Deleuze’s “Stuttering”:
Decomposition, Deterritorialization, and Pushing Language To Its Limit

Kelly Hardcastle Jones

University of Guelph
Abstract

This paper dissects and develops Gilles Deleuze’s idea that language is a thing that can stutter (Deleuze 1997, 107-114). Beginning with the claim that thought and language have proceeded according to an understanding that constrains their creative powers, this paper then calls on three ‘stuttering’ procedures (decomposition, deterritorialization, pushing something to its limit) that set thought and language free to create anew. The paper describes how these procedures work, citing examples and locating them on three registers: the linguistic, the stylistic, and the metaphysical. I conclude with some thoughts about what impact these procedures could have on the discipline of philosophy and our philosophical pedagogy.

Keywords: Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, stuttering, language, literature, Image of Thought, creativity
Table of Contents

Introduction

  Deleuze, Guattari, Lecercle, and “the language we do need”

  Apology

  A Note On Metaphor

Making Language Stutter

  First Movement: Decomposing Language

    Decomposing language: the linguistic register

    Decomposing language: the stylistic register

    Decomposing language: the metaphysical register

  Decomposing Language: Summary

  Second Movement: Deterritorializing Language

    Deterritorializing language: the linguistic register

    Deterritorializing language: the stylistic register

    Deterritorializing language: the metaphysical register

  Deterritorializing Language: Summary

  Third Movement: Pushing Language to Its Limit

    Pushing language to its limit: the linguistic register

    Pushing language to its limit: the stylistic register

    Pushing language to its limit: the metaphysical register

  Pushing Language to Its Limit: Summary

Conclusion

Bibliography
There is a small collection of essays by Gilles Deleuze called, *Essays Critical and Clinical*. In that collection, there is a small essay (only seven pages!) called, “He Stuttered.” And in that small essay, there is an idea with some very big implications: that language itself can stutter. We know, of course, that language doesn’t stutter. Common sense and common knowledge tell us that people – speaking people – stutter. At most, speech stutters. Maybe, sometimes, if we’re speaking metaphorically or anthropomorphically, a car engine can stutter or a video can stutter on playback. But usually we reserve the word ‘stutter’ for speech disfluencies: repeated syllables, audible airfl ow, verbal and nonverbal tics.

The idea that language itself can stutter implies otherwise, though: if language is a thing that can stutter, then stuttering is not limited to human speech. A different understanding of the relationship(s) between speech and language would be required. The human speaker would be removed from her privileged position as commander of the system of language. And we would need to change how we understand the system of language to operate. These are abstract implications, but if we consider language as a thing that can stutter, there may be concrete implications for how one does, says, and teaches philosophy. Deleuze asks us to consider these implications when he insists, in the seven pages of “He Stuttered,” that language is a thing that can stutter – and that’s what we’ll set out to consider here. These considerations will start by undoing what common sense about how language operates tells us.

**Introduction**

I’ve found that one of the most fun things to teach and to tell undergraduates about is the thought that moves through Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*. Whether or not my students agree with Merleau-Ponty, they recognize themselves in his thought (often immediately). Philosophy majors, science majors, and criminal justice majors alike can all relate
DELEUZE’S “STUTTERING”

to the ‘immediate givenness’ of the world and the unity of apperception (that Merleau-Ponty inherits from Kant through Husserl). The world is just there for my students. Reality is just meaningful - any self-subject can see this. Even Schneider, Merleau-Ponty’s example of someone whose perception is ‘broken’, ends up being an exception that proves the rule. Everyone (else) knows, ‘always already’, what it means to be, to have a body, to engage with the world. That everyone knows this allows my students an easy entrance into Merleau-Ponty’s text and thought.

“Everybody knows” is a claim about common sense. It marks a common sensical presupposition. Since everybody knows what it means to be or think, we can start to fill being and thought with content without asking about the form of being or thought. When our thinking proceeds from “everybody knows,” the path of thought (that is, the content we fill it with) will be determined by the form of our presuppositions. Common sensical claims allow us to reiterate what everyone knows about the form of thought. But common sense doesn’t provide a foundation for establishing new and different forms of thought (only variable contents). Nothing new, nothing purely different, gets born from “everybody knows.”

This is Gilles Deleuze’s claim at the outset of Chapter Three of *Difference and Repetition*, “The Image of Thought.” His objective is to critique the form of thought - that it follows from the presupposition ‘everybody knows’ - that has haunted philosophy (since Plato, through Kant and Hegel, including Descartes). This image of thought has kept philosophy tied to a *doxa* not only about what thought is, but how it proceeds. That thought is seen to adhere to the same form in order to work properly is reiterated in all philosophical methods. That this “everybody knows” is said of thought over and over again in philosophy is a problem. The Image of Thought makes some things possible - it makes Plato, Descartes, Kant and Hegel
possible. But it cannot account for difference or purely new thought because it is tied to a predetermined form. The Image of Thought cannot accommodate true creativity: “The form of recognition [the familiarity of ‘everybody knows’] has never sanctioned anything but the recognizable and the recognized; form will never inspire anything but conformities” (Deleuze 1994, 134). The same form, image, model, or method can only produce so many variants in content. The purely new and different requires variation in form and content.

The Image of Thought has eight characteristics. Some are descriptive. They tell us what thought is and how it works. Thought is the coincidence of our (Kantian) faculties, working together to grasp objects and discover intelligible truths about the world. Thought works through: 1. recognition, 2. representation, 3. logic, 4. and finding solutions to problems. The other four characteristics of the Image of Thought are normative: they say something about how thought should proceed, given what it is. 5. The proper end of thought is knowledge, achieved by the 6. proper, rational methods. 7. Common sense is governed by a good will and 8. any error is external to thought. These eight postulates give us the following form: thought proceeds and should proceed by methods that all rational beings already recognize. Everyone knows how to think (common sense) and only when thought proceeds this way can it be properly considered ‘thought’.

For Deleuze, these restrictions don’t just hinder the development of new thought. Because the Image of Thought requires the coincidence of all of our other (Kantian) faculties in order to work, all of our faculties [imagination, judgment, language, and some Deleuzian additions like, “vitality” and those “yet to be discovered” (Deleuze 1994, 143)] are governed by the same image. This is problematic for the philosopher who must not only be a thinker, but a communicator of thought, too (a teacher and a writer). At some point, the philosopher’s thought
DELEUZE’S “STUTTERING”

gets expressed in language. The Image of Thought produces an Image of Language: an “everybody says” that corresponds to the “everybody knows.” Like the Image of Thought, the Image of Language presupposes what language is, how it works, and how we should use it. If the Image of Thought dictates what we are able to think, the Image of Language dictates how we express those thoughts, to the extent that we can only express that which we can clearly think.

In order to think/say something new, what we need is not quite a new model, image or form, but a new method *again and again*: a non-normative and relatively unfamiliar method of thought and expression that varies in both form and content. This won’t be as simple as developing new concepts, for example, if those concepts are still used according to the Image of Thought. It won’t mean changing the words we use to more truly or accurately capture what “everybody knows,” either. Rather, both language and thought will have to be used in unfamiliar ways (and not necessarily in harmony with one another) - ill thought, ill said - according to a model of newness and difference.

However, this doesn’t mean flinging ourselves into irrationality and gibberish willy-nilly. As we’ll see, Deleuze and Guattari retain recognizable “supplies” and “mimic[s]” of the Image of Thought/Language (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 160). “Just enough,” they’ll say, to get by in one’s milieu (whether that’s a discipline or political regime or family). But behind the Images of Thought and Language is a problem of beginnings - if we aren’t to start from “everybody knows,” then where should philosophy begin? Deleuze counters the familiarity of “everybody knows,”

---

1 Gregg Lambert’s book, *In Search of a New Image of Thought: Gilles Deleuze and Philosophical Expressionism* gets this wrong right away, in the title. I don’t think that Deleuzians should be after a new Image of Thought. By definition, an Image of Thought provides limiting constraints to thought (and language). We’re searching, instead, for creative constraints. Not an image or a model, but an ever-varying series of ways and means that are constrained only by what we bring to an assemblage (which, in turn, is variable and malleable). This is the central argument of this paper.
knows” with the notion that, “Something in the world forces us to think” (Deleuze 1994, 139). This force is violent, untimely, intense, and can only be sensed. It is opposed to recognition, common sense, familiarity, “the Truth,” and the good will of the “everybody knows.” What forces us to think is not a rational animal’s innate excitement about questions and problems, but an interruptive encounter with the unintelligible [“wonder, love, hatred, suffering” (Deleuze 1994, 139)\(^2\)]. This force forces thought to begin by casting it into unfamiliar territory. Thought has to grapple with the limits of what it understands - with what it can’t think and may never “make sense” of.

What forces us to think is not an object of recognition but a fundamental encounter (Deleuze 1994, 139). One of the most famous examples of a philosopher being forced to think is the case of Derrida’s encounter with his cat. Derrida was stepping out of the shower one morning - thinking about nothing at all, or thinking about something else - when he was stopped in his tracks by the gaze of his cat, looking at him naked. Two things immediately occurred to Derrida: “I should cover myself” and “Why do I feel the need to cover myself?” On the one hand, he is driven to cover himself because he’s been caught naked and “everybody knows” that nakedness is shameful. On the other hand, he’s been caught naked by a being that doesn’t know what nakedness is (and therefore can’t know that it’s ‘bad’) - so why feel ashamed? The force of an encounter with what he can’t grasp (i.e.: the meaning of the gaze of the cat) traps Derrida between two actions: covering or not covering himself. Having been interrupted, he is forced to think the encounter even though it is something that he doesn’t understand: “The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there” (Derrida 2002, 397).

\(^2\)Lots of philosophy starts this way, of course. Descartes had his ‘wonder’ and Kant had his ‘sublime’. Their mistakes, according to Deleuze, would be to face the unintelligible and asking what it means (as if wonder and the sublime signified or were signifiers) – of subjected their interruptive force to the rule of the Image of Thought.
If this is the case - if thought begins by interruption - how can language hope to keep up with the force of thought in order to express it? What Truth is language supposed to communicate if thought is at a loss to grasp any recognizable truths? The violence of the force that forces thought disrupts the collaboration between thought and language - language must find its own way to begin and its own method of continuous variation.³

Each faculty must be borne to the extreme point of its dissolution, at which it falls prey to triple violence: the violence of that which forces it to be exercised, of that which it is forced to grasp and which it alone is able to grasp, yet also that of the ungraspable (from the point of view of its empirical exercise). (Deleuze 1994, 143)

Like thought, language must find that which would force it to begin - the sensibility that would exercise its difference and allow it to create something new. Just as thought gets forced to encounter what it can’t think, so too language will have to be put into contact with its own limit - with that which makes it tense or intense and shakes it from its familiar foundations. This “putting into contact” with the strange and different is the kind of procedure we’re looking for: a process of continuous interruption, disturbance, and at risk of violence that is also ultimately creative and productive.

It is this procedure that Deleuze (and Guattari) call, “making language stutter.” They will suggest three ways to get this procedure going. There may be more - in fact, to be true to the variation that characterizes force and difference, there have to be more. In this paper, I’ll focus on these: 1. decompose language 2. deterritorialize language 3. push language to its limit. The

³ As a result of the encounter, Derrida is forced to make up a new word: “animot” to attempt to talk about what happened. “Animot” is not definitive or signifying. “Animot” doesn’t denote an animal or animals in general, but tries to hold those together with the idea that human beings have given themselves the right to name the animal.
first procedure is an issue of what language is; the second, an issue of communication; the third, an issue of what language can do.

In their own manners, these procedures will make language stutter by producing an unfamiliarity, grounded in ‘everyday’ syntax. They will undo the Image of Language that says that language proceeds by fluidity and that it should proceed this way. They will make language stutter by producing an atmosphere of intensity. They will undo the Image of Language that says that language should express only clear and distinct ideas in clear and distinct ways, and that everybody knows how to do this. They will make language stutter by doing away with syntax and by putting language in relation with its ‘outsides’ - with silence or music. They will produce the means for language to become-otherwise by varying its form and content. They will problematize language and undo the Image that language is tied to Truth, meaning, and intelligibility. All of these procedures make language stutter.

**Deleuze, Guattari, Lecercle, and “the language we do need”**

You might think, “language gets used to express fuzzy and indistinct ideas all the time – in poetry, music, high schoolers’ creative writing papers…you’re not advocating for that kind of language to be the standard, are you?” The answer is: not really. Although all of those examples hit on something that seems true about language, but which the Image of Language conveniently misplaces: namely, that there is a “poetic operation” that underlies language, conceived of as a (radically different) system in continuous variation. Though there isn’t room here to discuss Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of language in depth, it is necessary to note where they stand in relation to linguistics, philosophers of language, and literary theorists. Then we’ll be able to

---

4 As we will see, these procedures require a lot of care. Although it might seem, at times, like we’re promoting “poetry for poetry’s sake” or experimentation without regard for failure and even violence, creative procedures require a lot of delicate work (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 344).
see the need for stuttering and the role that it plays within (supporting and undermining) the linguistic system.

Probably the most important aspects of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of language are its emphases on praxis and materiality. These two characteristics are linked, insofar as the materiality of language enables it to work on the world, both through speech and by transforming bodies. The easiest way to think about how this works is to first imagine the case of a human body - let’s take the common example of a person on trial. When we call someone “The Accused,” we ascribe the following characteristics to them: ‘presumed innocent’, ‘rational’ (or sane enough to get a lawyer), ‘citizen’, ‘human’, ‘morally accountable’, and so on. Being named “The Accused” does more than label that person, however - the name determines what the person can do. The name inscribes directions, possibilities, order, and rules on the body. As Lecercle notes, this act of naming is far from the Adamic style of representation and much closer to (if not fully aligned with) Judith Butler’s account of “subjectification”. This becomes especially clear if and when the person is named “Guilty”. The judge’s sentence “transforms the accused into a convict” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 80 - my emphasis). The possibilities and capacities once open to that body are now closed, or altered. Only a few remain: ‘appeal’, ‘prison’, ‘death’.

That something can be ‘said of’ a body means so much more than that body is ‘talked about’ or ‘represented’ or ‘denoted’ or named. Language is fundamentally transformative, although nothing physically changes, per se (the convict is not yet in actual chains when he is announced ‘guilty’, though he is immediately and incorporeally constrained). Language exerts forces on bodies and “directly affects” them; “it leaves traces, or inscriptions” on them (Lecercle 2004, 69). But Deleuze and Guattari (and Lecercle) add something important to this account of speech acts. For Deleuze and Guattari “take the word ‘body’ in its broadest sense (there are
mental bodies, souls are bodies, etc.)” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 80). So language doesn’t just work on our physical, human, individual bodies of blood and bone - it works on collections of things, on “socioinstitutional” bodies (Lecercle 2004, 66) like the courtroom or justice system.

