theory of performative utterances, Deleuze’s *énoncés*) and is much closer to Foucault than to Derrida or Lacan.

Thus immediately after citing the above late-Deleuzian passage Olkowski notes that “The performative must be the motion that inaugurates any such variation in language, for [it] is both language and body. The performative is language, in that it expresses sense in a proposition; it is simultaneously corporeal insofar as it actualizes something in bodies, it involves the actions and passions of bodies; it is doing by saying” (229). This catches one of the central paradoxes in Deleuze’s language theory—the *énoncé* (utterance, speech) is simultaneously linguistic and corporeal—and is closely related to the “problem” raised by Deleuze himself in the above passage: “Make the language system stutter—is it possible without confusing it with speech? Everything depends on the way in which language is thought. . . .” (*Essays* 108).

That is, this is not “stuttering” in the normal sense (a kind of vibration of speech or of the voice) but in a much wider sense where, “far from equilibrium,” *langue* itself vibrates or (metaphorically or metonymically?) “stutters.” For this wider *langue*-vibration or “rocking” is the physical, corporeal action of *langue*, its bodily “walking,” even though it contains speech “within it” (in a close-to-equilibrium state of vibration). Deleuze indeed associates it (metaphorically or metonymically) with the “rolling gait” of Beckett’s *Watt* (110), “for speaking is no less a movement than walking: the former goes beyond speech toward language, just as the latter goes beyond the organism toward a body without organs” (111).

In this late model, language becomes so “strained” at its extreme limit of disequilibrium “that it starts to stutter, or to murmur or stammer . . . then language in its entirety reaches the limit that marks its outside and makes it confront silence” (113.) The extreme point in the pendulum’s arc, where we feel that language is moving beyond itself, is simultaneously confronting non-language, non-speech, silence and looking back at itself, is the point reached in the “stammering” of truly creative writers: “Style—the foreign language within language—is made up of these two operations, or should we instead speak with Proust of a nonstyle, that is,

⁴ Olkowski notes that *mots-d’ordre* can both “give orders” and “bring things into order” (229-30).

of ‘the elements in a style to come which do not yet exist’?⁵ Style is the economy of language. To make one’s language stutter, face to face, or back to back, and at the same time to push language as a whole to its limit, to its outside, to its silence—this would be like the boom and the crash” (113). Language now has a “foreign language within” it because it is in the process of overcoming itself, becoming-other or becoming-foreign to itself, perhaps becoming its own future and/or its own past.⁶

However, here we might want to know how far this notion of poetic, or more generally literary, “style” (as “non-style”) differs from conventional or traditional notions of style and/or non-style. But it is hard to pin down the meaning of style in the conventional sense, except perhaps by saying it has to do with the technique, the use of words, the form of expression rather than the “content” or “meaning.” It *would* be tempting to say that the vibrating *langue*-machine is primarily the force of expression itself rather than some sort of (static, objectified) content, except for the problem that Deleuze does not want to distinguish form from content here.⁷ However, insofar as the best writing style—also painterly, musical, dancing style?—is sometimes said to be the most economical, Deleuze does also say in the above passage that “Style is the economy of language” (113), no doubt thinking of this stuttering-of-language model as the most generalized and encompassing, and/or most reductive, most simplified model of *poiesis* (which literally means “making” in or with language) we could possibly have. It is also the most metaphysical model: language becomes most truly “poetic” when it confronts its own ultimate limit and the silence that lies beyond it.⁸

Still, the problem of “literariness” does arise here. Lecercle points out the

⁵ These “two operations” may be more precisely the linguistic operations of disjunction and conjunction; see the following discussion of this double-axis model. But Deleuze here seems to metaphorically or metonymically carry over the “vibration” (itself a rapid movement back and forth, in two opposite directions) along two axes of this vast *langue*-machine into the vaster duality or vibration of sense (*langue*, poetic speech) and silence.

⁶ In Deleuze’s “An Unrecognized Precursor to Heidegger: Alfred Jarry,” the remote past of a language comes into play *via* its own etymology, now working as the “foreign language” within it. “Under the impulse of the affect, our language is set whirling, and in whirling it forms a language of the future . . .” (*Essays* 98).

⁷ This point is clearer in the earlier “test model” for this theory as we get it in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Chapter 5 (“On Several Regimes of Signs” 141); see the discussion in the following section.

⁸ One thinks of Heidegger, the subtext for Lecercle’s comment that “Stuttering . . . is . . . an equivalent of poetic language. The problem with this is that it is a metaphysical answer to a metaphysical question (why is there language rather than nothing?)” (234). Heidegger famously opens *An Introduction to Metaphysics* by saying: “The fundamental question of metaphysics is ‘Why are there any beings rather than Nothing?’”

apparent contradiction in Deleuze's attitude toward literariness in late essays like "He Stuttered" and "The Exhausted": while clearly wanting to reject any elitist, self-consciously text-oriented or style-heavy (hence non-style) "poetics," he chooses as his examples Luca, Beckett and other writers associated with elitist, hyper-intellectual high-modernist literature (Deleuze's forgivable intellectual aesthete's love of sophisticated art is also clear in his Cinema books and his book on the English painter Francis Bacon).⁹ But there is a more specific "literariness" issue that will concern me here: that of figures of speech like metaphor, often associated with literary (especially poetic) style. Though Deleuze does say, as part of his and Guattari's turn away from semiotics with their pragmatic language theory, that he has no use for "meaning" or "metaphor," the problem is that, at least for the uninitiated, metaphoricity would *seem* to underlie his entire philosophical discourse, manifesting itself everywhere and not least, ironically enough, in the very idea that the vast vibrating-language model could itself be or embody "poetic speech." A particular case of this is the notion, trope or figure of *langue* gazing simultaneously (in a double-movement) at the silence beyond it and back at itself, also taken by Deleuze as the problem of language's "exhaustibility." For the notion (figure) of "silence" here again suggests a certain "poetic" (indeed humanistic) priority inasmuch as, from a physical-science point of view, there may ultimately be only noise (rather than silence, a term defined by a "listener") beyond and "between" (the elements of) language or any system of meaning.¹⁰ Moreover, the late Deleuze's argument (via Beckett) that language (meaning) could exhaust not just itself (leaving silence) but its own "possibility" may seem more poetic than logical.

Thus, inasmuch as Deleuze takes his late vibrating-*langue* model (diagram, machine) as itself embodying *poiesis* or "poetic speech," I want to look at the problem of "literariness" (style vs. non-style) in relation to this model, more specifically the problem of metaphoricity. My first point here will be that while Deleuze rejects (a semiotics-based) signification and metaphor on principle, the stuttering-*langue* machine or model is itself a "figure" and an embodiment of

⁹ Lecerle also devotes a whole section of his book to pointing out that there are much simpler, "non-poetic" ways of getting (arguably) the same "vibration" or "distorting-of-*langue*" effects which Deleuze attributes to an asyntactic *poiesis* or "poetic language": these are syntactically "correct" sentences which through accidental or careless semantic slippages become in various ways paradoxical or nonsensical, suggesting that in the first place *langue* "stutters us" (rather than that we a poets "stutter it") (235-39).

¹⁰ Except perhaps in the special case of terminal equilibrium, whose maximal-entropic, frozen state might be considered "silent"; the question then arises as to whether we could compare this with Deleuze's state of maximum *langue*-vibration. (See the later discussion.)

metaphoricity in its literal sense of “going-beyond” (*langue* moves beyond itself toward silence). My second point (closely tied to the one above) point will be that the very notion of the limit of language (as a form of sound and/or noise?) and the silence beyond this limit is a sort of metaphor or metaphorical conception (literally one that “goes beyond itself”). My third point will be that the conception of language’s “exhaustion” as a total breaking-down or radical self-*transformation* is also metaphorical in the literal sense, as is Deleuze’s “logical” claim that Beckett’s narrative exhaustion of logical possibilities in *Watt* is in effect the giving of “another reality to possibility, one that is itself exhaustible.”

However, I will also point out in Deleuze’s defense—i.e. this is admittedly an ambiguous or “problematic” issue at best—that he accepts a certain conception of “figure” (rather than metaphor), one at least partly influenced by Lyotard and one which does try to get beyond semiotics by going “beneath” language, i.e. by not assuming at the outset any foundational or totalizing conception of “langue” but rather that “there are only indeterminate figures.” But here we come back to the first problem above: if there are only shadowy figures beneath (or instead of) a totalized language, then how can we begin from the model of a totalized *langue* that commences to vibrate or “stutter” when stretched to its extreme limits?

Given the above-mentioned problematic notion of silence in relation to sound and noise, I will then suggest that one might also move completely outside of this Deleuzian language-space (or meaning-space) by turning to the model or paradigm of information theory. Here we *begin* with that physical reality or physical world (of atoms, sound waves, etc.) that Deleuze seems to want to reach by stretching his *langue* to or beyond its limits, and I will briefly describe some ways in which the information-theory model—in which noise, which underlies sound/meaning and distorts or interrupts signals (meaningful sounds, messages)—may possibly achieve the same results Deleuze is aiming for in a much simpler or more direct way, even if now the (arguably “poetic”) notion of the silence that lies beyond *langue* may have to be discarded. The turn to information/communication theory also seems justified inasmuch as *poiesis* (“making”) does also appear in autopoietic (self-making) systems theory, apparently a more encompassing field than that of merely-human language.

Finally, in the Conclusion I will briefly explore the concepts or practices of “problem” and “question,” “problematizing” (a Deleuzian term) and “questioning” in order to see what sort of light questionability—perhaps itself a form of background noise—might throw on the above questions, problems, ambiguities, paradoxes. In fact Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* seems to have a very

preliminary, incipient, inchoate theory of questioning and/or problematizing, though one not explicitly related by him to the problem of language.

Poiesis and the Problem of Metaphor

Poiesis in Greek means simply “making,” but it became associated long ago with the “creative making” of any art form, and more especially with that of writing (hence “poetry”). However, since at least the mid-20th century (with the rise of cybernetics) *poiesis* has also been used to signify the creative making of any “system”; in this “wider” usage of the term we usually get it as *autopoiesis* or the *self-making* (self-creation, self-generation) of a system. Hence we have “autopoietic systems theory,” arguably a (metaphorical or metonymic?) usage or context of *poiesis* which *might* have fit Deleuze’s vibrating *langue*-model as well as, or even better than, the modern-poetic context. This self-generating aspect is already clear in the “prototype”—set forth by Deleuze and Guattari in Chapter 5 of *A Thousand Plateaus*—of the late “He Stuttered” *langue*-machine. For this prototypical “abstract machine” does not depend on any pre-existing foundation in “language,” unlike the vast syntactic theory/model of Chomsky. Rather, “it . . . makes no distinction within itself between content and expression”; its content *is* the force of its expression, it generates itself:

We must say that this abstract machine is necessarily “much more” than language. When linguists (following Chomsky) rise to the idea of a purely language-based abstract machine, [we object] that their machine . . . is not abstract enough because it is limited to the form of expression and to alleged universals that presuppose language. . . . A true abstract machine has no way of making a distinction within itself between a plane of expression and a plane of content because it draws a single plane of consistency. . . . The abstract machine in itself is destratified, deterritorialized; it has no form of its own . . . and makes no distinction within itself between content and expression. . . . [It] in itself is not physical or corporeal, any more than it is semiotic; it is diagrammatic. . . . It operates by *matter*, not by substance; by *function*, not by form. . . . [It] is pure Matter-Function. . . . (*ATP* 5, “On Several Regimes of Signs,” 141)

We cannot begin like Chomsky from the foundation of a pre-given language,

that is, by distinguishing expression from content, for there *is* no pre-given language but rather only the rhizomic, unspecified, shifting configurations of sense.¹¹ In a further extension of or variation on this deterritorialized-Chomsky model we have the double-axis vibrating-*langue* model of “He Stuttered” (1993).¹² This somehow begins from what *might* have been the classical double-axis semiotic models of Saussure (associative and syntagmatic axes) and Jakobson (metaphoric and syntactic-metonymic axes or poles), but quickly moves beyond their traditional “sense”:

Language is subject to a double process, that of choices to be made and that of sequences to be established: disjunction or the selection of similars, connection or the consecution of combinables. As long as language is considered as a system in equilibrium, the disjunctions are necessarily exclusive (we do not say “*passion*,” “*ration*,” “*nation*” at the same time, but must choose between them), and the connections, progressive (we do not combine a word with its own elements, in a kind of stop-start or forward-backward jerk). But far from equilibrium, *the disjunctions become included or inclusive, and the connections, reflexive*, following a rolling gait that concerns the process of language and no longer the flow of speech. Every word is divided, but into itself (*pas-rats, passions-rations*); and every word is combined, but with itself (*pas-passe-passion*). It is as if the entire language started to roll from right to left, and to pitch backward and forward: *the two stutterings*. (*Essays* 110)

Saussure’s horizontal syntagmatic axis (and, influenced by Saussure, Jakobson’s syntactic or *metonymic* axis/pole) is the linear axis of a well-formed sentence’s syntax: “The boy went to the store,” “I love you,” “*Je t’aime*”; the normal and logical-syntactical “connection or the consecution of combinables.” On the other hand, Saussure’s vertical axis of associative relations and Jakobson’s axis of resemblances or *metaphorical* axis is the line connecting each word of the well-formed sentence with all possible synonyms, other words that could be

¹¹ See the following discussion of an interview with Deleuze (in *Negotiations*) after *ATP* was published in 1982.

¹² Deleuze introduces this with the narratological figure of the stuttering, not of novelists’ characters but of novelists themselves: “. . . [T]he writer . . . becomes a *stutterer in language*. He makes the language as such stutter: an affective and intensive language, and no longer an affectation of the one who speaks” (107, 109).

substituted for the word in the original sentence: “The horse ran into the barn” or (poetry) “The cow flew to the moon” or “She ate apple pie.” Jakobson foregrounds the importance of such a model to (symbolist, modernist, surrealist) poetics, where we can also get sentences on “the edge of sense” (though still following “normal syntax”) such as “Green adjectives sing invisibly”: or rather, perhaps here the syntax is also violated, depending on how strictly we define this term.

This rich semiotic background of “modern poetics” obviously underlies Deleuze’s model, and Lecercle emphasizes at several points in *Deleuze and Langauge* the foundational importance of traditional semiotics and syntax theory for Deleuze, who in effect pays homage to them before subverting them.¹³ For the Saussure-Jakobson metonymic axis is “progressively combinatorial”—the way in which words can be combined in a sentence is highly restricted—just as their metaphorical axis is “exclusively disjunctive,” since we have a wide choice of synonyms for each word but are forced to choose just one. But this is when the machine is working (vibrating) close to equilibrium. Now Deleuze takes it (takes the semiotics which in a sense underlies modern poetics) to an extreme point of vibration “far from equilibrium” where “*the disjunctions become included or inclusive, and the connections, reflexive. . . . Every word is divided, but into itself . . . ; and every word is combined, but with itself. . . .*” (*Essays* 110). Now we no longer seek metaphorical substitutes for “boy” and “store” in “The boy went to the store” (to get “The cow went into the barn”)—which, when we take a wide view of *langue* and see it as one single whole or *bloc*, means making the division between ‘boy’ and ‘cow’ and then choosing one—but rather we focus on just one word (“boy”) and divide it into parts, break it down. Similarly, on the metonymic-syntactic axis we no longer combine different words to form a proper sentence but commence to combine each word with itself, self-reflexively or self-repetitively.¹⁴

¹³ For example: “Deleuze shares a belief with Chomsky—although with a rather different import: he believes in the centrality of syntax” (223); “[Deleuze’s stuttering] presupposes (in order to subvert) the main mode of structuring of systematic language, the opposition between vertical paradigm and horizontal syntagma. . . . Deleuze ascribes considerable value . . . to this usually despised mode of syntactic analysis” (232).