Although we can think about the event that came before the accused became a convict, the event of him being named ‘guilty’, and about the events after his transformation into a guilty person as different from the kind of event that is the expression of his guilt, what the Stoics (and therefore Deleuze) call the “expressed” of the statement “you are guilty” cannot actually be separated from the world in which that person is guilty. We can’t actually separate language from the world - if it is a system, it is a messy system that inheres in bodies and is tangled up with their composition, decomposition, and recomposition.

Because language is tied so tightly to the world, it might seem like the answer to the question, “who speaks?” is immediately answerable - every time something is expressed, whatever the body is that the expression inheres in, must be the thing that speaks. It is more complicated than that. It is true that sometimes we seem to launch speech into the world ex nihilo. When the judge says, “You’re guilty,” the convict doesn’t usually think, “Who is it that sentences me?” It’s the judge - it’s always the judge. But who is it that inflicts an incorporeal transformation in the body of the accused to turn him into a convict? It is not the judge, but what the judge has said - the expressed of the proposition (“You’re guilty”) affects an incorporeal transformation. Language has spoken.

Language, then, is not reducible to a tool for our use. If language can speak, independently of me, then I cannot always rely on language to be there when I need it. Sometimes, language will fail me. Other times, it will arise inconveniently. Both are recognizable characteristics of (clinical) stuttering: the word will not come, not come, not
come...and then it suddenly emerges in a shout. Deleuze and Guattari will say: this stuttering is not a ‘problem’ locatable in the speaker (in fact, not even clinicians are able to locate where, in the speaker, there might be a physical deficiency that causes stuttering). Instead, the fact that language works (quite literally) in and on the world to varying degrees of effectiveness shows (according to Deleuze and Guattari) that it is its own system and a system characterized not by stability and consistency but by variability and heterogeneity.

If language is not a tool that we can easily rely upon, then it’s hard to imagine language as a predictable, static, and strictly regulated system. Sure, language has rules. And you can follow those rules in order to make yourself understood to greater and lesser degrees. There are ‘appropriate’ uses of language that change according to your goals: phrases like ‘furthermore’, ‘insofar as’, and ‘notwithstanding’ have a place in academic writing, in which a reader can take his or her time with the text (and reread passages in order to account for the role of every word or phrase). But these phrases have no place in writing for professional broadcasts, for example. There, what is spoken must be conversational, familiar, non-technical, limited in syllable, as closed to alternate interpretations as possible, and easy to follow because it will be heard once or twice (at the most).

To this issue, Deleuze and Guattari add an important caveat: language is not primarily ‘for’ communicating or transmitting information. The work of the expression, “you’re guilty” is not simply to inform the accused (and society) of the judge’s sentence, but to inscribe that sentence on the body of the accused. Yes, language is used to tell us things. But its capacities are more: it shapes us, organizes us, gives us our place. In this way, language is inextricably linked to (social) life. Writes Claire Colebrook: “It is not that we have a world of set terms and relations, which thought would then have to structure, organise or name – producing organised
sets of what exists. Rather, life is an expressive and open whole, nothing more than the possibility for creation of new relations,” and so language, the expression of this life, must try to grasp “movements and potential” (*Deleuze Dictionary* 2005, 93). But expression of this life doesn’t come second: expression and life are immanent. Language does not catch up to thought; language and thought create and express concepts that act as ordinates that map life as it unfolds. We do not have the concept ‘guilty’ and then fish around for the proper word to express that concept. Guilt, the concept of being guilty, and the phrase “you’re guilty” emerge, shape, and reshape one another simultaneously.

It’s important to note that Deleuze and Guattari continue to refer to language as a ‘system’. However, unlike Saussure’s and Chomsky’s scientific systems (for example), this system is not a clean, static, optimally-functioning set of machinery. The system of language, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is characterized by fits and starts, blocks and flows, heterogeneity, variables and relatively stable constants, disequilibrium – it’s a system whose synchrony is determined by a (socio-political) diachrony and whose langue is replaced, not with parole, but with more efficacious speech acts. Stability in this system is “artificial” (Lecercle 2002, 67). The system of language, like other Deleuzian systems, has its own becomings—otherwise (its own ways of changing): language “can be rationally described, but as a multiplicity of heterogeneous currents, each with its own ‘speed’ or temporality, each following its own line of flight” (Lecercle 2002, 65). Deleuze and Guattari don’t deny that we can pull a langue out of this heterogeneous and varying system. But that langue is temporary, not universal.

---

5 Synchrony: an ahistorical description of how language works at a specific time (in one place or between places) / Diachrony: the change or development of language over time / Langue: the abstract system of signs that make up language / Parole: speech
6 Later, I’ll show how Deleuze and Guattari change the notion of syntax to be the term for language’s (variable) speed and temporality.
It is also inseparable from speech acts, and so the ‘science’ of language (for Deleuze and Guattari) would have to account for ‘partial generalizations,’ ‘defeasible maxims’, and singular utterances as they function in a vast and changing social system. For Deleuze and Guattari, each instance of a judge pronouncing the accused ‘guilty’ is a singularly important instance that, rather than appealing to a general, universal set of rules or truths, remakes and reshapes the rules each time it happens (even if those changes are barely discernible). Practice, not abstraction, is what determines this system of language.7

The system lends itself to charting, however: “language does not vary haphazardly, but along lines of flight that can be charted, through movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that need to be carefully described” (Lecerclé 2002, 66). If we understand a system as marking a certain territory (the justice system, for example, works to greater and lesser degrees in certain places: compare the Western court room to international waters), then deterritorialization is the movement by which a system cracks open, allowing some of its component parts to escape, or bleed into other systems, or allowing other systems to infiltrate (think of the frightening and inaccurate ‘tribal council’ constructed from component parts of the Western political and judicial systems on the island of Lord of the Flies). Because Deleuze and Guattari think that language is a system that works according to movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, that means that the system of language is capable of

---

7 Without this practice, there would be no system, in fact. In a short and clear summary of the plateau, “Postulates of Linguistics,” Jay Lampert emphasizes that the power of a speech-act to affect an incorporeal transformation is “backed by social pressure…Enunciations are thus ‘collective’, and specific forces of assemblage transmit them across the social field” (Lampert 2006, 72). In other words, there isn’t an abstract system of language from which we pluck the same words, over and over, to elicit the same meanings throughout history. Each time the judge declares a defendant ‘guilty’, that body is marked as something new, but something that the collective recognizes and declares all at once. Order-words like “you’re guilty” are repeatable precisely because we remake their meaning in their repetition. We add the newest guilty party to the assemblage as guilty, and nothing is said the same as a result.
complex relationships with other systems. For that reason, Lecercle notes, they necessarily find linguistics to be an inadequate tool for charting the system of language. Rather, they favour literature as both the science and the agent of language’s system in continuous variation.

Because language is not homogenous, because langue is an abstraction forced upon it, the stability of which is reached at the cost of artificiality, it is always moving beyond the grammar that seeks to freeze it into a system. …Only literature can capture the change at the speed at which it occurs, because…literature, not linguistics, can do justice to the disequilibrium of language. (Lecercle 2002, 67)

Literature’s task is not to produce (or reduce) a set of concrete ‘truths’ about language out of the heterogeneous system, but to map how language works, however it could work (and, as we’ll see, what it works on and what other systems it woks with). Literature can account for the system of language as an assemblage: a relatively stable conglomerate of elements that coalesce and disintegrate, that connect to other system/assemblages (political, musical, bodily…), that become. “A writer knows well,” says Deleuze in his “ABCdaire,” “that language is a system that is by nature far from equilibrium, a system in a perpetual state of imbalance, so that there is no difference between a level of langue and a level of parole. Language is made up of all sorts of heterogeneous currents, in a state of multiple disequilibrium” (“S is for Style,” trans. Lecercle 2002, 64). Because a writer knows this, Deleuze (and Guattari) will emphasize the works and reflections of poets (Luca, cummings, Carroll, etc.) and novelists (Woolf, Roussel, Fitzgerald, etc.). For Lecercle, Deleuze, and me: it is literature (that is, our use of language in ‘literary’
ways) that both accounts for and encourages language’s lines of flight. For this reason, making language stutter is a ‘poetic operation,’ rather than a linguistic rule.\(^8\)

If linguistics was in search of a science of language, literature is in search of its style. Style, here (though a contested term in literary theory and Deleuze and Guattari studies) is a name for the map that literature charts in a particular segmentation of the “heterogeneous currents” or lines of flight at work in a particular moment of language. Style is what we find when we map how language is working: in a particular text, say, language works like this, here’s how it functions in the assemblage, here’s how it connects with other assemblages, here are some lines of flight that it could take…this is an unexhausted list of a particular style.

Note that style ‘belongs’ to the assemblage – not a particular writer or speaker. This will become important later, as we talk about style becoming non-style, and it marks yet another way that Deleuze (following Foucault, here) breaks with ‘typical’ accounts of literary theory that would assign style to authors or texts. There could very well be an author of a certain style, but on Deleuze’s model, the author is one part of an assemblage that sweeps her up into the style. And so the author really is ‘of’ the style (of the assemblage), in the sense that she is “not the origin, but the effect of her style: the author does not have style, it is style that has an author” (Lecercle 2002, 223-4). As assemblage, the system of language is non-hierarchical. So much so that the writer or speaker is not thought to be in control – not even of her style of writing or speaking. It’s the territory (or relative deterritorialization) of the system of language that

\(^8\)“More generally, linguistics can tolerate no polyvocality or rhizome traits: a child who runs around, plays, dances, and draws cannot concentrate attention on language and writing, and will never be a good subject. In short, the new semiotic needs systematically to destroy the whole range of primitive semiotic systems, even if it retains some of their debris in well-defined enclosures” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 180).
determines style (understood as the map of language’s function and lines of flight) – the author/speaker just lives there.⁹

Lecercle works out this conception of style in *Deleuze and Language*, in a chapter that also covers language that stutters. But this is where Lecercle and I part ways – at least a little bit. At times, Lecercle seems to collapse ‘style’ and ‘stuttering’ – giving them the same functions and concept.¹⁰ Instead, I would like to reserve the term ‘style’ for the map of language’s lines of flight, and ‘stuttering’ for the movement characteristic of language that is decomposing, deterritorializing, and taking a line of flight toward its non-linguistic limits. Of course, language can have a style (or many styles) that does not stutter (or that stutters immeasurably little – since Deleuze and Guattari think that the movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization are constant, even if systems sometimes appear static and stable). For example, because the Image of Language is based on real uses of language, it has a style. It is based on the idea that language is a homogenous and study-able system in equilibrium, which changes gradually over time, but only at the level of *parole*. The style (map) of the Image of Language is complex, but it is a relatively clean, rational, anthropocentric, predictable set of rules. Conversely, the style of language that stutters would be a map of breaks, silences, interruptions, ‘failures’, variables, instability, and movement. This style is, in many ways, ‘more authentic’ because it results from a

⁹ Of course, she doesn’t ‘just’ live there. She is created by this style. Her life is born (and reborn) out of assemblages’ relative deterritorializations. Just as the accused that is named ‘guilty’ undergoes an incorporeal transformation, so does the writer/speaker engaged in a particular assemblage have the style of that assemblage inscribed onto her body.

¹⁰ Lecercle and I think that style means different things: he thinks that style is “an original syntactic treatment of language” (Lecercle 2002, 222) and “the name of the foreign dialect of minority within the native tongue” (Lecercle 2002, 234) and “the capacity to take language to its frontiers with silence, but also with other media, notably music” (Lecercle 2002, 222). These describe, for me, what *stuttering* is. I define style as the map of how language works as a result of treatments like stuttering. See: *Deleuze and Language*, “Another Philosophy of Language: Style and Stuttering” (Lecercle 2002).
stuttering procedure that reveals the system of language for what it really is: an assemblage in relative states of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Stuttering is a procedure, a movement, and a characteristic of many different types of styles (i.e.: many different literary accounts of how language functions).

These are the ideas that will be most important in this paper: that language is a system in disequilibrium; that style is a map of that system and its relationships with other systems; that stuttering is a procedure that causes and characterizes the deterritorializing movements of the system of language. Before we embark on an investigation into what language that stutters looks like and how it works, I should tell you two things about what stuttering is not: for Deleuze and Guattari, stuttering is literary/critical, not clinical. But stuttering is also no a metaphor.

Apology

‘Stuttering’ is a concept that gets used widely: medically, sociologically, anthropologically, linguistically, literarily, musically, and philosophically. A stutter can be: a developmental disturbance; a hindrance to communication; a metaphor or trope; an oddity or joke; a sign of social anxiety or traumatic childhood; paired with the repetition of physiological tics...

The question is: how can we ‘get away’ with using concepts in a critical sense that were founded by and find their typical use in the clinical realm? That is, how can the philosophical ‘steal’ its concepts from the medical and avoid doing injustice to those with real, often debilitating, conditions? Put in terms of this project: how can we use the word ‘stuttering’ and purposefully ignore the millions of actual stutterers who have serious, non-Deleuzian, non-

---

11 See: Black Swan Green (a novel by David Mitchell), “the King’s Speech” (a film by Tom Hooper and David Seidler), “Psychy Killer” (a song by The Talking Heads), and A Handbook on Stuttering (a clinical analysis by Oliver Bloodstein).
necessarily-philosophical experiences? Is it enough to say: we’re not talking about that kind of stuttering? What is at stake in this project is not a blissful ignorance of the work being done by speech pathologists or the day-to-day struggles of actual stutterers. However, the critical analysis of stuttering that we’ll embark on is for the sake of changing the form/Image of Language itself and to allow for a variety of contents, not just clinical ways of thinking about stuttering.\footnote{For an explanation of how Deleuze might think that the critical and the clinical can work together, see: Aidan Tynan’s *Deleuze’s Literary Clinic: Criticism and the Politics of Symptoms*.}

The claim that stuttering can happen outside of the clinical realm is absolutely not to employ a metaphor or trope.\footnote{Although we’ll see that the affects of stuttering are akin to the affects of metaphor, insofar as they both produce new and strange combinations.} Critical accounts of stuttering, like clinical accounts of stuttering, have real subject matter—but rather than analyzing physiological speech and how it is used (or misused), critical accounts of stuttering analyze what our use of language is capable of producing. As such, the focus is not on the ‘st-st-st’ of a ‘st-st-st’-stuttering speech, but on the atmosphere created by a stopping and starting, a repetition of sounds, a tension, and a disfluency. Whether or not we can distinguish between such affects of language and the materiality of speech will depend on what we think language can do (and not just what we think language is).

Our Deleuzian account of language (above) allows for this. The idea is to a) extract clinical concepts from literary/philosophical space or b) to immerse clinical concepts in literary/philosophical contexts and show how those concepts work differently, to produce different results. In this way, the clinical project and the clinical project are similar: “...authors and artists, like doctors and clinicians, can themselves be seen as profound symptomatologists” (Deleuze 1997, vxii). We’ll isolate the symptoms (the signs) of textual stuttering, but not for the sake of compiling them into a syndrome that can be ‘cured’. Rather, the goal is to push those symptoms to their limits - to where they cause a reaction or
becoming - and transform the text and the bodies in contact with that text. If there can be said to be a ‘goal’, it’s to experiment with the concept of stuttering.

It’s not that clinical descriptions of stuttering are ‘wrong’, only that clinical analyses of the concept (to stutter) allow us to think and express in certain ways at the expense of thinking and expressing in other ways. This isn’t to say that the work of the clinician is bad - I’ll try very hard not to make a moral claim about what is good or not good for speech pathologists and actual stutterers. I don’t expect clinicians to rely on novels (or theatre or philosophy) to tell them how to do their jobs. I do expect that the clinical and the critical can inform one another for the sake of expanding a concept’s capacities. What’s problematic is when the critical is subordinated to an Image of Thought or Language that prevents it from producing new concepts. According to Deleuze, “the critical (in the literary sense) and the clinical (in the medical sense) may be destined to enter into a new relationship of mutual learning” (Deleuze 1997, 14). If what we discover about stuttering and its capacity to produce newness is true, then Deleuze’s understanding of stuttering (in the critical sense) might reveal a false problem in the old understanding of stuttering (in the clinical sense). Namely, that the concept ‘to stutter’ is not anchored in the materiality of speech, but in language itself.

A final word by way of apology: much of what you’ll read (and have already read) in this paper is written in a tone that might be called, “untraditional,” “folksy,” or “abnormal for philosophy”. That is entirely on purpose. My contribution to Deleuze’s effort to disrupt common sense’s notions about how thought and language “should” proceed is to forego the typical, traditional academic tone of most papers and presentations. Of course, I’m not alone in this. Karen Houle (“In the best book of all time, Housekeeping…” and “Clearly I have hamstrung myself,” from Houle 2009, 63-78) and Lindsay Lerman (who, in an essay on Where the Wild Things Are, Georges Bataille, non-knowledge insists that
accomplishes two things: that it 1. Invites a wider audience to engage with my work for the sake of interdisciplinarity and a greater number of connections with non-philosophers, and that it 2. does so without losing any of its ‘rigor’, but rather undermines the Image of Thought that requires only reason and logic to make an argument. This tone is how I choose to make my philosophy stutter – by interrupting its normal procedure and inserting lines of flight toward its limits.

A Note on Metaphor

At times, stuttering in Deleuze seems like a metaphor: “as if the language were stretched along an abstract and infinitely varied line...as if the entire language started to roll from right to left, and to pitch backward and forward...” (Deleuze 1997, 109-10). It seems like stuttering is a literary trope that makes the reader feel ‘as if’ something is really happening. The function of metaphor – to bring unrelated concepts or bodies together under the same Idea\textsuperscript{15} – seems like it might be related to some of the functions of stuttering – using inclusive disjunctions\textsuperscript{16} at the level of ideas, for example. It seems like caching stuttering as a metaphor for the way a text presents itself to us would help us more easily understand the weirdness of a language (itself) that can stutter.

But metaphor isn’t strange enough, for Deleuze. Metaphors are rooted in representation and resemblance, issues of essence and identity produced by the Image of Thought. Metaphorical methods seek to make-comprehensible. They bring together strange concepts, yes, but not to

\textsuperscript{15}“In general, a metaphor ascribes to some thing or action X a property Y which it could not literally possess in that context. Responding to this anomaly, the hearer or reader infers that what is meant is that X is Z, where Z is some property suggested by Y, X or the interaction of the two, that can be literally true of X in some context” (Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms, 139).

\textsuperscript{16}In other words, considering one \textit{or} more \textit{or} many things to be true at once.
produce the strange. Instead, they capture the strange and render it more familiar according to what ‘everybody knows’ about something else. Taken as metaphor, the proposition that language is ‘pitching and rolling’ compares an activity of language to the motion of the sea, maybe, or a vessel in the water. But this metaphor doesn’t get us very far – all that’s possible is to reduce language’s activity to a lacking representation between differences in kind. The metaphor is trying to get at the essence of a language that stutters, but can only say, “It’s like…” Limited in scope and potential, the objective of a metaphor is to make-familiar.

Analyzing or interpreting metaphors tend to initiate a search for the creator of the metaphor. “What did s/he mean?” “Who is putting/holding these concepts together and why?” These questions aren’t bad questions, but they limit the power of language to the authorial intention of a writer/speaker for whom language is a tool for communication (poetic communication, maybe, but communication nonetheless). Since we’re working on upending the Images of Thought/Language, the Image of the writer/speaker as ‘user’ will have to change, as well.

Stuttering’s function is to make-strange in order to unravel the representation that grounds the Images of Thought/Language. That means that stuttering is after what Alphonso Lingis calls, “immediate blows of the actual” (Silverman (ed.) 1988, 164). Whereas metaphor softens or mediates the encounter with the weird by misdirection into representation, the procedure Deleuze is after:

…seeks to practice a thought prior to the formulation of the philosophy which makes the difference an object of representation. … [This] discursive practice would be provoked by regional, minor, minority practices of discourse in which an unrepresentable sensible,  

---

17 Recall that we’re not searching for weirdness-for-weirdness’ sake. Rather, an interruptive force is necessary to shake us out from under the rule of the Image of Thought/Language.
sensation without sense, is set forth. Provoked by the shock of the encounter, it would then not proceed to interpret it, to re-cognize its meaning, but to practice a mechanic’s analysis – see how it works. (Silverman (ed.) 1988, 152)

Metaphor gives us a tool for knowledge, interpretation, and judgment. But stuttering should not be confused with such a method – it is not supposed to help us interpret texts or art or bodies or concepts for the sake of a more full account of essences. Stuttering is a procedure that causes and characterizes the deterritorializing movements of the system of language. Stuttering is not a metaphor, but a metamorphosis (Lecercle 2002, 219).

**Making Language Stutter**

I’ll start by giving you a provisional (if lengthy and technical) definition of stuttering, the components of which will get worked out as this paper proceeds. Stuttering is a movement that affects becomings in language (by decomposing it, deterritorializing it, and pushing it to its non-linguistic) limits which reveal the system in disequilibrium that subtends the Image of Language(Thought).

This paper will unpack that definition by explicating Deleuze’s essay, “He Stuttered” from *Essays Critical and Clinical*, the site in his *oeuvre* that deals with stuttering as a concept at length and most explicitly. But I can’t really give you an explication of “He Stuttered” by starting at the beginning of the essay and analyzing every premise and conclusion until we reach the end. Why? For one thing, because that’s not how Deleuze writes. One of his imperatives is that we try to make things “grow from the middle.” In his writing with and without Guattari, we get concepts up front that aren’t explained until we’ve passed through a series of arguments and seen how the concepts *work*. As Sean Bowden notes about *Logic of Sense*: Deleuze’s series, concepts, and arguments “refer to one another in indirect, manifold and ultimately non-linear”
ways (Bowden 2011, 3). “He Stuttered” is no different - this essay refers and folds in not only to and on itself, but intersects with other texts by Deleuze (with and without Guattari): most explicitly *Difference and Repetition* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. As it is in many of his other texts, it’s often unclear (even though it is only Deleuze’s name that’s attached to this particular collection of essays) who the ‘proper’ origin of the ideas in ‘He Stuttered’ might have been. Or what other ideas these concepts might be referring to.

So, how to provide a clear and somewhat typical explication of something ‘nonlinear’? I’m going to divide the analysis of this essay into three topics, guided by Deleuze’s three imperatives for making language stutter. Though Deleuze did not organize his thought this way, I’ll rearrange portions of his essay according to those that discuss: 1. decomposing language (straining language by inserting tension), 2. deterritorializing language (carrying language off on a line of becoming), and 3. pushing language to its limit (at the threshold where it becomes-otherwise). Naturally, these divisions will speak to one another, bleed into one another, and the examples used in one might easily be transferable to the others. That’s because these three imperatives are not successive – it’s not necessary to make one happen first before moving on to another; they all seem to happen simultaneously, in some texts; and it’s not entirely clear whether all of them need to happen to make language stutter.

I take this vagueness to mean that these three movements are not stages of a methodology, but three ways of becoming. In a way, they’re three imperatives of the same ‘type’: not three ways of saying the same thing, but three ways of taking a line of flight.18

18 In the *Deleuze Dictionary*, Tamsin Lorraine defines a ‘line of flight’ as: “a path of mutation precipitated through the actualization of connections among bodies that were previously only implicit (or ‘virtual’) that releases new powers in the capacities of those bodies to act and respond” (*Deleuze Dictionary* 2005, 145). A line of flight is a way and a means: it is the trajectory a body takes in its becoming(-otherwise) but it’s also the movement that allows bodies
However, they are also three self-contained lines of flight. If Deleuze is trying to outline a procedure for making language stutter, these three components (decomposition, deterritorialization, and pushing to the limit) will be included in any successful stuttering, to some extent, and each component has the potential to carry the others along with it. Outlining how these procedures work is my main goal, so that we can then think about where to find them and how to put them to use in the assemblages we’re parts of.

These three procedures: decomposing language, deterritorializing language, and pushing it to its limits, each occur on three registers: 1. at the linguistic level, 2. at the stylistic level, 3. and at the metaphysical level. At the linguistic level, stuttering works on or plays with the components of ‘natural’ language: phonemes, word combinations, punctuation, etc. At the stylistic level, stuttering ‘varies’ and ‘subverts’ constraints. At the metaphysical level, stuttering pushes language to/beyond its limits and exposes the nonlinguistic features of language.

Each of the following sections will look at one of the movements of stuttering: decomposition, deterritorialization, and pushing to the limit. Each section will provide example(s) of that particular movement of stuttering at work on all three registers: linguistic, stylistic, and metaphysical. I’ll consider challenges to Deleuze’s philosophical claims and more fully explain why he considered his examples ‘stuttering’. Along the way, I’ll use Lecercle’s (of all kinds) to come together and do more than what each was able to do on its own. Lines of flight are creative. Finally, flight is not an escape (into nothing). Brian Massumi, in his notes on the translation of A Thousand Plateaus, says: "Fuite covers not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance (the vanishing point in a painting is a point de fuite). It has no relation to flying" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, xvi).

19 These registers are borrowed from Lecercle, but I am delineating them differently and putting them to different uses than you would find in his Deleuze and Language (2002). Though we’re moving from a scientifically linguistic account of how language works to a literary account, we’ll need to investigate some of the historically linguistic features of language (like syntax) along the way, and so we’ll keep the term “linguistic” around. Unless otherwise noted, “linguistic” (as in, “linguistic register”) means, “at the level of the materials of language.”
commentary on the essay as a reference point for linking the linguists that Deleuze is unsatisfied with to his new philosophy of language and for my own commentary. Since ‘He Stuttered’ is less than seven pages long, I’ll also include important connections between the concepts at work here and the concepts at work in *Difference and Repetition* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.

**First Movement: Decomposing Language**

Let’s *try* to begin at the beginning. “He Stuttered” opens with a discussion about what options seem available to novelists who want to spice up their texts with varied expressions or give the voices in their texts varied intonations. Deleuze gives three options: either “*to do it,*” “*to say it without doing it,*” or “*when saying is doing*” (Deleuze 1997, 107). For the first (to do it), Deleuze cites the character Father Grandet from Balzac’s novel *Eugenie Grandet*, who stutters during business transactions: “I am willing; c-c-comes t-t-to sixty th-th-thousand. Very good,” continued Grandet.” Father Grandet stutters - it is obvious from the repeated segments of the beginning of words, separated by hyphens until they culminate in the word Grandet meant to say. For the second option (to say it without doing it), Deleuze cites Melville’s Billy Budd who, we are told by the author, has a “stutter or even worse.” In this case, Melville knows how Billy speaks and tells us directly, but the textual formatting of Budd’s voice is ‘normal’. These first two “dialogic markers” (Deleuze 1997, 107) depend on an authorial intention (to control the formatting of the text) and the stuttering is limited to affectations of characters’ voices. But Deleuze claims that there is a third possibility (“*when saying is doing*”), an expressiveness that affects the whole of language and not just affectations of particular speech.

Unlike the first two options, which were merely markers, the third option is a “poetic operation” - there is activity here that is absent from the first two options. In a way, “saying” is not active enough, but neither is “doing” – on their own, neither is enough to *affect* a stutter. “He
stuttered” or “th-th-thousand;” these impoverished expressions are not creative, productive, or even real verbs (in the sense that we normally assume ‘saying’ and ‘doing’ would be). They are affectations - nouns disguised as verbs, which lack intensity and efficacy.

The first two dialogic markers might be able to make speech stutter, but they are insufficient for making language itself stutter. And so, the motivation behind following this third possibility is to insert a pragmatics into structuralism: to remove the dominance of the signifier and replace it with a system in disequilibrium that produces real affect that will affect language itself. The first movement of stuttering – decomposing language – will put the Image of Language in a position to be overturned by revealing the differentiation already at work in the system of language. Says Deleuze: “It’s easy to stammer, but making language itself stammer is a different affair; it involves placing all linguistic, and even nonlinguistic, elements in variation, both variables of expression and variables of content” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 98).

Deleuzian pragmatics is able to account for a form of expression (‘a saying’ – ‘he stuttered’) that inheres in a form of content (‘a doing’ – the formatting of the text). These forms “coalesce” or “coincide” (Lecercle, 2002, 241) in order to give the text an affective atmosphere. The following sub-sections will indicate how that works for the sake of producing the first movement of stuttering: a tension that decomposes language.