¹⁴ It may seem Deleuze is taking a very strange perspective on *langue* here, seeing it as a continuous *bloc* in which individual words are like things or atoms, a *bloc* which can break down into its atomic parts as do (potentially) physical objects. We tend to see medium-sized objects like houses, cars, bodies as being self-complete wholes, rather than see the whole world (or even city) of which they all are parts; and of course we cannot see the molecules and atoms of which they are composed. Deleuze may be suggesting that we tend to see language as a medium-sized (normal) object in this sense, but he is forcing it to see it as a vast whole which (at the other

Here I want to come back to the issue of *poiesis* in its more restricted sense of “poetics,” a sense both adopted and subverted by Deleuze’s virtually out-of-control machine. On the “adoption” side, Lecerle notes not just the importance of semiotics and syntax theory for Deleuze but also the philosopher’s fascination with elitist, intellectually and aesthetically sophisticated, high-modernist poetic and narrative styles or non-styles. He also helps us to make sense of the poetic example in the above passage, the self-divided and self-reflecting words “*passion*,” “*ration*,” “*nation*” . . . *pas-rats, passions-rations . . . pas-passe- passion. . .*: “The examples come from one of Deleuze’s favourite poets, Gherasim Luca, a Romanian writing in French: in the poem, the speaker literally stutters for several pages before uttering his *point de capiton*, ‘*je t’aime passionément*’” (233).¹⁵ Although Deleuze likes high modernist poetics because its agrammaticality—e.e. cummings is another poet admired by him—and atomic fragmentation vibrate the *langue*-machine far beyond equilibrium, Lecerle reminds us that many sorts of careless (un-poetic or unintentionally poetic) language uses seem to have this same effect, a point not really made by Deleuze though perhaps one he would consider obvious.¹⁶

However, the problem of metaphoricality seems to be a more serious one. Deleuze rejects metaphor (at least in its traditional semiotic sense) and yet one might think, not only that his whole discourse, his whole writing (non-)style is metaphorical through and through, but that the model of the vibrating *langue*-machine is just that—a model, a figure, a metaphor. Indeed it is (metaphorically?) a machine whose very function—even if the traditionally-poetic metaphoric and metonymic axes close to equilibrium get somehow broken down at a higher rate of vibration—is to “carry *langue* beyond itself” (metaphor literally means “to carry across”). The rejection of “metaphor” by Deleuze and Guattari is grounded in their rejection of “meaning” (in the traditional sense of “signification”). We see the latter in an interview after the publication of *Anti-Oedipus*. Here

extreme or arc of vibration) can break down into the tiniest parts. But this is the model/machine which drives the “exhaustion of *langue*” in “The Exhausted,” so I will return to it in the next section.

¹⁵ Or Deleuze: “Each variable state . . . tends toward a limit that is no longer . . . grammatical . . . : hence Luca’s formula, ‘*je t’aime passionément*,’ . . . explodes like a scream at the end of a long stuttering series” (112).

¹⁶ Perhaps non-style can also mean un-poetic in the sense of accidentally poetic, as madness might also be accidentally poetic. Lecerle (222) quotes this passage from *A Thousand Plateaus*: “That is what style is, or rather, the absence of style—asyntactic, agrammatical: the moment when language is no longer defined by what it says, even by what makes it a signifying thing, but by what causes it to move, to flow and to explode—desire. For literature is like schizophrenia: a process, and not a goal, a production and not an expression.”

Deleuze says flatly that

We've no use for signifiers. We're not the only people, or the first, to reject all that. Look at Foucault, or Lyotard's recent book [*Discours, figure*, 1971]. . . . That's why we turned to Hjelmslev: quite some time ago he worked out a sort of Spinozist theory of language in which the flows of content and expression don't depend on signifiers: language as a system of continuous flows of content and expression, intersected by machinic arrangements of discrete discontinuous figures. . . . We're strict functionalists: what we're interested in is how something works, functions—finding the machine. But the signifier's still stuck in the question “What does it mean?”—indeed it's this very question in a blocked form. But for us, the unconscious doesn't mean anything, nor does language. (*Negotiations* 21-22)

And in an interview after *A Thousand Plateaus* was published Deleuze says, in response to a question about the key (and surprising) role of linguistics in this book, that his and Guattari's fundamental points with regard to language and linguistics are “first, the part played in language by precepts [*mots-d'ordre*]; second, the importance of indirect discourse (*and the recognition of metaphor as something that just confuses matters and has no real importance*); third, a criticism of linguistic constants, and even linguistic variables, that emphasizes ranges of continuous variation” (*Negotiations* 29, emphasis added).

Now the interviewer responds by saying to Deleuze: “You emphatically reject metaphors, analogies too. But you use the notion of ‘black holes,’ drawn from contemporary physics, to describe spaces you can't escape from once you're drawn in,” and by asking him, “Aren't [contemporary scientists] likely to see [this book] as full of metaphors?” Here Deleuze's reply seems ambiguous to the point that one might even think he is ducking the question:

A Thousand Plateaus does indeed use a number of concepts with a scientific resonance, or correlate even: black holes, fuzzy sets, neighborhoods, Riemannian spaces. . . . I'd like to reply by saying there are two sorts of scientific notions, even though they get mixed up. . . . There are notions that are exact in nature, quantitative, defined by equations, and whose very meaning lies in their exactness: a philosopher or writer can use these only metaphorically, and that's

quite wrong, because they belong to exact science. But there are also essentially inexact yet completely rigorous notions that scientists can't do without, which belong equally to scientists, philosophers, and artists. They have to be made rigorous in a way that's not directly scientific, so that when a scientist manages to do this he becomes a philosopher, an artist, too. *This sort of concept's not unspecific because something's missing but because of its nature and content . . .* Conversely, it's not impossible for a philosopher to create concepts that can be used in science. This has often happened. (*Negotiations* 29-30, emphasis added)

Yet while Deleuze wants to speak (as in *What is Philosophy?*) of the philosopher's act of "creating concepts" (rather than the poet's act of "using metaphors"), the problem is that it may be difficult to distinguish his created concepts (the "rhizome" and "body without organs" come to mind) from metaphors ("saying one thing in terms of another"), even if some of his technical terms (*agencement* or "assemblage," "plane of immanence") might seem sufficiently abstract to escape this fate.

However, it is easy to come to Deleuze's defense if we think (as we probably do) of a "model" as a "diagram" or "figure" rather than a "metaphor," and further note that Deleuze praises (along with Foucault and Hjeltmslev) Lyotard and his semiotics-exploding notion of the "figure" in the above-quoted *Anti-Oedipus* interview. In a short essay from the 1970s on Lyotard's *Discours, figure* (1971), Deleuze says: "Lyotard's book . . . performs a total reversal of the figure-signifier relation. It is not the figures that depend on the signifier and its effects; on the contrary, it is the signifying chain that depends on figural effects, creating . . . with non-figurative figures, causing lines to flow and breaking them according to singular points, crushing and twisting signifiers as well as signifieds. . . . (*Desert Islands* 214-15). And this fits with (indeed may have influenced) Deleuze's special sense of "indirect discourse" (e.g. "He said he would go" instead of "He said, 'I will go'"). In a note on the above-quoted *A Thousand Plateaus* interview, Martin Joughlin defines this term as meaning

indirect or reported speech . . . in which one utterance paraphrases the content of another 'primary' utterance. But according to Deleuze and Guattari, language is *primarily* oblique. Deleuze, in *The Logic of Sense*, inverted the traditional account of metaphor that derives the

indirect or figural sense of a word from a true “primary” meaning: all meaning and identification derive rather from the unstable interplay of figures, from configurations of sense In *A Thousand Plateaus* all discourse is indirect in the sense that all utterances . . . derive any identity they may fleetingly possess from the unstable interplay of words and other things in the shifting configurations that are “collective arrangements of utterance.” (*Negotiations* 189, note 6)

If we substitute “figures” (perhaps in something like Lyotard’s sense) for metaphors, then we have the idea that figurative language does not depend on a “primary language” but rather underlies it—or rather, there is no “primary language” but only the “unstable interplay of figures, [of] configurations of sense [or] ‘collective arrangements of utterance [énoncés]’”; this model, which dominates the language theory set forth in *A Thousand Plateaus*, suggests again the influence of pragmatics, of Austin and speech-act theory. In a further gesture toward tentatively justifying Deleuze’s rejection of “metaphor” (in the traditional, literary-critical and semiotic sense), we return for a second look at his reason, in the above interview, for using “scientific metaphors” (which are not really metaphors, and are not really scientific but rather philosophical): “This sort of concept’s not unspecific because something’s missing but because of its nature and content.” If such “concepts” are part of what language after all basically is, namely the “shifting configurations of sense,” then of course they will already be indeterminate, shadowy, “unspecific.”