**Decomposing language: the linguistic register.**

Next, in “He Stuttered” we get the first instance of a question that will repeat in different forms throughout this essay: “Is it possible to make language stutter without confusing it with speech?” (Deleuze 1997, 108) Deleuze answers his own question with a condition: “Everything

---

20 In other words, the motivation behind writing such that “saying=doing” would be to release language from its hierarchical constraints (where the sign governs meaning and the writer determines the adequate meaning out of a relatively consistent system of signs) and to make language a thing that acts in the world (by affecting incorporeal transformations, for example).
depends on the way we consider language” (Deleuze 1997, 108). A series of “if...then”
statements follows: if we think of language as a stable, homogenous system in equilibrium with
constant terms and relations, and predictable, direct effects - then language itself will not stutter.
Speech will stutter, but it will involve “nonpertinent variations of the intonation type” (Deleuze
1997, 108). Remember that, for Deleuze, relying simply on ‘he stuttered’ (as Melville did)
without including a corresponding atmospheric form of content, will not generate stuttering
affects throughout the language as a whole. At ‘worst’, stuttering will be passed over as
unimportant, ineffectual, and arbitrary. At ‘best’, it will be reduced to a character’s affectation.
Since we’re following Deleuze’s third option: saying is doing, it’s no longer just speech or text
that stutter, now. Says Lecercle:

Language stutters... because it is not a stable or fixed system, but a system in a state of
constant disequilibrium.... Disequilibrium does not mean that there is no system of

21 Intonation refers to changes in the pitch of a person’s speech, with the purpose of expressing
emotion or emphasis or asking a question, say (Crystal 1975, 11). Deleuze’s point here is that: if
we think of language as a homogenous system, then its variations are limited to expressing more
or less emotion when saying you’re sorry (for example). Language itself won’t stutter, but
speech might (if you’re very, very sorry, the pitch of your voice might change to reveal that).
However, this isn’t the kind of atmosphere Deleuze is getting at: he’s looking for the intonation
(the pitch or tone) of language itself.
22 Deleuze and Guattari (following Hjelmslev) do not define content in opposition to form.
Rather, they believe in a “double articulation” of a form of content and a form of expression
(Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 43-44). Both content and expression have their own respective
forms and substances – content is not just the substance or “filling” that an empty form is waiting
for. In this case, ‘he stuttered’ is not the result of an empty form of expression (as if any
dialogical marker would do) that gets filled with that particular (‘he stuttered’) content. Writes
Jay Lampert, “forms of expression are syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic; forms of content are
spatio-temporal” (Lampert 2006, 77). In this way, the form of expression of ‘he stuttered’ is its
meaning and tone – its interruptive force. The form of content of ‘he stuttered’ is the social
function it performs on bodies – the incorporeal transformations it affects. Form of expression
and form of content are immanent: together, they produce an affective saying that is also doing.
language, although the Saussurean contrast of *langue* and *parole* has been superseded.\(^{23}\)

But the system is a system of variations. (Lecercle 2002, 242)

For Deleuze and Guattari, language is a system founded on these differential relations. Put another way, language is not a system of constants, but a system in perpetual disequilibrium that takes up relatively constant positions. One of the ways that language stutters is by setting loose its own differential potential. And language is intensive, in two directions. That’s because everything that exists tends toward the limits of the virtual and the actual – virtuality and actuality inhere or insist in everything, simultaneously. The constants of language are not actually static or ‘fully actual’ – they tend toward actuality to a greater degree than they tend toward the register of the virtual. Everything is process, an intense process of becoming, but at greater or lesser speeds, to greater or lesser stabilities (Deleuze 1988).

What does this look like? As a system, language is subject to “a double process” (Deleuze 1997, 110). First, there are choices: between what to say or write, and when and how. Second, there are combinations: links between linguistic particles and phrases and propositions. On the model of a homogenous system, our choices are exclusionary. We choose to say something at the expense of another [“we do not say “passion,” “ration,” “nation” at the same time, but must choose between them” (Deleuze 1997, 110)]. On the model of a homogenous system, the connections we make are ‘progressive’. There is a forward, teleological movement [“we do not combine a word with its own elements, in a kind of stop-start or forward-backward jerk” (Deleuze 1997, 110)]. On the model of our new philosophy of language, where the system is in variation, our choices are disjunctive and our connections between ‘combinables’. Says

---

\(^{23}\) Here, Lecercle is referring to the obsolete need to keep *langue* and *parole* separate in order to make a scientific study. The assemblage of enunciation is beyond the need for a set of constants and their particular actualizations: it is a system made of speech acts.
Deleuze, “...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” (Deleuze 1997, 110).

The two processes, choices and combinables, are two kinds of stuttering (Deleuze 1997, 110). Deleuze gives one example of both kinds at work in Gherasim Luca’s poem JE T’AIME PASSIONNÉMENT (“I love you passionately”):

Passionné nez passionnem je
je ’ai je t’aime je
je je jet je t’ai jetez
je t’aime passionnem t’aime

Here, Luca is not choosing to say something at the expense of something else – he is attempting to say “je t’aime passionnément” all at once. It’s as if what he has to say is so important, he doesn’t want to privilege one ‘piece’ of the statement over another. To do so would diminish his passion, which he feels immediately but cannot immediately put into words. Luca also combines the words of “je t’aime passionnément” with their own elements, and with the elements that ‘belong’ to other words that don’t even appear in that sentence to produce words that don’t seem to apply [“jetez,” (“throw”) “nez,” (“nose”) “t’ai” (“you have”)…].

Luca decomposes the sentence, “Je t’aime passionnément” into its component parts, not to get at the root of something secret ‘behind language’ but to unleash what he cannot bring himself to say ‘properly’, by means of the variation that belongs to language in the first place. The form of expression (“je t’aime passionnément”) inserts itself into the form of content in a

---

24 Of course, Luca is still working with ‘normal’ syntax. We’ll return to this idea shortly, but note that syntax is in development: it’s becoming. Making language stutter moves syntax from a set of rules, through a ‘plastic’ phase, and finally into asyntax.
stop-start, discontinuous, chopped-up manner, to produce an atmosphere of nervousness, uncertainty, and earnestness. This is the (relate-able, if not universal) feeling of being passionately in love and trapped between wanting to tell someone sweetly, perfectly and wanting to shout it in their face. Reliance on the Image of Language breaks down in these kinds of scenarios.

Luca’s kind of stuttering, Deleuze says, is the “saying is doing” type, although it looks perilously close to the “doing without saying” type. It’s all well and good to be a writer that plays with different combinations of syllables and phonemes and letters. But Deleuze told us that language itself can stutter – separately from speech or text and separately from us speakers or writers. In order to take Luca into account as a poet whose “saying is doing,” Deleuze has to qualify his claim: “If language merges with speech, it is only with a very particular kind of speech, a poetic speech that actualizes these powers of bifurcation and variation, of heterogenesis and modulation, that are proper to language” (Deleuze 1997, 108). Language and ‘the poet’ are neither opposed, nor do they exist in hierarchical relation to one another. They must work together (through style) and by the end of this project, we’ll work out what that looks like (when language and the language ‘user’ are pushed to their limits). For now: in the first movement of stuttering, a language that stutters can merge with a speech that stutters, but it is a poetic speech that takes intensity, difference, and choices/combinables into account.

Language that stutters is what Deleuze refers to as a ‘poetic operation’. A writer performs a poetic operation like a surgeon – this isn’t poetry for poetry’s sake, but a delicate and exacting procedure that works on language for the sake of increasing its capacities. And just as a surgeon might remove a tumor (negation) or reroute a flow (affirmation), at the linguistic level,
Decomposing language is all about playing with negation (choices) and affirmation (combinables).

**Decomposing language: the stylistic register**

The first movement of stuttering (decomposing language) is the movement of intense differentiation in language. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari inform us that there are two forms of everything in a socio-linguistic field: a form of expression and a form of content. Form and content are not opposed, for Deleuze and Guattari. Instead, expression and content are opposed. Content involves any formed body (understood in the broad, Stoic and Spinozist sense) and expression involves signs (understood not as representations, but as “expresseds of statements” or events).

Although opposed, expression and content work together: “expressions or expresseds are inserted into or intervene in contents, not to represent them but to anticipate them or move them back, slow them down or speed them up, separate or combine them, delimit them in a different way” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 86). Because expression does not represent content, there is no primacy between expression and content. Both are inseparable from a movement of one to the next and both continually pass into one another. They vary in proportion and enunciation, respectively, and there is a continuous “parceling of the two, a manner in which expressions are inserted into contents, in which we ceaselessly jump from one register to another, in which signs are at work in things themselves just as things extend into or are deployed through signs” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 87). That is not to say that ‘language is everything’ or that ‘everything is linguistic’ – rather, the fact that signs are at work in things and things are deployed through signs allows us to say that language can *do something*. It has efficacy, power, capacities: the world is e/affected by/determines language (just as much as it e/affects/is determined by
language). The form of expression gives the form of content materiality and the form of content gives the form of expression efficacy in the world.

This is the root of the power that Deleuze wants to grant language: the capacity to stutter. He writes:

...when the author is content with an external marker that leaves the form of expression intact ("he stuttered..."), its efficacy will be poorly understood unless there is a corresponding form of content — an atmospheric quality, a milieu that acts as the conductor of words — that brings together within itself the quiver, the murmur, the stutter, the tremolo, or the vibrato, and makes the indicated affect reverberate through the words. (Deleuze 1997, 108)

When we’re talking about the form of expression and the form of content of a text, they seem identical. But the form of expression is ‘he stuttered’. Content was defined above as any ‘formed’ body – so it’s odd that Deleuze would call a form of content an ‘atmosphere’, since that calls to mind some kind of formless ‘mist’ or ‘aura’ rather than tangible content. What makes sense to me is that the form of content is actually the ‘language itself’ that stutters – the system that’s in disequilibrium, but that’s no more abstract than the concrete words/text itself.

When the form of expression and form of content inhere in one another, an incorporeal transformation is affected: something happens (some thing is expressed). So what incorporeal transformation is expressed by ‘he stuttered’ and what bodies does it intervene on? The bodies at stake are the words themselves and the incorporeal transformation is to inject the words with an affect that makes them stutter. The writer is like the judge that says, ‘You’re guilty': “Kafka...confirms Gregor’s squeaking through the trembling of his feet and the oscillations of his body” (Deleuze 1997, 108). Gregor doesn’t have a stammer - Gregor is a bug. He cannot speak.
But, then again, there is no Gregor. There is only the text, only words that can squeak or tremble or oscillate. And so we’ve moved on from dialogical markers and into a saying-as-doing: an affect of stuttering distinct from characters’ affectations and dispersed ‘as an atmosphere’ through the text itself.

The affect dispersed is an affect of intensity – an intense expression (or an expression of tension) and tense relations between contents. Creating this intense atmosphere is the first movement of stuttering. Form of expression and form of content work together to produce an intensity about the text – a tension inserted by and into the language itself. Intensity, for Deleuze, depends on variation and difference. In Difference and Repetition, intensity is the characteristic of an encounter – namely, the encounter between the virtual and the actual (when something passes from the virtual to the actual). Actualization, for Deleuze, works neither by representation and identity (“I am $x$”), nor by negation (“I am not-$x$”), but by differentiation (“$dx$” or “$n-1$”). Difference is the medium through which and by which and into which something happens (an ‘event’, a genesis), and that medium is characterized by intensity.

What ‘tenses’ language is not a particular phrase or syllable that could be relied on and inserted over and over again for the same e/affect. Says Deleuze: The tensor$^{25}$, therefore, is not reducible either to a constant or a variable, but assures the variation of the variable by subtracting in each instance the value of the constant ($n-1$)” (Deleuze 1987, 99). Tension and intensity are neither particular constants nor variables, but the quality of difference itself (taken in the Deleuzian sense: ontologically). In stuttering, intensity is generated through differentiation.

---

$^{25}$ In literary theory, generally: “tension has been located wherever opposing forces, impulses or meanings could be distinguished and related to one another. (Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms, 236)” The push-and-pull of the form of expression pole and the form of content pole create this tense atmosphere.
Take the example of Lewis Carroll’s portmanteau word: “frumious”. Neither “furious” nor “fuming” nor the simple combination of the two, frumious gives us the word that erupts out of an attempt to express the experience of being two things at once, two variations that don’t cancel one another out or subsume one another. Though it’s unclear, maybe, what “frumious” denotes, manifests, or signifies, the sense of this particular portmanteau word can be felt. Affected. Something happens when we say, “frumious.” The form of expression (“furious” + “fuming” = “frumious”) is made from refusing to choose or exclude. The form of content (a intense, disjunctive atmosphere) is made from combining furious and fuming without reducing one to the other. “Frumious” is disjunctive because it goes in both directions at once, equally, simultaneously. Being disjunctive, says Deleuze, “exceeds the possibilities of speech and attains the power of the language, or even of the language in its entirety” (Deleuze 1997, 109). Because only one direction can be said at once (furious or fuming), the eruption of ‘frumious’ points to the double-direction that the system is pulled in and answerable to – the stuttering and disjunction that grounds our capacity to make exclusionary choices in speech (actuality) and the linguistic system in its virtual multiplicity.

**Decomposing language: the metaphysical register**

In Luca and Carroll, it seems to me that the role of the writer-as-decider still retains some of its efficacy, even if it seems like they are trying to decenter the ‘everybody says’ away from its dependence on the personal. “Je t’aime passionnément” feels like it needs Luca’s influence to stutter (it needs him to wrestle with the choices and combinations, because it is ultimately ‘his’ passion that is expressed). In something like Beckett’s texts, however, we get closer to the idea that language itself is at stake. Deleuze says that Beckett stutters by letting loose ‘zones of
vibration’ and ‘differential positions’. Let’s return to that earlier discussion of differentiation to see how this happens.

Differential positions mark changes that determine the function of a series or system. Deleuze takes this definition from differential calculus (which studies the rates at which quantities change), where differentiation is the process by which a mathematician discovers the rate of change near a specified point on a line. Differential positions, for Deleuze, are importantly different from ‘identities’ (either \( x \) or not-\( x \)) because they mark a process of change – a becoming. Differential positions are dynamic. They are sites of transition and affect.

Differential positions relate and shift in zones of variation/vibration – they affect and are affected by one another. What this means for language is that its terms, its constants, are just relatively static differential positions. Constants are not opposed to variables, but are simply variables put to certain uses. Writes Deleuze:

The linguist Guillaume, for example, considers each term of a language not as a constant in relation to other constants, but as a series of differential positions or points of view on a specifiable dynamism: the indefinite article a covers the entire zone of variation included in a movement of particularization, and the definite article the covers the entire zone generated by the movement of generalization. (Deleuze 1997, 108-9)

To place this claim on Guillaume might seem odd, considering that what Guillaume was looking for (in his own words): “comes from the great Meillet, who wrote that ‘a language involves a system where everything fits together and has a wonderfully rigorous design.’ This insight has been the guide and continues to be the guide of the studies pursued here” (Guillaume 1984, 3). Like Meillet and Saussure before him, it seems like Guillaume must have needed a constant and reliable system of language at the root of his analyses. Perhaps what Deleuze likes about
Guillaume’s search for the genesis of the ‘proper’ uses of ‘a’ and ‘the’ is that it’s rooted in what Guillaume calls the pre-conscious mind of speakers, rather than in a system that is ahistorical or pre-historical. Guillaume’s “psychosystem” makes allowances for the give and take of speakers reacting to one another in conversation. This produces variable mini-systems, perhaps as speech jumps back and forth between particularization and generalization, for example. Articles, in this case, are not constant, but relatively stable variables, depending on their use.

Another of Deleuze’s examples of linguistic differentiation is Roussel’s shifting phonemes: most notably /p/ and /b/. Once actualized, /p/ and /b/ enter into differential relations that reciprocally determine one another by their differences. In an individual language (French, for example), that means that those relations structure the pattern of how those phonemes work (what they can do, what other phonemes they can relate to, etc.). However, that also means that those differential relations determine /p/ and /b/ as zones of variation/vibration – as dynamic positions of change. It means that Roussel can begin a story with the sentence: “Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard/The white letters on the cushions of the old billiard table” and end with the sentence “Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux pillard/letters [written by] a white man about the hordes of the old plunderer” and that the shift from /b/ to /p/ can pass through a whole host of possibilities in between. The letters form a series of differential positions in differential relations that allow for dynamism.

26 Though reciprocal relations aren’t foreign to linguistics (the science – see: Reinhart, T. and E. Reuland on “reflexivity,” or Chomsky or Pollard on “binding”). What is different here is that, given the right conditions, differential relations can occur between anything – not simply what the chart of the universal set of linguistic constants dictates or predicts.

27 In this case, a whole host of French possibilities in between. This doesn’t really work in an English translation. But the idea is that there are differential relations and zones of variation that make up language itself, not just French.
Although pushing language to its limit is the ‘third’ movement of stuttering, here we get the first inkling of language pushed to its limit (where it affects and is affected by what’s not language). Roussel strains language in a very textual way, with phonemes and words and a story. But, Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

…when one submits linguistic elements to a treatment producing continuous variation, when one introduces an internal pragmatics into language, one is necessarily led to treat nonlinguistic elements such as gestures and instruments in the same fashion, as if the two aspects of pragmatics joined on the same line of variation, in the same continuum.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 98)

Well, of course the two aspects of pragmatics (linguistic elements and nonlinguistic elements) are joined on the same line of variation. We have already seen how a form of expression (“he stuttered”) inheres in a form of content (a stuttering atmosphere) to affect an incorporeal transformation in a body (in that case, a text).

But we can imagine the first movement of stuttering (straining) happening to a nonlinguistic body, too. In fact, Deleuze cites Beckett’s characters as stuttering bodies. According to Deleuze, Beckett affects differential positions in his characters’ bodies by:

…laying out and passing through the entire set of possibilities. Hence, in *Watt*, the ways in which Knott puts on his shoes, moves about his room, or changes his furniture. It is true that, in Beckett, these affirmative disjunctions usually concern the bearing or gait of the characters: an ineffable manner of walking, while rolling and pitching. (Deleuze 1997, 111)

Mr. Knott is an especially weird case of disjunction, because Mr. Knott is not. He’s not present, but not absent, either. He doesn’t speak, but he is expressed by his bodily comportment and by
the house itself. He traces himself as he drifts in and out of the house and garden, but in each
description – all we get is a vague outline. “In the room, passably lit by the moon, and large
numbers of stars, Mr. Knott continued, apparently very much as usual, to lie, kneel, sit, stand and
walk, to utter his cries, mutter and be silent” but “of Mr. Knott [Watt] could not speak” (Beckett
1953, 177). It doesn’t get much more ‘ineffable’ than that. Beckett’s other characters: Malloy,
whose pockets fill and empty with rotating ‘sucking stones’ as they move to and from his mouth;
Clov, in Endgame, who painfully draws and opens curtains, comes and goes, covers and
uncovers lids and sheets, moves and replaces ladders, and cannot sit down; the vagrants in
Waiting for Godot who pass the time by trying desperately to make something happen while they
remain in place, varying wildly between hope and desperation.

Think about what it must be like to see these characters move – it must look like they’re
trying to go in two (or more) directions at once, but failing, and lurching about in some direction
or other instead. In Malloy’s case, the stones appear and disappear as his hands move cyclically
(will he take this one or that one?). In Clov’s case, his legs are deteriorating on the spot with no
reprieve (will he sit, stand, or move on?). In the vagrant’s case, there is the tension between
staying and going (what if Godot should appear while they’re gone?). These movements are
definitely not ‘progressive’, and not a matter of choice. In fact, the issue is that there is no choice
to be made – put another way, the bodies are trying to affirm more than one choice at the same
time, in the same body. It should be physically impossible to walk in this manner.

And yes, these are characters in a text (and so hardly ‘nonlinguistic’), but many of
Beckett’s texts are also plays that feature ‘real’ human bodies that stutter. And we already know
that a form of expression (linguistic) can intervene on a form of content (nonlinguistic) and
produce something (an incorporeal transformation). Furthermore, says Deleuze, in Beckett:
…[the particular movements of the characters] is how the transfer from the form of expression to a form of content is brought about. But we could equally well bring about the reverse transition by supposing that the characters speak like they walk or stumble, 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.

(Deleuze 1997, 111)

Beckett sets loose the difference that subtends language – the differentiation that makes language possible: namely, the differentiation between the absurd ‘noise’ of bodies and speaking. But Beckett brings bodies and speech ‘together again’ (or shows how they are together all along) by straining language – making it stutter.

Because Beckett’s characters don’t (always) stutter when they speak, it might seem odd to characterize what they’re doing as ‘stuttering’ – why that and not ‘stumbling’, ‘fidgeting’, or ‘oscillating’? Perhaps we could use those words, if we’re also comfortable using them to describe how language works. Because the point, with Beckett, is not that language and bodies are opposed to one another, or that one determines the other (i.e.: as if only stuttering speech could allow us to call someone a ‘stutterer’). Rather, language is inscribed in bodies and bodies are affected by language – they work together in particular assemblages, without a hierarchy between them, and co-constitute the movement of that assemblage. Hamm (unable to stand) and Clov (unable to sit) – their hesitations (in speech and movement) are not determined solely by their bodies or solely by their language. Their predicaments are shot through with lines of illness, psychosis, apocalypse, opposition, dependency, family, tragedy, comedy, hope, despair… as these lines converge, they shape the style (map) of the assemblage and determine the movements (physical and linguistic) that are possible for Hamm and Clov (as well as their lines of flight).
Before moving on to the second procedure that makes language stutter, we should pause and ask: if Deleuze is a “philosopher of immanence,” why would he insist that we decompose language (and the Image of Thought/Language)? Why insist that we disrupt it, why not make an attempt to smooth over any disturbances and unify a new Image of Thought/Language (as Badiou seems to suggest that Deleuze does all along, when he calls Deleuze a philosopher of ‘the One’)? If “the univocity of Being signifies…that it is said in one and the same ‘sense’ of everything of which it is said” (Deleuze 1969, 179), then why wouldn’t a ‘decomposed’ language reveal a homogenous system of constants ‘at the bottom’?

There has been some scathing backlash to Badiou’s Clamor of Being (see especially: Roffe’s Badiou’s Deleuze) that do a far more thorough job of countering these questions than I can do here (even with more space, Deleuze’s ontology is not my main area of research and therefore not my specialty). For now, let it be enough to say that Deleuze’s interest in immanence is to oppose it to philosophies of transcendence that would ground identities in principles ‘outside’ of themselves (the human grounded in God or consciousness grounded in the mind, for example). In the Logic of Sense, Deleuze looks for a linguistic counterpart to this ontological immanence. He notes that the circle of the proposition (denotation, manifestation, signification) is a vicious circle – each condition is, in turn, conditioned by what it claims to condition (is it speech, language, or truth that is the ground? In logic, it is truth. In speech, it is the denoting “I”. In language, it is significance. Taken from different points of view, each could be the ground for the others). To break this cycle and its loopy dependence on a transcendent ground, Deleuze proposes a fourth dimension: sense. Sense would be the “expressed” of the proposition – a pure, ideational event without physical or mental existence but which ‘subsists’ in the proposition. Sense is an ungrounded condition for possibility – immanent
in the proposition but not transcendent to it. Sense is the same thing that is said of everything that is said.

And yet, sense is not a smooth surface from which language and thought spring. In the latter part of *Logic of Sense*, we discover a dynamic genesis – sense is born alongside the push-and-pull of pure bodily noise and the forces that would seek to organize that noise into propositions. The system of language is volatile, even if sense is immanent throughout, and decomposing language reveals the constant, consistent, and creative push-and-pull between bodies ‘beneath’ the surface of sense and the organization of propositions ‘above’ the surface. That push-and-pull generates tension, difference, and sense. And so the answer to the question, “why not just smooth language over, rather than decompose it?” is: you cannot. To smooth it over would be to fossilize the dynamic genesis of sense: to express the Same again and again rather than expressing difference again and again (and anew).

**Decomposing Language: Summary**

In the first movement (decomposing language), stuttering happens: 1. on the linguistic register by working on or playing with choices and combinables (Luca); 2. on the stylistic level in affirming disjunctions (composing portmanteau words, say, like “frumious”); and 3. on the metaphysical level as the system of language is revealed to be a system in disequilibrium, actualized by differentiation.

In the first movement, it’s fairly obvious that the writer is in some way ‘responsible’ for making language stutter (either by selecting/combining, in the case of Luca, or ‘setting loose’, in the case of Beckett). This is especially evident when we consider that the way to make language stutter seems to be by inventing new ways of inserting forms of expression into forms of content. But it’s too easy, and not at all in line with phenomenological accounts of what the writing
process is like, to assume that an authoritative author figure stands alone at the root of a language that stutters. The writer can ‘make’ language stutter, but she does so by releasing an affective power already present in an understanding of language as a system in disequilibrium. Language itself stutters - writers allow themselves to be affected by that (or find ways to capture stable points). The first way to make language stutter – decomposing language - is an issue of affirmation (like most everything else in Deleuze): affirming variable disjunctions and combinations, and affirming that the writer is not in total control of the system in disequilibrium that she links up with.

Second Movement: Deterritorializing Language

If the first movement made language tense, the second movement pushes language down an intense line of becoming. The first movement put the Image of Language in a position to be uprooted and disturbed it by revealing the differentiation already at work in the system of language; the second movement will carry the Image of Language away and dissolve it in the process, as language approaches its limit (the thresholds between language and ‘everything else’). Deleuze calls this second movement the process of ‘deterritorialization’: a procedure of taking everyday concepts, thoughts, bodies, and languages, and putting them to new uses.

Deterritorializing language: the linguistic register

Syntax is typically understood as the set of rules that govern sentence structure (Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms 233-5)\textsuperscript{28}. Chomsky’s generative grammar, for example, looks at the form of sentences to discover whether or not they conform to a model of innate human language that would allow the sentence to have the ‘proper’ grammatical form allowable

\textsuperscript{28} Recall that Deleuze is trying to push our understanding of the system of language from the linguistic and into the literary. As a result, his definition of syntax will look much more like a definition found in literary theory, and much less like the definition a linguist or philosopher of language might use.
for a particular natural language. Other grammars involve grounding structure on “noun phrase” and/or “verb phrase” relations or formulas that determine where in the rest of a sentence a verb should look for its object (for example), or even connectionist theories of language that have roots in neural network research. These investigations, although interesting, are concerned with syntax as form only (and not form-of-expression – just form).

Pragmatics sees syntax informing (and, to greater or lesser extents, determining) meaning. We can think of syntax as determining a proposition’s meaning according to the laws of linguistic space and time (in English, for example, a proposition makes more and more sense as it’s said or read ‘left-to-right’, as we get more information and context). In this way, syntax is the physics of language: it organizes linguistic structures and governs their behavior and relations. If syntax is ‘form’ (the structure of units of language) and semantics is ‘content’ (the meaning generated by the relations between signifiers), then we already know that these concepts are not opposed: that there is a form of expression and a form of content. Not only are these concepts not opposed, they carry no punch unless they’re taken together. And so syntax must inhere in semantics (and, for Deleuze, vice versa).

*The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* asks us to note the difference between:

- “She put the book down.”
- “She put down the book.”

In the former, the activity is split. We have to wait for the other shoe to drop, so to speak, in order to know what she did with the book. It takes time to get to the meaning of the proposition because the activity is spread out over the expanse of what is said. Here, semantics has to ‘wait’ for syntax. In the latter, we get activity all at once (its terms are spatially ‘close’), but it takes

---

29 Here, the psychological, neurological/physiological, and phenomenological experience of reading English shape the meaning.
time to learn what’s at stake (not a lot of time, of course, but time nonetheless). Both of these sentences are syntactically acceptable and, in the end, their meaning is clear.

Now, let’s change the object:

• “She put down the book.”
• “She put down the rebellion.”
• “She put down the dog.”

What’s at stake here is a change in the meaning of “put down”: the subject of the sentence either “placed,” “quelled,” or “killed” something. It takes time to figure out what happened and to whom/what. But our uncertainty is fleeting and resolved because all of these propositions adhere to laws of syntax. If we wait the appropriate amount of time, the sentence will cover its syntactic ground and we’ll ‘eventually’ know what it means.

Take this case, though (a fake and possibly ineffectual version of e.e. cummings’ “he danced his did”):

• “She downed her put.”

What can we make of that, syntactically and semantically? First, the spacing is off. “Put” should be in proximity with “down,” and it should be first. To “down put” or “downed put” something doesn’t make sense (in either the “placed,” “quelled,” or “killed” context we saw before). Second, the timing is off, in two senses: on the one hand, “downed” is an attempt at past tense but it’s acting on the wrong word – unless she “downed” a drink, but the presence of “put” indicates that it’s not what’s going on. On the other hand, at the end of the ‘sentence’, we’re still waiting for the other shoe to drop. We don’t have a proper object and we’re left in limbo. This sentence is absolutely against the rules, and therefore doesn’t generate fully coherent meaning.