Beckett and the Exhaustion of Logical Possibilities

A highly poetic, explicitly metaphorical passage in Beckett’s *Disjecta* gives us “the non-principle of [the] punctuation . . . of poetry and music”:

The night firmament is abstract density of music, symphony without end, illumination without end, yet emptier, more sparsely lit, than the most succinct constellations of genius. Now seen merely, a depthless living hemisphere, its crazy stippling of stars, it is the passional movements of the mind charted in light and darkness. The tense passional intelligence, when arithmetic abates, tunnels, skymole . . . through the interstellar coalsacks of its firmament in genesis . . . in a network of loci that shall never be co-ordinate. The inviolable

criterion of poetry and music, the non-principle of their punctuation is figured in the demented perforation of the night colander. (44)

The purely random or chaotic “non-principle of their punctuation” is in the first place (before it became extended in figure or metaphor) that of the stars, in a pattern “that shall never be co-ordinate,” as we see them lining the inner surface of the night sky; the image of “night colander” suggests that these points of punctuation which are the stars may just be holes in the sky, the light shining through them from the other side.¹⁷

In a later passage from the same “essay” (“Dream of Fair to Middling Women”), which clearly points back to the above passage, illuminating it, Beckett correlates true style (that is, “non-style”) with the vertical or perpendicular axis and conventional, trite style (perhaps the “principle of punctuation” or of “co-ordination” since it “flows without accident”) with the horizontal. The reader can only get the “margarita” (precious stone, poetic jolt) from the vertical because it hides the stone within the commonplace (hence non-style), whereas the horizontal just directly presents the stone to you so that the thrill of discovery is lost:

You couldn't experience a margarita in d'Annunzio because he denies you the pebbles and flints that reveal it. The uniform, horizontal writing, flowing without accident, of the man with a style, never gives you the margarita. But the writing of, say, Racine or Malherbe, perpendicular, diamante, is pitted, is it not, and sprigged with sparkles; the flints and pebbles are there, no end of humble tags and commonplaces. They have no style, they write without style, do they not, they give you the phrase, the sparkle, the precious margarit. (47)

The starry “night colander” of the first passage, in suggesting the night sky's inner surface or *lining*, also reminds us of Deleuze vibrating-*langue* machine when it reaches the extreme limit of poetic speech (voice, sound, noise) and confronts the silence beyond or on the other side of it.¹⁸ Yet this “figure” of Deleuze—language

¹⁷ In Notes Part I at the end of *Disjecta* (in a letter translated from German) Beckett says: “As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today” (172).

¹⁸ Deleuze says in “He Stuttered”: “And just as the new language is not external to the initial language, the asyntactic limit is not external to language as a whole: it is *the outside* of language,

confronting the silence beyond its limit—seems overtly metaphorical (even more than figurative in the sense of model or diagram) and even in a traditionally “poetic” sort of way, one indeed suggestive of the late Heidegger’s poetic philosophizing. In fact, if Deleuze wants to be as objective as possible then it is not so clear what silence would even mean here, since it presupposes the subjectivity of a (probably human) listener, and in physics it may be hard to distinguish silence from background noise.¹⁹

In “The Exhausted,” which comes shortly after “He Stuttered” in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze discusses Beckett’s “exhaustion of language” as a sort of dynamic process that works through a series of stages. Deleuze’s essay was originally included in a collection of Beckett’s texts and so serves as a sort of commentary on them; the three stages in Deleuze’s “exhaustion” model/machine correspond respectively to Beckett’s novels (in particular *Watt*), his novels and plays but especially radio plays, and his more extremely experimental late writing in *How It Is* and the television plays. The first stage, that of the novels, is where we get the trope of the “shuffling gait” in “He Stuttered”—the telltale “roll and pitch” of Beckett’s listless characters and of *langue* vibrating far from equilibrium. Watt’s way of walking is described in the most reductive, spatial-mechanical way, such that the logical-mechanical nature of the spatial description slides over into the logical-mechanical nature of the (absolutely reduced, minimal, non-stylish) English “style.”²⁰ The same logic of “inclusive disjunctions” that drives these modes of

but is not outside it” (*Essays* 112). Whether we see this as the outer or inner surface (lining) of the outer boundary of language, the new language which now (like a “foreign language”) is forming within the old one as the old language self-transforms or “molts,” and also (the same thing?) the “asyntactic limit,” now become this outer boundary.

¹⁹ Deleuze’s comment that Lyotard’s *Discours, Figure* “surpasses the signifier-signified relation toward the exterior and interior of discourse,” making the “word a visible thing” (*Desert Islands* 114), also suggests a metaphorical perspective, one which, like seeing/hearing “silence” on the “other side,” even seems visionary.

²⁰ “Watt’s way of advancing due east . . . was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and then again . . . and then again . . . and so on, over and over again . . . until he reached his destination. . . . The knees, on these occasions, did not bend. They could have, but they did not” (*Watt* 30-31). The last sentence brings us to the widest limit of this whole narrative discourse, that of pure logical possibilities, of what might or might not happen, just as the description of Watt’s walking reduces it to its most essential logical “form.” We again get the combination of the most essential spatial and narrative-logical possibilities in the description of Mr. Hackett’s dilemma: “Mr. Hackett did not know whether he should go on, or whether he should turn back. Space was open on his right hand, and on his left hand. . . . He knew also that he would not long remain motionless. . . . The dilemma was thus of extreme simplicity:

physical movement or non-movement also drives characters' ways' of dealing with physical objects (Molloy's sorting of the pebbles) and the numeration to the point of exhaustion of more abstract "logical possibilities."²¹ Deleuze thus begins with Beckett's way, especially in *Watt* and the late novels of the trilogy (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnameable*), of emphasizing mere lists of things, behaviors and logical possibilities, of running through their exhaustive logical permutations, rather than giving us "realistic narrative" in the conventional sense.

However, as Jakobson points out in his "Two Types of Aphasia" essay, where he develops Saussure's associative and syntagmatic axes into his own metaphoric and metonymic axes or poles, narrative logic is essentially syntagmatic or syntactical, like the logic of events in linear time order, whereas poetry emphasizes the vertical axis of metaphorical substitution. (Both axes are of course present in all literary works.) Beckett may seem to be almost purely syntagmatic, given his minimal variation on the vertical-metaphorical axis, yet even his syntax is extremely reduced, mechanical, self-repetitive. Thus Deleuze sees in his non-style the two axes of the *langue-machine* vibrating far from equilibrium, where the distinction between them begins to break down.²² But at this point of virtual breakdown of the metonymic axis-metaphoric axis distinction, as is already implicit in Deleuze's examples from Luca of "words divided into themselves" and "words combined with themselves" ("*pas-rats, passions-rations . . . pas-passe-passion,*") (*Essays* 110), it is as if word-particles themselves almost become thing-particles, atoms that are themselves decaying.

to go on, or to turn, and return . . . the way he had come" (*Watt* 7-8). The "to go on" foreshadows the famous line from the later trilogy: "I can't go on . . . I can't go on . . . I can't go on . . . I can't go on . . . I can't go on . . . I go on"—the purest form of metaphysical despair.

²¹ For example, *Watt's* reflections on Mr Knott's "mealtime arrangements": "Twelve possibilities occurred to Watt, in this connexion: 1. Mr Knott was responsible for the arrangement, and knew that he was responsible for the arrangement, and knew that such an arrangement existed, and was content. 2. Mr Knott was not responsible for the arrangement, but knew who was responsible for the arrangement, and knew that such an arrangement existed, and was content . . ." (*Watt* 99). Beckett runs through all twelve permutations, keeping the fourth term ("and was content") constant. Here we have a parody not just of formal logic but (as with Hackett's dilemma) of its metaphysical implications: Mr Knott ("Not") could be God, who was "content" when he looked upon his "works" at the opening of Genesis, or perhaps the Leibnizian "principle of sufficient reason"; "this arrangement" might be that of the cosmos. In this parody (through reduction to the absurdly mundane) of logical-metaphysical discourse, the logic of exhaustive permutations itself becomes the narrative "topic."

²² See notes 17, 18, 19. For a discussion of Beckett's "(non)-style" as a working-through or "exhaustion" of logical possibilities in *Watt*, one which uses the image of a "matrix of surds" (irrational numbers) from the early novel *Murphy*, see Stevenson, "Exhaustion of Style in Beckett's Early Fiction."

The approach to this vibrating-*langue* model/machine *via* Beckett (or *vice versa*) therefore makes more explicit the (or a) *reason* for this—one perhaps implicit in “He Stuttered” (where Beckett is also present): Beckett’s intent, the function of his non-style, is to “exhaust all logical possibilities,” that is, “exhaust the possible.” But what is possible is or includes, along with language and (an ultimately language-based) human thought and logic, the actual physical world that is made up ultimately of molecules and atoms. By simply enumerating “things” and their logical possibilities or permutations, *via* a literary non-style that has already moved so far from “equilibrium” that the syntactic-metaphoric distinction has virtually broken down, Beckett’s textual world has become one of word-things, or name-things, or noun (*nom*)-things (*nom* can mean “name” and “noun” in French). Thus “[Beckett’s] name-words are disjunct atoms [because] their sequences form enumerations of lists, not propositions, and their combination is algebraic, in the obsessional Beckettian manner, rather than syntactic” (Lecerclé 4).

Deleuze’s description of the first stage in/of Beckett’s dynamic non-style of “exhausting logical possibilities” goes like this:

The combinatorial is the art or science of exhausting the possible through inclusive disjunctions (*Essays* 154).²³ . . . Nonetheless, if the ambition of the combinatorial is to exhaust the possible with words, it must constitute a metalanguage, a very special language in which the relations between objects are identical to the relations between words; and consequently, words must no longer give a realization to the possible, but must themselves give the possible a reality that is proper to it, a reality that is, precisely, exhaustible: “Minimally less. No more. Well on the way to inexistence. As to zero the infinite.”²⁴ Let

²³ Normally exclusive disjunctions (we must choose either A or B or C but not every single one of them, thereby exhausting all possibilities) become inclusive once we get far from equilibrium in the “He Stuttered” model, though there it is explained as the “self-dividing” of words, or perhaps of the *langue-bloc* as one large word. Deleuze says that “Beckett’s entire *oeuvre* is pervaded by exhaustive series, that is, exhausting series—most notably *Watt*, with its series of footwear (sock-stocking; boot-shoe-slipper) or furniture (tall-boy—dressing table—night stool—wash stand; on its feet—on its head—on its face—on its back—on its side; bed-door-window-fire: fifteen thousand arrangements) (154). Deleuze’s own note here reads: “Beckett, *Watt* (London: Picador, 1988), pp. 200-1, 204-6. François Martel has made a very rigorous study of the combinatorial science, of the series and disjunctions in *Watt*: ‘Jeux formels dans *Watt*,’ *Poétique* 10 (1972). See Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies* (New York, Grove, 1956), p. 4: ‘Everything divides into itself.’” (Note 11, *Essays* 202).

²⁴ Deleuze’s own note here reads: “Beckett, *Ill Seen, Ill Said*, in *Nohow On*, p. 93.” (*Essays* 203)

us call this atomic, disjunctive, cut and chopped language in Beckett *language I*, a language in which enumeration replaces propositions and combinatorial relations replace syntactic relations: a language of names. (*Essays* 156)

Words are closely analogous to things (not identical with them), but “the relations between objects are identical to the relations between words” when we move (with Beckett) up to the level of a metalanguage which more nearly identifies language and reality than is the case in our ordinary world. We make this move because we are trying (Beckett is trying) to exhaust the possible with words, not to “realize” the possible (which would be impossible since we are speaking of mere possibility, not reality): thus on the level of this metalanguage we “give the possible a reality that is proper to it, a reality that is, precisely, exhaustible.” The logic here may seem paradoxical or problematic; or perhaps the problem is that we have now entered a space (or world, or discourse) that is more metaphorical than logical. Lecerle (5) reminds us that Deleuze turns to a “theory of the Other as possible world” at stage two, but one might already wonder here at stage one if Deleuze is speaking of “possible worlds.”²⁵ But to imagine a possible world whose reality consists precisely in the fact that it is merely possible (not real, not actual at least within the dimensions of this world) would not entail (unless we have truly entered into another dimension of logic) that we take its reality to be its own exhaustibility: for (in logic as we know it) it is real things, not possible things, that are exhaustible.

Or does “exhausting the possible with words” (also) mean that there are more words than things? (If “the possible” means “all possible things” then it may seem to imply this.) If so, how could “the relations between objects [be] identical to the relations between words” even when we move up to (or poetically create, create through *poiesis*?) this metalanguage in or by means of which we “give the possible a reality that is exhaustible”? In fact, Deleuze could also be starting from the

²⁵ Possible worlds theory developed from the logical-linguistic semantics of thinkers like Meinong and Hintikka, and holds that what can actually be *expressed* in a (linguistic and/or logical) language can actually be possible in some world. However, now we are no longer looking (as would e.g. semioticians like Saussure or Chomsky) at language as a “universal medium” but rather at language as a “calculus” (hence the breaking down of the linguistic-logical distinction). As Thomas Martin points out in *Poiesis and Possible Worlds*, “possible-worlds theorists assert that instead of an inviolable medium, language is a reinterpretable calculus that functions naturally as a metalanguage” (76); Martin also emphasizes the potential importance of possible-worlds theories for poetics and theories of literature, given that now metaphor as a force of “carrying-over” or “expansion” can play an ontological role (133 ff.) Possible connections with Deleuze’s late model of *poiesis* may be found here.

assumption that the reverse is true, that there are more things than words, which is why the words have to keep “dividing into themselves” and “combining with themselves” (essentially repeating themselves) in order to “exhaust reality” or rather “exhaust the possible.” In Deleuze’s much earlier essay (“Raymond Roussel, or the Abhorrent Vacuum”²⁶) on Foucault’s book about Roussel, a French modernist writer who, as Deleuze notes, “had a considerable influence on the Surrealists, and today on Robbe-Grillet, [but] remains relatively unknown,” we learn that

According to . . . Foucault, there exists in language a kind of essential distance, a kind of displacement, dislocation, or breach. This is because words are less numerous than things, and so each word has several meanings. The literature of the absurd believed that meaning was deficient, but in fact there is a deficiency of signs. Hence in a word a vacuum opens up: the repetition of a word leaves the difference of its meanings gaping. Is this the proof of an impossibility of repetition? No, this is where Roussel’s enterprise comes into view: he tries to widen this gap to its maximum and thus determine and measure it, already filling it with a whole machinery, a whole phantasmagoria that binds the differences to, and integrates them with, repetition. . . . These liberating repetitions are poetic precisely because they do not suppress difference [but] authenticate it by internalizing the Singular. . . . [T]hings themselves are opened up thanks to a miniaturization, . . . a doubling, a mask. And the vacuum is now crossed by language, which gives birth to a whole world in the interstice of these masks and doublings. (*Desert Islands* 72-73)

Roussel’s need for, and obsessive technique of, the *repetition* of words, of language in order to “fill” or “cross the vacuum”—the empty space that opens within *langue* due to the insufficiency of words, their inability to name all the things—might seem to lie behind the kinds of models or machines that Deleuze is imagining, creating or constructing in these late essays.

The description of stage two of Beckett’s narrative process of “exhaustion” begins with the idea that words themselves need to be exhausted, but seems not to depend on the issue of the relative number of words (names, nouns) and things:

But if one thereby hopes to exhaust the possible with words, one must

²⁶ There is no editor’s note citing the source in this case.

also hope to exhaust the words themselves; whence the need for another metalanguage, a *language II*, which is no longer a language of names but of voices, a language that no longer operates with combinable atoms but with blendable flows. Voices are waves or flows that direct and distribute the linguistic corpuscles. When one exhausts the possible with words, one cuts and chops the atoms, and when one exhausts the words themselves, one dries up the flows. It is this problem, to have done now with words, that dominates Beckett's work from *The Unnamable* onward: a true silence, not a simple tiredness with talking. . . . (*Essays* 156)

This is Deleuze's commentary on the second phase of Beckett's work, the radio plays which sometimes make use of overheard voices speaking in incomprehensible sounds, in what sound like foreign languages that viewers/listeners cannot understand. We are apparently moving, in Deleuze's description above, away from poetic speech as "sense" to poetic speech purely as "speech"—or rather as "voice" which is more encompassing than speech, more tied to the biophysical than to the linguistic or cognitive domain. Lecercle emphasizes not so much the "nonsense" or "noise" ("Babel") of these voices as their "Otherness":