Actually, this sentence is against the rules as long as you don’t try to recreate it from the
other things it could be (“She put down object x,” “She put object x down,” etc. etc). According to the Image of Thought/Language, we can still make quite a lot of sense from “She downed her put” because it is the “atypical expression” that is “produced by the successive correct forms” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 99). The Image of Thought/Language put what’s ‘correct’, ‘reasonable’, ‘sensible’, and ‘unerring’ at the root of systems of thought and language. But for Deleuze, the typical and the atypical happen on the same plane: “The atypical expression constitutes a cutting edge of deterritorialization of language, it plays the role of tensor; in other words, it causes language to tend toward the limit of its elements, forms, or notions, toward a near side or a beyond of language” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 99). What’s ‘normal’ and what’s ‘abnormal’ are co-constitutive of one another, and what is atypical is part of the system of language itself, even if we can’t make sense of it according to the rules that govern the major language.

Luckily, Deleuze means something more by ‘syntax’ than: “rules that govern sentence structure” and even more than “rules that govern sentence structure for the sake of producing meaning.” Here is Lecercle again: “We are moving from an extensive account of language (as system of places creating semantic values) to an intensive account (where the linguistic sequence is a site for affects, where iconicity is as important as system)” (Lecercle 2002, 242). In other words, where the form of a sign (it’s iconicity) is no longer arbitrary. We are moving to an ‘image’ of language in which: forms of expression inhere in forms of content, affect arises directly from language, meaning is not arbitrary but plastic, and variations of signs and variations of meanings are as important as a whole system that is in disequilibrium.

Plastic syntax will allow for shifts in the temporality and spatiality of language, by allowing affect to speed things up, slow things down, inject silences, disjunctions: “It is no
longer the formal or superficial syntax that governs the equilibrium of language, but a syntax in
the process of becoming, a creation of syntax that gives birth to a foreign language within
language, a grammar of disequilibrium” (Deleuze 1997, 112). Foreign language within language
will be important for the third register of deterritorializing language. On the linguistic register,
we can note how we can use ‘normal’ syntax in strange ways. It’s not that Luca and Carroll
completely dismiss syntax, understood as a set of grammatical rules. But they play with those
rules and, in doing so, push and pull those rules, put them to use in other contexts, and make
those rules work in different ways. If the rule is, “you must choose,” Carroll says, “I choose both
at once.” In doing so, Lecercle says, Carroll adopts a literary syntax – a plastic syntax open to
and subject to variation that (scientifically) linguistic syntax (that would operate according to the
Image of Language) refused.

**Deterritorializing language: the stylistic register**

In “He Stuttered,” Deleuze gives a few examples of writers who fiddle with syntax in
order to deterritorialize language – to make it stutter. These writers insert repetitions, digressions,
and ‘zones of vibration’ into their texts, respectively. Immediately, these insertions seem
comparable to characteristics of clinical stuttering. Repetition of syllables, for example, makes a
word disjointed and decomposed. Digression (understood as starting to say one word but
switching to another) points to an open-endedness of meaning and a stopping-and-starting.
Repetition and digression overlap with the two stutterings that language itself is subject to:
choices and combinables, respectively. Repetition is a response to not choosing the ‘right’ word,
once and for all. Digression embodies the non-progressive flow of language as a system in
disequilibrium, where meaning and sense are subject to continuous variation. Here’s what this
looks like, according to Deleuze in “He Stuttered.”
In an article in the New Criterion, Roger Kimball writes about Péguy this way:

In both his poetry and his prose, Péguy favored repetition. A word, a line, an image would be taken up over and over again, slightly varied, often repeated outright. His style was at once accretive, like a pearl, and relentless, like a tidal wave. It doesn’t work for everyone. When François Mauriac was told that someone was translating *Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d’Arc* into English, he said “What a pity someone does not translate him into French. (Kimball 2001)

Here, we get a good idea of what Péguy’s work sounds like and a wry (but apropos) remark about how he managed to seem like a foreigner in his own language. Because Péguy’s text is so full of repetition, his translators have often taken liberties and cut a lot of his prose down to ‘what matters’, such that: “Péguy is mostly known—to the extent that he is known at all—as the author of one-liners” (Kimball 2011). The shame in this is that the repetition is integral to ‘what matters’. Péguy’s repetition creates an atmosphere of subtle urgency – a tension that creeps up on you as affects and concepts are stated and restated, looped, repeated.

In his personal and political life, Péguy reacted strongly and negatively to ‘modern rationalism’ and the pervading notion that interest or investment could be calculated. “We live…necessary corrective” (Kimball). By injecting his writing with repetition, Péguy affected a stutter in the major language that would require a writer to weigh each word or phrase carefully.

---

30 To me, Péguy’s writing reads much like what one hears when one tunes into a radio or television preacher. He seems to repeat words and phrases for emphasis – and the same general idea over and over in successive sentences. For me, this echoes the cadence and rhythm of a sermon (though Péguy was Catholic and I’m primarily thinking of Evangelical and Baptist preachers, here, who tend to speak from the heart, rather than the Book – so to say). Here is a sample at random from *Clio I:* “To explain a disaster (rationally, I mean), and the word ‘disaster’ must be used, I do not say a disaster of that degree, but a disaster of that order, a fault of the same order must have been committed. To explain such a disaster, a mystical disaster, a disaster in the mystique, a fault of mystique must have been committed” (Péguy 1958, 101).
and select the ‘right’ one (rationalism, on the contrary, would require that there could be only one, since its choices operate by exclusion). Repetition, for Péguy, was an injection of affective passion that defied the demand to make such choices and affirmed proliferation.

Deleuze writes: “In Péguy, stuttering embraces the language so well that it leaves the words intact, complete, and normal, but it uses them as if they were themselves the disjointed and decomposed members of a superhuman stuttering” (Deleuze 1997, 111). Péguy doesn’t say the same thing in the same way over and over again. There’s variation in his repetition – difference behind it all. And the progress is minoritizing in the way it loops forward and backward on itself. Péguy ‘progresses’ through a series of concepts, but according to a stuttering that governs the motion. It’s not ‘stop/start’ but ‘again/again1/again2...’.

Roussel’s digression tactic is best explained with his own words, since he wrote a book called, *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* in order to reveal the complex composition at work in his ‘novels’:

I chose two similar words. For example *billard* (billiard) and *pillard* (looter). Then I added to it words similar but taken in two different directions, and I obtained two almost identical sentences thus. The two sentences found, it was a question of writing a tale that can start with the first and finish by the second. Amplifying the process then, I sought new words reporting itself to the word billiards, always to take them in a different direction than that which was presented first of all, and that provided me each time a creation moreover. (Roussel 1977, 3)

Roussel is describing the procedure he used to write a short story – a procedure that moves in “two different directions” at once! The digression from *billard* to *pillard*, on the one hand, and from *pillard* back to *billard* on the other gives the tale two equally important registers that both
DELEUZE’S “STUTTERING”

subtend and bookend the entire text. Maybe this explanation makes Roussel sound more ‘sane’ than he really was. So note this: you can add to his list of digressions not just a novel that digresses from one point, through a whole host of seemingly unrelated points, and finally to a variation on its original point – you can add to his list of digressions the fact that he needed to write another book to explain the digressions of the first book.

In the case of Péguy, language stuttered because (as Lecercle says) “the same element occupied more than one place, through the repetition that prevented stasis” (Lecercle 2002, 242). Péguy made the “constants” of language stutter by straining what they could denote and express. By repeating, Péguy at once amplifies what constants are capable of (by placing them and replacing them in slightly variable positions) and shows the limitation of a major language founded constants. Place is what matters, here – the constants of language stutter because they are ‘out of place’ in the sense of occupying too many places, over and over. Repetition ‘de-territorializes’, quite literally, by multiplying acceptable numbers of places (territories).

In the case of Roussel, language stutters because (as Lecercle says) “no element is fixed in its place, each element occupies a zone of variation, a place the position of which is not constant” (Lecercle 2002, 242). Roussel makes constants stutter by deterritorializing them – this time by extracting them from their territories (or positions or places) and putting them to use in other territories, where they might not ‘normally’ belong. /p/ and /b/ are not constant in their “-illard” words, but further: their variation threatens the system of the major language with deterritorialization, since just the subtle shift from /p/ to /b/ is enough to change the meaning of a word, change the meaning of a sentence, and to e/affect the production of an entire story.

Notice that Deleuze doesn’t present us with the strangest things that have ever been written. He doesn’t point to any Dadaists. Or to someone like Jonathan Safran Foer, the novelist
whose most recent book, *Tree of Codes*, was made by physically cutting out most of the words of Bruno Schulz’s *Street of Crocodiles*, resulting in a new story made of fragments of sentences, visible underneath missing strips from the previous pages. No, Deleuze wants to do philosophy with a fine file, not a sledgehammer (or a pair of scissors, in Foer’s case). While someone like Derrida probably approves of Foer’s shenanigans (if *Glas* is any indication), Deleuze and Guattari would shudder. They call deterritorialization the “art of dosages” – of knowing precisely how much and when deterritorialization is necessary (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 160). They want “small rations,” “small supplies,” and “mimic[s]” of normal things. They don’t want us to fly off the handle or to deterritorialize too much or too quickly. In *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze’s most heroic deterritorializer is the boring Bartleby whose revolutionary cry is the dull: “I prefer not to.”

I suppose I see the value in these cautions. I’m certainly not interested in having my favourite artists and philosophers condemned to a psych ward as schizophrenics, just because they pushed their creativity too far. Or for them not be able to manage how they are affected, how open they are to lines of flight, and to perish by their own deterritorialization (through suicide, say). It would certainly be frustrating to have any creative force that seems “too weird” be ignored or stifled, or worse. But I side with Derrida and *Glas* on the issue of pushing stylistic deterritorialization as far as possible, using sometimes violent and interruptive tools (like scissors or a sledgehammer) – or even techniques that get called “inscrutable” or “obscure” or “dizzying”. I don’t think that someone like Foer (or Mark Z. Danielewski, author of *House of Leaves*, that uses similar “tricks” in typeface and abnormal page orientation) should be excluded from the list of stutterers. If stuttering only operated in this manner, then perhaps it could be dismissed as a fun gimmick of the saying-without-doing type. But *Tree of Codes* and *House of*
Leaves and Glas: they still have syntax, they still have semantics, they still have pragmatic use. There are forms of expression (meaning/voice) and corresponding forms of content (social function/affect). They are not, ultimately, that “weird.” Just because they are visibly deterritorialized does not mean that they don’t work. As we will see below, even the traditionally un-subtle genre of pop music can make language stutter.

**Deterritorializing language: the metaphysical register**

In “He Stuttered,” Deleuze calls stuttering “a minor use of a major language” (Deleuze 1997, 109). Lots of Deleuze scholars have poured ink into describing major and minor languages – usually, as Deleuze did, by referencing Kafka or situating the concept in politics. It’s true: the idea of a major language is the linguistic version of a political model of homogenization, centralization, standardization, power, and dominance (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 101). And, as it is with political power, ‘major’ here doesn’t necessarily mean ‘quantitatively more’ (Deleuze points out that men – the major sex, the power-holders – are grossly outnumbered by those that are minor in relation to them: animals, women, children, etc.). A major language is not necessarily a ‘mother tongue’ or a particular language, either (British English, for example). Rather, it is the dominant form of expression and an organizing principle. It establishes the territory ‘proper’ to language: constants, grammaticality, signification, and subjectification (the author, reader, speaker, writer, etc.), to name a few. “No one is supposed to be ignorant of grammaticality,” write Deleuze and Guattari, “those who are belong in special institutions. The unity of language is fundamentally political” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 101). That seems a bit dramatic – the government didn’t lock e. e. cummings up for penning, “he danced his did.” That’s because cummings was not at all “ignorant of grammaticality” – he knew the rules in order to know how to break them. “One needs to know in relation to what major language it
[agrammaticality, dialect, or minority] exercises its function,” say Deleuze and Guattari. The major and minor are non-oppositional. Both are uses of the same system of language: Deleuze’s system in continuous variation.

There are many ways to dominate, to form a major language. But they all have the same function: to extract constants from the system of variables and impose them as ‘universal’. All major languages express the same thing: “everybody says.” Major languages organize, delimit, and standardize a homogenous system of language. “It is a question of extracting a set of constants from the variables, or of determining constant relations between variables…” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 101). The major is not a different language than the one Deleuze proposes. It is a possible treatment of language, but a treatment that stifles variation on purpose.31

Even the minor is subject to ‘rules’, however. If the major extracts constants, the minor is a “regulated, continuous, immanent process of variation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 103) that works on the same language and the same constants to set them free again. Though American English is not THE major language, it functions as one in relation to Black English. But Black English works on American English according to its own grammaticality. Because of this feature, the minor always runs the risk of succumbing to too much consistency and getting reterritorialized by the major.

It’s fairly easy, while you’re devouring Deleuze and Guattari, to read an amount of normativity into the major/minor distinction. You could (conceivably) organize lots of Deleuzian

31 Deleuze and Guattari seem to charge Chomsky, more than anyone else, of treating language this way. And they find him fascist, for it: “…the scientific model taking language as an object of study is one with the political model by which language is homogenized, centralized, standardized, becoming a language of power, a major or dominant language…Chomsky’s trees establish constant relations between power variables” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 101).
concepts according to the dichotomy of “what he likes” (left) and “what he doesn’t” (right). It might look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Minor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stasis</td>
<td>Becoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constants</td>
<td>Variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocks</td>
<td>Flows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized</td>
<td>Schizo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those lists could go on and on. But they would prove futile for understanding how those concepts relate to one another (and how they work together). I took a graduate course once with a professor who lectured for three hours straight. On the last day of the semester, in the last five minutes of the last class, he looked up from his notes (surprised, it seemed, to find 20 other bodies in the room) and asked, “Any questions?” One student raised his hand and said, “…so, are we all just supposed to be schizophrenics, then?” That question, premised on the idea that Deleuze wants to reduce thought to a set of dichotomies: one side ‘better’ than the other, is to miss the point entirely. It’s true that Deleuze writes about ‘odd-balls’ (Artaud, Roussel…) but he and Guattari also strongly caution against favouring the schizophrenic over the ‘sane’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1977).