Language no. 1 is the language of *names*. . . . Language no. 2 is the language of *voices*. The familiarity of language no. 1 is explained by the fact that there is still a subject, a speaker, who is in charge of naming . . . [and] the relation of reference between words and things is still there. Not so with language no. 2. For [now] words have disappeared. This vanishing of words has two . . . consequences. First, such language is no longer *my* language, since I fail not only to make sense out of it, but to grasp it as an expression of meaning. Second . . . such language, if a tongue at all, can only be a foreign tongue . . . uttered by the utterly Other. Deleuze takes advantage of this situation to sketch a non-trivial theory of the Other as possible world, whose only point of contact with the world of my reality is the Voice that no longer makes sense. (4-5)²⁷

Deleuze then moves to Beckett's third stage, which begins from the more

²⁷ See note 24.

extremely experimental fiction (especially *How It Is*) and the late television plays:

How can one make a whole out of the series? By . . . multiplying it by two if one speaks to the other, or by three if one speaks to the other of yet another? The aporia will be solved if one considers that the limit of the series does not lie at the infinity of the terms but can be found anywhere in the flow: between two terms, between two voices or the variations of a single voice. . . . There is therefore a Language III, which no longer relates language to enumerable or combinable objects, nor to transmitting voices, but to immanent limits that are ceaselessly displaced—hiatuses, holes. . . . “Blanks for when words gone. When nohow on. Then all seen as only then. Undimmed. All undimmed that words dim. All so seen unsaid.” This something seen or heard is called Image, a visual or aural Image. . . . It is no longer a question of imagining a “whole” of the series with language I . . . or of inventing stories or making inventories of memories with language II. . . . (*Essays* 157-58).

Lecerle comments:

Language no. 3 is the language of images. Its qualification as “language” can only be the product of a *long drawn-out metaphor*. . . . [It] has neither subject nor object, speaker nor referent. But it still has an addressee, the audience, and there is still something going on, the process of emergence of those images. This . . . is the process of language itself, when art takes it to its limits, moves it closer and closer to silence, to which it aspires. . . . Language no. 3 is the language of the limits of language, when it turns into silence, or to another medium, music or picture. (5, emphasis added)

But it is Lecerle himself who emphasizes at the beginning of his book, like Olkowski at the end of hers, that “language is a problem” for Deleuze. In the previous section I raised what seems to me to be a problem with Deleuze’s “rejection of metaphor” inasmuch as even the stuttering-*langue* model, with silence lying just beyond its limit, seems metaphorical. But I also allowed that if Deleuze is replacing metaphorical with figurative language (in something like a Lyotardian sense) then these shadowy, indeterminate figures may reach beyond or beneath the

totalized-*langue* space of semiotics. However, now I also find Deleuze's whole philosophical discourse (employed to elucidate Beckett's narrative discourse) of "exhaustion" to be in certain respects problematic. What seems a logical ambiguity in the description of Language I as a metalanguage that gives "the possible its own reality, one that is, precisely, exhaustible"—a claim that arguably does not make sense in *this* possible world (the "logical" one)—is only intensified in the descriptions of Languages 2 and 3, which pursue this same theme to further and further degrees. The more general point here is that the idea (the possibility) of "exhausting" all language, or sense, or meaning may not make sense—unless again we assume that we have gone beyond logic into a metaphorically or figuratively extended, meta-logical world of some sort.²⁸

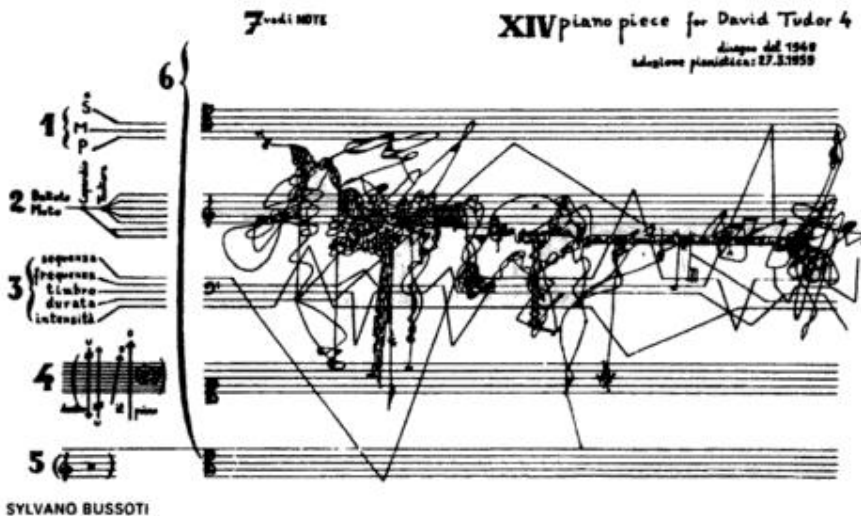
Perhaps the problem is that Deleuze is attempting to make sense of the notion of the "(self-) exhaustion of language" (and/or of "reality"), not only within the confines of his interpretation of the complex narrative and dramatic texts of a highly experimental late-modernist creative writer—one who in certain ways may have, *via* his own narrative-poetic techniques, introduced these problems in the first place—but also within the confines of his own vibrating-*langue* model. For the foundations of this model still lie within the domain of a "theory of language" broadly defined, more precisely within that of "linguistics." Even though Deleuze takes the "classical" semiotic axes of association and combination, metaphor and metonym to their extreme limits of stuttering—limits beyond which the machine itself may in some (metaphorical or figurative?) sense totally break down and confront silence—those two axes are still grounded in classical semiotics.

Thus I want to briefly suggest an alternative model, one drawn from information theory, that can in fact explain some of the same problems Deleuze is dealing with but in what may seem a simpler way—e.g. speech and voice in terms of a more encompassing "background noise," the "exhaustion" of language/meaning in terms of a terminal equilibrium which, beyond the confines of language and even (perhaps) meaning, has a wider range of function or application than the "vibrating far from equilibrium" of the Deleuzian language-machine. As will be suggested in the Conclusion, this information-theory model may also have a natural connection to the whole notion, issue, question or problem of problematizing and/or questioning.

²⁸ Though it might be a logical tautology to say that "To exhaust all sense won't make sense," since once it has been exhausted there is no more sense to "make." (Which perhaps is also Beckett's and Deleuze's point.)

Voice, Noise, Terminal Equilibrium

Deleuze formally rejects “metaphor” yet his writing is in many ways (like that of a poet or creative writer, like that of Nietzsche) driven by it; however, it was suggested above that we may say he uses “figures”—a term Lyotard gives a clearly non- or trans-semiotic sense in *Discours, Figure* and one which more easily correlates with those shadowy, unspecific “configurations of sense” Deleuze and Guattari see as underling language, at least from the time of *A Thousand Plateaus*. “Figure” also has the advantage, as compared with metaphor, of directly suggesting the visual domain, more precisely a diagram, something essentially pictorial rather than verbal. Deleuze and Guattari’s introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), “Introduction: Rhizome,” begins non-verbally and perhaps musically with a diagram or figure. We see at the top of the page the photograph of a drawing by Italian artist Sylvano Bussoti entitled “Five Pieces for Piano for David Tudor” (1970). It seems to picture musical staves on which what would have been “notes” appear more like atomic points interconnected by the vibrating lines of a mad diagram, lines that run together in chaotic or rhizomic (proliferating horizontal root-like) fashion and, both horizontally and vertically, “run off the scales.”



This is clearly some sort of musical variation on, or precursor to, the vibrating-far-from-equilibrium *langue*-machine of “He Stuttered.” It reminds us that musical notes can be “written” (and played or sung) but not “spoken,” and yet “music” already suggests that such a diagram, embodying the in-between space of noise-sound (noise-speech), is “pre-verbal”: even if it contains no captions or words, it is somehow on or near the boundary of verbal language. In *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze gives us a model of the “genesis of language” through a series of bio-evolutionary stages: from “inner-body noise” (tied by Deleuze both to our bestial-ancestral past and to schizophrenia) arises voice, from voice arises speech, and then from speech arises the “infinitive verb” (located on the “metaphysical surface” of the body where it is correlated with the mouth as speech and thus too as thinking); this verb is the virtual “event of language.”