In fact, there would be no minor without the major – so what sense would it make to strive to eliminate the major altogether (never mind that you can’t)? Instead, we should consider how these concepts relate to one another and what their interaction makes possible. It seems to me that the major, as an organizing principle, sets constraints – and it does so to greater or lesser degrees. The minor works within constraints, set by the major, to push boundaries, rework limitations, disrupt what’s ‘accepted’, and potentially change what counts as major. But the
minor doesn’t appear from nowhere. The major is relatively static, but not infertile: though it often reads and gets called ‘fascist’, it provides the materials and context that spur the creation of the minor. The major, as a set of organizational constraints, operates to greater or lesser degrees, speeds and slownesses, closedness and openness. It can be as seemingly innocuous as reading from left to right or as politically and racially charged as requiring voter IDs in the rural, Southern United States (which is based on a level of literacy and economic means not available to a great number of African Americans). Similarly, the minor gets put to different uses, to greater or lesser ‘effectiveness’.

Major and minor are both objectively definitive states. But there is a third: a movement between them (thought only in one direction) that Deleuze calls becoming-minor. “The problem is not the distinction between major and minor language; it is one of a becoming. It is a question not of reterritorializing oneself on a dialect or patois but of deterritorializing the major language” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 104). If there is a major territory and a minor territory that strains the boundaries of the former, then becoming-minor is the deterritorializing process that affects the major territory. It is also where stuttering happens. Stuttering is a minor use, Deleuze said. Stuttering is not a minor state, but the process of minoritization.

A major use of stuttering might be: the kind of stuttering we hear in Hollywood movies that, for decades, has reduced stuttering characters to idiots (even the King’s Speech – which features a prominent stutterer as its lead character - relies on the premise that stuttering is a clinical problem, needing to be fixed). Stuttering as a foible, something to be laughed at or dismayed, stuttering as a stereotype, the kind of stuttering that is limited to speech – these are all major stutterings.
A minor stuttering is tricky because it has ‘success’ (it ‘works’) just as it reterritorializes as acceptable. Though it is a state that pushes the boundaries of the major, it can’t stay minor. It causes a becoming-minor of the major, but loses efficacy once ‘everybody says’ that the minor use is acceptable. On the other hand, stuttering-as-minor-use continuously experiments with major constraints. Let’s look at some examples of minor stuttering.

Most people know David Byrne as the lead for the Talking Heads – a post-punk, Afro-influenced band that skirted the edges of pop by having some videos on early MTV and who staged ‘elaborate’ performances with over-sized suits, art-school movies, and lyrics that (sometimes literally) stopped making sense. Byrne’s book, “How Music Works,” isn’t quite a biography. It’s not quite music history. In the preface, Byrne says:

I have…looked for patterns in how music is written, recorded, distributed, and received – and then asked myself if the forces that fashioned and shaped these patterns have guided my own work…and maybe the work of others as well. One hopes I’m not just talking about myself here! In most cases, the answer is yes; I’m no different than anyone else.

(Byrne 2012, 10)

I think the answer is definitely, “yes” – the patterns Byrne finds in how music works shaped the music he made, insofar as his process and product could be understood as Deleuzian, stuttering, and minor. In the last section of this paper (“Pushing language to its limit: the metaphysical register”), we’ll return to this idea that music and stuttering allows for Byrne (and others) to be importantly and complicatedly “no different than anyone else.” Here, we can read echoes of the idea that patterns in how something works define its assemblage – and the idea that the forces of those patterns guide the writer/musicians (rather than the other way around). Byrne is simply saying: territory (i.e.: relative deterritorialization) matters.
Byrne’s first chapter, “Creation in Reverse,” begins with the “slow-dawning insight” (Byrne 2012, 13) that context largely determines creation. He contrasts the notion that time, place, money, and format matter because they provide liberating constraints to the “conventional wisdom” (Byrne 2012, 13) that figures an artist is some isolated genius churning out “ART” in a vacuum. For Byrne, it matters whether you’re going to play your music in a palace, a symphony hall, outdoors, or at CBGB. It matters whether or not people will dance or sit quietly. It matters whether you want to record your music, and in what format. This might seem like common sense: of course those things matter. But Byrne argues that they don’t often figure into our ideas about how music gets written – and you might even think that an artist that pays attention to those contexts is “fake” or “inauthentic.” Rather than ‘writing from the heart’, paying attention to form and format could be seen as cold and mechanical. Not so, says Byrne:

Of course, passion can still be present. Just because the form that one’s work will take is predetermined and opportunistic (meaning one makes something because the opportunity is there), it doesn’t mean that creation must be cold, mechanical, and heartless. Dark and emotional materials usually find a way in, and the tailoring process – form being tailored to fit a given context – is largely unconscious, instinctive. …Opportunity and availability are often the mother of invention. (Byrne 2012, 13)

The fact that space, place, time, and audience dictate (to some extent) what’s created just means that context matters – and as contexts change, so do creations and creative processes. It means that every creation is collaborative (with the human and otherwise) and that contextual ‘constraints’ can be productive instead of restrictive.

We can think of the major as a set of constraints and the minor as the creative forces that allow minoritization to push/pull those constraints. In music, there is usually a rhythmic ‘grid’
that determines a beat. You might assume (as I did) that playing exactly to the beat is essential to making a particular song sound ‘right’. Byrne says, though:

A good singer will often use the ‘grid’ of the rhythm as something to play with – never landing exactly on a beat, but pushing and pulling around and against it in ways that we read, when it’s well done, as being emotional. It turns out that not being perfectly aligned with a grid is okay; in fact, sometimes it feels better than a perfectly metric fixed-up version. When Willie Nelson or George Jones sing way off the beat, it somehow increases the sense that they’re telling you the story, conveying it to you, one person to another. (Byrne 2012, 44-45)

In this example, the pushing and pulling of the beat are hardly ‘subversive’. But this shows the plasticity of a certain major rule, and the ease with which a minor idea can ‘infiltrate’ – even if it’s ephemeral and gets subsumed into what’s ‘allowed’. A singer that works with the beat in this way is akin to a poet like Luca, who works with proper syntax as a basis for exposing the virtual variation of that system itself. What Luca does is still obviously poetry – what the singer does is still obviously music. But since we’re moving past the notion that there’s an Image proper to Thought/Language, we could start to think about syntax (the grammar of language or music) as Lecercle does: “a rhythm, rather than a formal code” (Lecercle, 244). A rhythm makes sense, but isn’t necessarily pre-determined and can change over the course of the ‘same’ movement. A rhythm is an organizing principle, a creative constraint, but not a fascist one.

The relation between the beat and singing (in this example) creates disjointedness. There is a pushing-and-pulling, back-and-forth relationship between the major beat and the singer’s minor use of it. Since stuttering is a movement that affects becomings that reveal a system in disequilibrium, it’s possible that (at one time) singing off-beat could count as the type of
stuttering we mean when we say “becoming-minor”. However, since Willie Nelson and George 
Jones both achieved critical success by stuttering in this manner, it’s also possible that this 
particular procedure has lost its effectiveness. As we’ll see below, the thing we can’t forget about 
making-minor and overturning the Image of Language/Thought is that they are ongoing 
processes.

Later in How Music Works, Byrne takes us through a short history of how recording 
technology has influenced popular music – from records to CDs to .mp3s, the way we record and 
disseminate music actually transforms the kinds of music that get created. And those 
technological constraints determine what kinds of music count as major and minor (in the 
Deleuzian sense). Take mixtapes, for example. Writes Byrne, “Mixtapes were a form of potlatch 
– the Native American custom by which a gift given requires that a reciprocal gift be received in 
the future. …Other people’s music – ordered and collected in infinitely imaginative ways – 
became a new form of expression” (Byrne 2012, 112). Mixtapes could be recorded at home, 
made from songs ripped from the radio, LPs, or other tapes, and given to friends or strangers as 
tokens of appreciation or insights into one’s personality or emotional state. Record companies 
hated mixtapes, Byrne says, and there was a huge advertising campaign, similar to the current 
campaign to prevent DVD piracy, to keep people from copying, sharing, and acquiring music 
that they hadn’t paid for.

Mixtapes are part of a minor movement because they allow previously unheard voices 
access to affordable technology for recording, production, and dissemination. In this case, the 
major takes the form of record companies that would try to direct all consumer traffic through 
the acceptable channel: hear music on the radio/live in concert ⇒ purchase music ⇒ encourage 
friends to purchase the same. The minor takes the form of the mixtape that undermines the major
structure. And the movement of becoming-minor occurs as people make decisions about how to create their mixtapes (though a popular pastime, creating a successful mixtape is often quite difficult: see *High Fidelity* by Nick Hornby). The creative process that occurs when one is making a mixtape is characterized by choices, combinables, differentiation, variables, textures, affect, emotion – the mixtape makes anyone an artist, and not simply a relatively passive consumer.

However, says Byrne, as will all becomings-minor:

…There is always a tradeoff. As music gets disseminated, and distinct regional voices find a way to be more widely heard, certain bands and singers (who might be more creative, or possibly have just been marketed by a bigger company) begin to dominate…

This dissemination/homogenization process runs in all directions simultaneously; it’s not just top-down repression of individuality and peculiarity. A recording by some previously obscure backwoods or southside singer can find its way into the ear of a wide public, and an Elvis, Luiz Gonzaga, Woody Guthrie, or James Brown, can suddenly have a massive audience…And then the homogenization process begins again. (Byrne 2012, 112-3)

I don’t know if David Byrne ever read *A Thousand Plateaus*, but I can’t help noticing similarities between the evolution and repercussions of the mixtape and Deleuze and Guattari’s descriptions of how the major and minor work in a given system. Here, Byrne has described a becoming-minor that pushes and pulls the major in new directions, resulting in a reterritorialized minor state and a reshaping of the major into something new (importantly, ‘reterritorialization’ doesn’t mean a return to a previous state: ‘the homogenization process begins again’ or ‘anew’). Our definition of stuttering, as a movement that affects becomings by decomposing,
deterritorializing, and pushing systems to their limits is at work here, especially, in the genesis of
the minor out of the major.

And here, we also see the importance of continuous variation. Record companies are still
fighting against music piracy (less so with mixtapes, now, but definitely with digital music and
especially online), but the proliferation of homemade artists and DIY mixed albums has
dwindled significantly. Rather than a cassette and a tape deck, one needs a more specific set of
physical and technological tools to copy and widely distribute mixes of digital music (audio
editing software, knowledge of the inner workings of audio streaming) – those physical tools are
generally free, but the technological tools are far less ubiquitous than they were in the days of
mixtapes. And so, it might soon be time to find another way of making-minor.

**Deterritorializing Language: Summary**

In this movement (deterritorializing lanugage), stuttering happens: 1. on the linguistic
register by working on or playing with syntax: showing its plasticity through repetition or
digression, for example (Péguy and Roussel); 2. on the stylistic level in a similar way: but this
time at the level of an atmosphere produced by repetition and digression; and 3. on the
metaphysical level as a minor language is developed.

Lecercle writes that the result of making the major language minor:

is another conception of syntax, not as a hierarchy of structures, an architecture of
modules, a system of principles and parameters, but as a line, a `ramified variation', with
its curves, its bends, its deviations. A dynamic line…A syntax neither `superficial' nor
`formal', but *en devenir*, a creative syntax that gives birth to the foreign dialect of
minority within the standard dialect. This syntax is not defined through the stability of a
system of rules, but through its tension towards silence, towards the ineffable, towards the limits of language. (Lecercle 2002, 233)

We’re moving toward uncovering the trajectory of this syntactic ‘line’, at the threshold between the linguistic and the non-linguistic (i.e.: ‘belonging’ to language and ‘otherwise than’ language). As a result of stuttering on the first two registers (linguistic and stylistic), language itself is actually becoming-otherwise as it’s minoritized. Language is a virtual system of differentiation, actualized by an intensive process (first movement) in order to follow (second movement) the line to its limit (third movement). And yet, each of these movements is contained in the others: in the first movement (decomposing language), language was already becoming-minor when Luca refused to choose between two words at the exclusion of one over the other. And language was already pushed to its nonlinguistic limit when Beckett affirmed disjunctions in his characters’ bodily comportment. The line of becoming can be segmented into three ‘parts’ (a straining, a making-minor, and a pushing to the limit) – OR we can see all three movements at stake in every stuttering procedure, making the line of becoming stretch through them all.

**Third Movement: Push Language to Its Limit**

The first movement made language tense. The second movement deterritorialized it. The third movement ‘pushes language to its limits’ – in other words, this stuttering procedure will place language in proximity with the non-linguistic, with what’s ‘outside’ language, to affect a comingling or leaking between systems. ‘Limit’, here, is a threshold. It is not an end, but a divide beyond which language continues to become, but becomes-otherwise. Language takes on the function usually proper to another system (painting or music, say – we’ll look at examples as we outline the three registers of this movement). At the limit, language connects to non-linguistic systems – but just as differentials, disjunctions, and minorities were revealed to be part of the
system of language ‘all along’, so will we find that the ‘outsides’ of language (bodies, painting, music…) were inside language all along.

Write Deleuze and Guattari: “Lines of change or creation are fully and directly a part of the abstract machine. Hjelmslev remarked that a language necessarily includes unexploited possibilities or potentialities and that the abstract machine must include those possibilities or potentialities” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 99). In “He Stuttered,” those possibilities or potentialities are silence, painting, and music. Deleuze claims that language becomes-music, -painting, and –silence when pushed to its limit by a stuttering procedure. He also says that we only get to the limits of language IN language: “words paint and sing, but only at the limit of the path they trace through their divisions and combinations” (Deleuze 1997, 113). Immanent in the linguistic is the non-linguistic: images, pure sounds, bodily movements. How can we think about these overlapping systems and how does a language that stutters function at the threshold between them?

**Pushing language to its limit: the linguistic register**

Though stuttering might have pushed language to its limit by decomposing and deterritorializing syntax to produce a plastic version of syntax, Deleuze says that language at its limit is ‘asyntactic’. Syntax moved from a set of rules that governed form to a “syntax in the process of becoming” (Deleuze 1997, 112) to, now, something agrammatical – “even when it still seems to be so formally” (Deleuze 1997, 112). At its limit, the system of language is no longer organized by syntax – because it’s an assemblage like any other assemblage, language is drawn towards its limits and reorganized by a ‘Body without Organs (BwO)’.

BwO, a term that Deleuze and Guattari borrow from Artaud, refers to a never-completed process of becoming that provides an alternative to the organizational schemas given by systems
that work according to ‘everybody knows’ and ‘everybody says’ (much of psychoanalysis, scientific linguistics, some philosophy, etc.). The BwO is an unattainable, virtual, real state that serves as a polar magnet to your assemblage. As one takes a line of flight, they move ever closer toward their BwO, that central disorganizing principle.