Yet rather than beginning from out-of-control inner-body noises, the late Deleuze’s vibrating-*langue* machine beings from the rationality of the classical semiotic axes and only at or near the “end” does it commence to vibrate far from equilibrium. On the other hand, at this extreme point where it may commence to break down or explode, it confronts the silence beyond it. In the *LS* model, seemingly quite different, the infinitive verb on the metaphysical surface correlates with the silence of Freud’s *thanatos*, but it is not so clear that the inner-body noises arose out of an earlier silence. (In the beginning there was perhaps only noise; Deleuze in *LS* correlates Freud’s *thanatos* with Aion, the flat surface of time, and his *eros* with Kronos, the noisy, linear, ancestral-bestial “depths” of time.) Do the extreme peaks of the jagged, out-of-control, superlinear lines of the rhizomic-music diagram then suggest the machine vibrating far from equilibrium and-or (going the other way?) inner-body noise? Is it possible that the stuttering-*langue* machine can also “work in reverse”?

Music is of course a (relative degree of) “harmonization” of audible sounds or noises, their restriction within a more limited harmonic range.²⁹ In information theory, sound (and at a further degree music) is simply a refinement, tuning-in or self-ordering of background noise. And given that noise surrounds and encompasses the more limited domain of sound/music—which we tune in out of “static” on the radio—we might expect that in Deleuze’s genesis-of-*langue* model in *LS* the earliest stage of “inner-body noise” encompasses voice, voice encompasses (articulate)

²⁹ For Deleuze and Guattari in the “On the Refrain” chapter of *ATP*, music is the deterritorialization of “animal sounds” or “animal speech,” the pragmatic language-for-communication of all animals including humans. But this might have a sense more of defamiliarization (as in the Russian formalist theory of “art”) than of “refinement” or “harmonization” within a more narrow range. (Or: “refinement” as “becoming art.”)

speech, and speech encompasses (as its forerunner and progenitor) the infinitive verb of “thinking” on the metaphysical surface.

But then what of the late Deleuze’s three stages (his three “languages” or rather “metalanguages”) in Beckett’s progressive move toward the exhaustion of language and/or sense? Here we had a still slightly conventional (meta)language—i.e. a more rational one, closer perhaps to the infinitive verb at the body’s metaphysical surface?—giving way to “flows of voices” (largely beyond rational sense), which in turn give way to the still less rationally-defined, still more unspecific configurations of “images.” Beckett then seems to be moving (on Deleuze’s reading), in the course of his creative work, in the opposite direction, once again, from that in the *LS* genesis-of-language model: from greater specificity toward greater indeterminacy, not evolution but devolution, as too in the vibrating-*langue* model. This seems natural for a creative artist: to keep exploring more widely and deeply, keep vibrating ever further from “equilibrium,” getting ever closer to the most widely encompassing background noise, or perhaps to Dionysian disorder, chaos.

A key theory or model in physical-science-based information theory is that of the ongoing interplay between noise and sense. Too much background noise will of course distort or interrupt a signal, and yet paradoxically too little noise will tend to cause the signal to become “too clear,” “too efficient,” leading to a state of excessive order (or hyper-redundancy of the signal, of meaning) and ultimately to the frozen state of “terminal equilibrium.” A basic premise of chaos theory is that disorder (chaos) naturally self-orders (into order), and order, once it reaches a hyper-ordered state (through excessive repetition), naturally “decays” into disorder. Michel Serres correlates this excessive repetition or self-ordering of “forms” in the physical world with the redundancy of a logical tautology like “A = A” (or “A = A = A = . . .”), which after all is nonsense as it tells us “nothing we did not already know” and thus “means nothing,” “communicates no meaning to us.” (It may be a bit like Hegel’s “Being” at the opening of the *Science of Logic*, which “means everything” and therefore “means Nothing.”) This is what happens with messages (for example “youhowareyouhowareyouhow. . .”) that are not at least minimally “separated from each other” by background noise: the message becomes too clear, too logical, a senseless redundancy, a block or indefinitely-extended horizontal surface, what Serres in *Genesis* terms blank chaos as opposed to the dark chaos of initial disorder. A crucial point of chaos and information (or communication) theory is thus that a certain minimal degree of background noise is needed to reorder or regenerate signals (communicated meanings), to renew or regenerate meaning by

coming-between, making spaces between.

Now the question becomes: How might this be another way of looking at what Deleuze seems to be doing with his late model of the “stuttering of langue,” the vibrating *langue-machine*? The problem is again that, as with the interpretation of Beckett’s narrative technique, Deleuze (who is also doing “literary interpretation”) is beginning from within a sort of language- or linguistics-based model or diagram. And yet the word-particles or word-atoms generated by (or generating) Luca’s poem—“*pas-rats, passions-rations, pas-passe-passion*”—are now (far from equilibrium) noises rather than words conveying “sense.” The machine’s extreme vibration reduces what were meaningful (whole) words to senseless word-parts, linguistic (and in particular phonetic) fragments: the machine is in effect shaking sounds until they become reduced to noises, or distorting the tuned-in sounds/music on radio channels (perhaps just by turning the dial) into static, noise. But this is *background* noise: on a chaos/information-theory reading of “He Stuttered” the machine vibrates the words back into the senseless particles (word-atoms) that they were in the *beginning*, before they ever *self-ordered* into meaningful words, words that form (order) into the rational sentences of the classical semiotic models. The machine shakes these ordered sentences/words, these meaningful sounds back into noise.

Deleuze’s very use of the figure (or metaphor?) or “atoms” and “atomic decay” suggests, after all, that it might be easier to begin with a model based in the physical sciences. Of course Luca is a human poet, Beckett is a human novelist and playwright, they are not machines. But if we want to use an extremely objective and perhaps even “mechanical” approach to elucidate these writers’ highly experimental, high- or late-modernist, asyntactic and indeterminate (as to sense) non-styles, then why not just begin with a model normally taken as being non-human, mechanical, indeed itself perhaps a “machine” or (autopoietic) “system”?

There is another, more specific way in which the information-theory model fits Deleuze’s analysis in “He Stuttered” and “The Exhausted.” Deleuze repeats at several points in both essays the idea that “creative stuttering” also means “growing out from the middle.” This is the figure of “the rolling gait,” the *eccentric* walking style of Watt, who moves straight ahead by alternating (vibrating like a pendulum) between orientations toward the left and toward the right, the figure of the *langue-machine* as (being also a) body-without-organs. Thus in a highly “asyntactic” poem “Beckett’s procedure . . . is as follows: he places himself in the middle of the sentence and makes the sentence grow out from the middle, adding particle upon particle . . . so as to pilot the block of a single expiring breath. . . .

Creative stuttering is what makes language grow from the middle, like grass; it is what makes language a rhizome instead of a tree, what puts language in perpetual disequilibrium . . ." (*Essays* 111, emphasis added). Yet above we noted that in the information-theory model (or figure), background noise *comes in-between* two potentially clear (meaningful) signals) that got run-together (or "self-divided," "self-repeated"), separating them so as to make their individual meanings clear; otherwise the hyper-ordered (hyper-efficient) signal joins everything together into one block (*bloc*) that has no sense since we would not know where to begin or end: "youhowareyouhowareyou how. . ." (where the punctuation mark, the question mark, could help).

What especially strikes me as a congruence between Luca's or Beckett's poetic "non-style" and the theory of meaning-regeneration *via* noise that "interrupts in the middle" is this: in both cases obvious noise or nonsense gets combined with the quest for a clearer sense, a sense that does *not* finally return to nonsense through being hyper-rationalized, hyper-logicized. For Luca's repetitions as in "*pas-rats*" are not absolute repetitions; they are part of the process through which dark or inchoate chaos forms into preliminary order. In Deleuze's model as well as that of information-chaos theory meaning is being created out of noise: with Beckett's poem, formed by "piloting the block of a single expiring breath" in alternate or opposite directions" (*Essays* 111), we may assume (as with art in general) that a new meaning (order) is being created by bringing in just enough noise to break down the tyranny of (the "excessive meaning" of) rationality and logic.

This brings us finally to terminal equilibrium, the possible end state (it is a special case) of hyper-ordered systems that continue to lose heat (in thermodynamic theory) until—as some think will happen eventually to our entropically expanding universe—they become "frozen." With communicated signals (messages) this means that the message (meaning) or message (meaning)-system (perhaps the computer) finally never gets regenerated or "rebooted" but rather becomes *frozen* due to the lack of enough "noise" to thaw it out, regenerate it by coming-between, separating it into parts. The obvious late-Deleuzian point for comparison here is the vibrating *langue-machine* in its extreme state, where it is about to break down or stop and "confront silence." Yet this is clearly also tied by Deleuze to Beckett's praxis of "exhaustion": his way of progressively (through three stages in his creative work) exhausting language and/or sense and/or their "possibility." Of course, it is not so clear that Beckett (in Deleuze's discussion) does this by progressively, *entropically* (as I am suggesting, at least in a figurative sense) breaking down all the differences, but with metalanguage 1 we do have an "*atomic*,

disjunctive, cut and chopped language,” and with metalanguage 2 we do have “a language . . . of voices . . . that no longer operates with combinable atoms but with *blendable* flows . . . When one exhausts the possible with words, one *cuts and chops the atoms*, and when exhausts the words themselves, one *dries up the flows*” (156, my emphasis). As for metalanguage 3 we have “aporia,” “blanks” and “holes” as well as “images,” but we also have the idea of beginning-in-the-middle again: “The aporia will be *solved* if one considers that the limit of the series does not lie at the infinity of the terms but can be anywhere in the flow: *between two terms, between two voices* or the variations of a single voice” (157, emphasis added). And Deleuze does comment, with regard to Beckett’s “block of a single expiring breath” poem, that “Creative stuttering is . . . what puts language in perpetual disequilibrium” (111).

If there is finally a crucial ambiguity, ambivalence, paradox in Deleuze’s view of sense/nonsense in relation to the role or meaning of art (poetry)—is the truly *avant-garde*, ayntactical poetics a poetics of “nonsense” and thus the “highest” or “truest” form of poetics or *poiesis*?—then we do after all have this same ambiguity in information-theory. The key problem is that meaning forms in the in-between flow, the move from disorder to order, but order once formed is already becoming (again disorder). This meaning or sense is always already on the boundary of nonsense, a becoming-sense or becoming-nonsense, whether we are looking ahead toward noise disorder (noise) or back toward it. But in chaos-information theory it is only a question of noise, not of silence—*except* perhaps in that special case where hyper-order enters the frozen state of terminal equilibrium. Thus finally we return to a key but problematic issue for any comparison of Deleuze’s vibrating langue-machine and the system of information-chaos theory: in this special case, that of the maximal-entropic, frozen state of terminal equilibrium (also called “information death”), does the system indeed gaze, like Deleuze’s machine in its maximum state of *disequilibrium*, at the silence “beyond” it? Seemingly not inasmuch as it is *already* this silence; but then we may be left wondering about the just-prior state of redundant disorder.

Conclusion: Problematizing and Questioning

Deleuze often circles back to earlier ideas or themes to expand upon them in certain directions. Thus he was already discussing, in a more incipient form, his late notion of “non-style” in conversations with Claire Parnet in *dialogues II* (Paris 1977):

Becomings—they are the thing which is most imperceptible, they are acts which can only be contained in a life and expressed in a style. Styles are not constructions, any more than are modes of life. In style it is not the words which count, nor the sentences, nor the rhythms and figures. In life it is not the stories, nor the principles, nor the consequences. You can always replace one word with another.³⁰ . . . There's nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. [Style] belongs to people of whom you normally say, "They have no style." This is not a signifying structure. . . . It is an . . . assemblage (*agencement*) of enunciation (*énoncé*, utterance). A style is managing to stammer in one's own language. [Yet] there has to be a need for such stammering. Not being a stammerer in one's speech, but being a stammerer of language itself. (3-4)

Here already we see the move away from meaning or signification, interpretation, "texts" as we get these in semiotics, (post)structuralism and hermeneutics, and the move toward pure life-energy or life-force as a sort of ordinary everydayness, the unremarkable "suchness" (*haecceity*) of the person who apparently "has no style."³¹ Real life, action, the body are much "larger" than style in the traditional sense, not confined by it.

And just before the above passage in "A Conversation: What is it? What is it For?" we are dramatically reminded that the (Deleuzian) creative writer-thinker won't be restricted by any "formats"—including that of "interviews"—but rather will constantly break out of or move beyond them, extend them. Right at the beginning of his dialogues with Parnet, before she makes her own extended response, Deleuze indirectly expresses his preference for "problems" rather than "questions," where the latter are taken in the sense of conversational or more precisely interview questions, those one person asks another to get "information":

If you aren't allowed to invent your questions . . . if people "pose" them to you, you haven't much to say. The art of constructing a

³⁰ So much for style as Flaubert's *mot juste*.

³¹ The particular, singular whatness of a thing or person (the medieval sense of *haecceity*) is tied by Daniel Smith to a person's "life" in his Introduction to Deleuze's late *Essays*: "These percepts are what Woolf called 'moments of the world,' and what Deleuze terms 'haecceities,' in which the mode of individuation of a 'life' does not differ in nature from that of 'a climate,' 'a wind,' 'a fog,' or 'an hour of the day'" (xxxiv).

problem is very important: you invent a problem, a problem-position, before finding a solution. None of this happens in an interview, a conversation, a discussion. . . . The aim is not to answer questions, it's to get out, to get out of it. Many people think that it is only by going back over the question that it's possible to get out of it. "What is the position with philosophy? Is it dead? Are we going beyond it?" It's very trying. They won't stop returning to the question in order to get out of it. But getting out never happens like that. Movement always happens behind the thinker's back, or in the moment when he blinks. Getting out is already achieved, or else it never will be. (1)

Deleuze doesn't think we can "get out of" the philosophical question (e.g. "Is philosophy dead?") or get "free" from it by finally answering it—perhaps because we could never give a final or complete answer, such questions are inevitably ambivalent and open-ended. Thus he would rather just jump out of (or away from) it in the beginning, take a line of flight as the body keeps walking (or vibrating). On the other hand the thinker sets up problems for himself to think about (with again no assumption of any final answer or solution); in *Difference and Repetition* (1968) it appears that Deleuze sees problems more as a kind of set or assemblage, a rhizomic network with a wide range of answer-possibilities to be considered or pursued.³² While "question" comes from the root "quest" (a "seeking of an answer"), problems are "obstacles" (*problema*) that we confront and must solve or overcome. *Problema* literally means "throw forward": we must somehow deal with (dissolve, get over, go around) these obstacles that are constantly "thrown forward" at us, that keep emerging in front of us.

Coming at the concept of "question" or "problem" (but here "question" may serve better, even if Deleuze doesn't like questions) from a slightly different angle, one which may not be particularly Deleuzian, one wonders if it might be possible to

³² One way to read Deleuze's incipient or undeveloped "theory of questioning" in *DR* is in terms (once again) of a model or diagram with two axes: here the vertical-time and horizontal-time axes. A question has a potential (vertical) emergence into the future with each actual answer, which is easiest to see if we think of a predictive question as in scientific hypotheses. On the other hand, at each point along the vertical time-axis we must pause to consider the (perhaps rhizomic) array of possibilities now displayed on a wide horizontal surface. In *DR* such a model is inevitably tied to Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's eternal return as the return of difference: the repetition in vertical time of a dice-throw, where each throw is an explosion (on the horizontal surface) of possibilities. It is also inevitably related to the later model in *Logic of Sense* (1969) of Aion as the flat surface of time (the verb, virtual events) and Kronos as linear or vertical time, which also has "depths."

compare the stuttering or vibration of the *langue*-machine—a figure Deleuze (poetically) creates as part of his “problematic” theory of language—to the vibration or *rapid alternation* between question-and-answer in our normal speech and (language-based) thinking. After all, this too seems like a kind of “stuttering” and one that underlies both our thinking and language at the most fundamental level: we are shocked, confused or puzzled by something (i.e. we have a question/problem), hence we want to know, to have an “answer.” That our language as well as our thinking (at both the most concrete, everyday levels and the most abstract, “speculative” ones) is somehow grounded in this vibration/alternation of question-answer is obvious when we consider that (presumably in any verbal language) any statement-sentence can also be (re)written as at least one question sentence, and *vice versa*.

Furthermore, the biophysical force of the voice comes back into play here in an important way. In every *langue* the interrogative sentence is spoken with a different intonation—essentially at the end, though the declination may sometimes be

7-note NOTE XIV piano piece for David Tudor 4
 giugno del 1968
 adagio pianissimo 27.3.1958

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