The function of a particular BwO is easier to describe, compared to finding a general, workable definition. In the case of an assemblage of enunciation, a BwO works by drawing language along on a line of flight that would provide an alternative to language’s “central role…in arbitrating truth and reality against madness and the pre-symbolic real” (Deleuze Dictionary 2005, 34). Put another way, a BwO reorganizes language: language still functions as a mode of expression, but not one that privileges recognition, representation, logic, solutions, and the ‘everybody knows/says’. The BwO of an assemblage of enunciation draws language toward the frontier between reason and madness, allowing other modes of expression to slip in. Rather than organizing itself against madness and the pre-symbolic real, language entertains their nonsense. One way to do this is to reinsert the noise of the body into the assemblage of enunciation. Artaud attempted this – he tried to allow ‘pure’ (irrational) sound a place in language proper (traditionally, bodily noises like breaths or cries are heard as unintelligible cacophony that need to be interpreted and codified into words in order to make any sense). By inserting pure sound into language, Artaud folds nonsense into sense. In doing so, he a) reveals language to be a system in disequilibrium (where sense is produced by elements that have no

---

32 “Sense” and “nonsense” for Deleuze don’t refer to “meaning” and “the absence of meaning/absurdity.” Rather, sense is what is expressed in a proposition and nonsense is of two types: 1. a surface nonsense of non-signifying phrases and propositions (portmanteau words, for example) 2. the ‘deep’ nonsense of bodily noise (Deleuze 1969). A BwO pushes language to the limit at which it risks ‘falling back’ into expressing ‘nothing but’ the noise of a body, instead of the sense of a proposition.
sense), drawn along by an intense line of flight towards a BwO and b) takes language (through language) to a bodily, non-linguistic limit.

Here, rather than syntax, language that stutters is organized by affect, not syntax. Affects affect bodies - affects are forces that speed a body up or slow it down or subject it to false starts and interruptions. But the only way affects could work on an assemblage of enunciation like this is if language itself (beyond speech, but also beyond words or signs or the ‘circle of the proposition’) could affect and be affected. Artaud’s stuttering puts language in proximity to a BwO that would reorganize it according to a bodily assemblage.

This final [bodily] limit eventually abandons any grammatical appearance in order to appear in its raw state in Artaud's breath-words: Artaud's deviant syntax, to the extent that it sets out to strain the French language, reaches the destination of its own tension in these breaths or pure intensities that mark a limit of language. (Deleuze 1997, 112)

Deleuze’s example of the asyntactic emerging at the frontier between the linguistic and the nonlinguistic is Antoin Artaud’s breath-words. In his last public reading, “the Story Lived by Artaud Mômo,” Artaud spoke at an audience of 900 people. He began by asking them how he could be ‘truly sincere’ in his presentation…after ranting and raving for hours and hours, his words dissolved into screams, then howls, then breaths before he ran off stage. In all of his work (written and performed, legible and breathy), Artaud attempted to peel away the major language to reveal the flows of intensity ‘underneath’. Artaud strains language so much, makes it so minor, and pushes it to such a drastic limit that it ‘returns’ to the pure intense noise of bodies. In Artaud's words, his work: “takes the gestures and develops them as far as they will go: like the plague it reforges the chain between what is and what is not, between the virtuality of the possible and what already exists in materialized nature” (Artaud 1994, 27).
Artaud is grossly offended by the rules and rigid systematicity of the major language. He sees it controlling his body, just as much as his speech, and so he tries to collapse the distinction between body and language in order to reveal the asyntactic, ungoverned, and affective line of becoming that draws bodies and language along. He says:

I shall not command my desires and inclinations, but neither do I want them to direct me, I want to be those desires and those inclinations, and this of course is difficult in a world which has never ceased to be under the command of the mind, and this to the impairment of the soul and the loss of every body. (Artaud 1976, 446-7)

Though Artaud doesn’t explicitly mention language here, he is actively working against the ‘everybody knows’ that would command his (irrational) desire. We can think of his breath-words as a comparative counter to the ‘everybody says’ that would organize his bodily noise into (rational) speech.

At this point, language that stutters (at the limit or non-linguistic threshold) could very well sound like clinical stuttering. One could just insert breaths, long pauses, gutteral noise, cries, and even facial tics into language and come up with something audibly indistinguishable from the st-st-stuttering of speech or the two ineffectual dialogical markers (saying or doing). But the function of stuttering that reveals language as a system in disequilibrium and thus connected to non-linguistic systems is critical, not clinical. It is literary, not (scientifically) linguistic. Its purpose is to show how something can work, not how it should work according to the Images of Thought/Language. Stuttering at the limit pushes language in proximity to a BwO that radically reshapes language’s possibilities (i.e.: how it has affects and what affects it). In addition to commanding desires and inclinations, language can also give itself over to desires and inclinations, taking on a new power: the power of bodies. The amount that language could
express would increase if we allow for non-linguistic expressions to be included in our assemblage of enunciation.

**Pushing language to its limit: the stylistic register**

Since the writer/speaker is part of the assemblage of enunciation, we should wonder what happens to her as language is drawn toward the limit and the BwO. At the linguistic register, syntax became asyntactic. At the stylistic register, style will become non-style (Deleuze 1997, 112). But recall that ‘style’ refers to the map of becomings and forces at work in an assemblage of enunciation. And this style shapes the writer/speaker. If style becomes non-style (and we’ll see what that means), what happens to the subject that was shaped by that style? To find out, we’ll turn to a case of language at its limit with painting.

Merleau-Ponty calls Cezanne’s work an “approach to painting” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 9); rather than a completed corpus, he says we’re dealing with an attempt, a trial, or an experiment. This approach was marked by fits and starts, insecurities, and the absence of a reliable ‘game plan’. Though Cezanne had goals in mind (Merleau-Ponty says he wanted to paint the world in the act of appearing), Cezanne didn’t seem to have realizable ideas about a) how, exactly, to achieve those goals, or b) how to put those goals and the processes he used to try to reach them into words. Cezanne made attempts at painting and at describing his painterly experiments/hypotheses to his friends, but he admitted a sense of ‘powerlessness’ both in front of the canvas and in front of his critics (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 9). Citing weakness, instability, and indecision, Zola commented that Cezanne, “could never give arguments” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 10). Cezanne was so incapable of speaking and writing adequately and rationally about his intent (in a time, as now, when artists’ manifestos are valued as much as their work) that friends, commentators, and historians lean heavily on psychology and possible schizophrenia to explain
Cezanne’s artistic behaviour. Merleau-Ponty goes as far as finding an ‘inhuman’ character in Cezanne’s paintings and (in a somewhat Deleuzian manner) a “flight from the human” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 10-11).

But, for Merleau-Ponty, these inabilities to be rational and these inhuman characteristics aren’t negative – rather than detract from Cezanne’s work, they make it possible. Though the process (the ‘approach’) to achieve his goals may have causes Cezanne anguish, may have distanced Cezanne from his friends and family, Merleau-Ponty sees convinced of their necessity and positivity. In Cezanne, Merleau-Ponty sees an artist that “did not think he had to choose between feeling and thought, between order and chaos” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 13). In conversation with Emile Bernard, Cezanne complained about such dichotomies – making him (in Merleau-Ponty’s eyes) an artist fighting against ‘traditional’ emphases on ‘sense’ and ‘understanding’. As a result of his desire to paint the world in the act of appearing and his refusal to submit to secondary, anthropocentric constructs (like ‘rationality’), Cezanne had no choice but to paint and speak ‘inhumanly’. Reducing the emergence of the world to human perception “misses the mystery” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 16), the profundity, and the incomprehensibility of that emergence. Conceptualizing what the world could look like in the act of appearing is secondary, and so “Cezanne’s painting suspends these habits of thought and reveals the base of inhuman nature upon which man has installed himself” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 16).

But, how is Cezanne ‘stuttering’? How is this ‘language becoming-otherwise’? Like the writer who wrestles with choices and combinables in order to keep possibilities open, Cezanne’s brushstrokes “must satisfy an infinite number of conditions” (Merleau-Ponty 1993, 15). Each brushstroke must wrestle with the grammar of painting. Knowing this, and knowing that “expressing what exists is an endless task,” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 15) how could Cezanne hope
to begin? Certainly not with a wealth of certainty or self-confidence: thus, the insufficient means and tentativeness of an ‘approach’. And this is where Cézanne’s painting stutters. Merleau-Ponty says this about painting (which could be said about writing, making music, pottery, sculpture, dance…): “there is nothing but a vague fever before the act of artistic expression, and only the work itself, completed and understood, is proof that there was something rather than nothing to be said” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 19). Of course, certainty has a place in artistic creation (even if it’s only after-the-fact). Merleau-Ponty isn’t saying that this is the only valid experience of painting (or, he shouldn’t be!). But this is what it feels like to create by stuttering: to be uncertain (and to remain uncertain), out of total control, at the mercy of the artistic act (such that what must be said emerges alongside what must be done, and not before it). “Only one emotion is possible for this painter – the feeling of strangeness – and only one lyricism – that of continual rebirth of existence” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 18), says Merleau-Ponty. I would add: and only one process – that of stuttering.

That the “proof that there was something rather than nothing to be said” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 19) comes after the fact requires a stuttering procedure. But it also requires that language relinquish its dominant hold on both our perception/comprehension and our activity, and make way for painting (or music or dance or...) to speak. Rather than write or speak about his artistic intention, “Cézanne, in his own words, ‘wrote in painting what had never yet been painted, and turned it into painting once and for all’” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 17). This is quite complicated. Cézanne said that, in words. But his words don’t actually help us make sense of what he’s done. Cézanne painted landscapes, portraits, and still-lifes, not letters and sentences. So how could he claim to ‘write’ in paint, if he didn’t paint words? Cézanne’s paintings surpass the powers of
DELEUZE’S “STUTTERING”

writing, though they take on writing’s sense-giving characteristics. Cezanne’s painting ‘writes’ insofar as they give sense where words fail.

And this changes what it means for Cezanne to be a painter. In fact, since his mode of expression (painting) has adopted the function of another mode of expression (writing), Cezanne is drawn along on a line of flight that is becoming-writer. The catalyst for this line of flight is the style of the assemblage of enunciation (the map of forces that organize the system of painting). It’s style that makes the man (Lecercle 2002, 219), and at the limit, style makes the man something Other. Cezanne is “not the origin, but the effect of [his] style” (Lecercle 2002, 223-4), and the deterritorialization of painting into writing causes Cezanne to become-writer. Style here is non-style insofar as the assemblage has entered a ‘no-man’s land’ – the assemblage is leaking (painting \(\rightarrow\) writing) and its parts are escaping. Cezanne is becoming-writer, dissolving his painterly self (which we saw was ‘inadequate’, anyway) and taking on new functions, new organization, new ways of being a creative subject. At the limit between the linguistic and the non-linguistic, there is no stable individuality and no accountable style. Writes Deleuze, “What remains?...forces, nothing but forces. But force no longer refers to a centre, anymore than it confronts a set of obstacles. It only confronts other forces, it refers to other forces that it affects or affect” (Deleuze 1989, 139). There are only movements at the limit. Everything is in motion, becoming, moving toward a BwO and a reorganization. There are no ‘organisms’ (nothing is organized, because it is all in flux) and nothing for style to map.

Pushing language to its limit: the metaphysical register

The idea that style makes the artist (because the artist is part of an assemblage), isn’t new to David Byrne. When he sat down to write the lyrics to one of the Talking Heads’ most popular songs, “Once in a Lifetime,” his approach seemed...backwards. The Talking Heads had already
drafted the music for that song, and it was Byrne’s job to write some words to match. He started with absolute gibberish, singing nonsense syllables and phrases that attempted to match the rhythm and tone of the music. Slowly, driven by the “gently ecstatic nature” of the music and the influence of a southern radio preacher’s cadence and phrasing, “Once in a Lifetime” emerged (Byrne 2012, 189). “We don’t make music,” writes Byrne, “it makes us. Which is maybe the point of this whole book” (Byrne 2012, 155). Byrne didn’t begin with a set of clear, distinct, and speak-able ideas that he wanted to get across. He “ooh’ed” and “aah’ed” and improv’ed his way into a song, driven by the music and its affects, not the words or (stereotypically) ‘unconscious need’ to express something.

In How Music Works, Byrne says:

Music tells us things – social things, psychological things, physical things about how we feel and perceive our bodies – in a way that other art forms can’t. It’s sometimes in the words, but just as often the content comes from a combination of sounds, rhythms, and vocal textures that communicate, as has been said by others, in ways that bypass the reasoning centers of the brain and go straight to our emotions. (Byrne 2012, 94)

For Byrne, music bypasses the requirements of the Image of Thought/Language and is expressive without being organized by those principles. Music has organization, of course, but the sensibility that music expresses need not work according to what we ‘know’ to be true about treble clefs and rhyme schemes and minor chords. Music works, even on the technically uninitiated (the musically ‘illiterate’), making it a system that easily links up with other systems. And, like Byrne says, it’s not just about the lyrics. Music and language don’t cooperate just

---

33 In fact, much of what’s written when we make music is superfluous. For a discussion of music that is quite complex in its simplicity (its barrenness on the page, especially), see the discussion of “Clapping Music” in Houle and Steenhuisen’s: “Close (vision) is (how we) here” (2006).
because they can both feature words. Think of a movie score (often only instrumental) and how it ‘tells us’ something: something romantic, sad, exciting, etc. We don’t always need corresponding visuals to tear up or have our hearts race – music ‘bypasses’ the brain and goes straight for the gut (or: it bypasses the rational, processing, and analyzing brain and goes for the feeling brain – the brain that’s affected).

And just as language became-body or –painting, when language becomes-music it operates according to a different organizing scheme. And, according to Byrne, becoming-music opens an assemblage to more than just songs. He writes that we can see ‘musical scores’ everywhere, that they provide us with this alternative organizational sensibility and that they are ubiquitous. Byrne cites “Robert Farris Thompson, a professor of art at Yale” who “pointed out that once you let yourself see things this way, lots of things become ‘musical scores’ – although they might never have been intended to be played” (Byrne 2012, 189). There are rugs woven in Africa, Byrne says, with patterns that have a decipherable rhythm. The rugs are organized to tell us something in the affect sense. ‘Reading’ those rugs would consist of feeling their rhythm (musically), not deciphering their code for a secret message (linguistically). “There’s no dominant motif or top line,” to this rhythm,” Byrne says, “though that doesn’t stop it from having a distinct identity. It’s a neural network, a personality, a city, the Internet” (Byrne 2012, 189). Because there’s no dominance, no hierarchy to this rhythm – and because it can affect those who might otherwise be illiterate (either in the sense that they can’t read sheet music or in the sense that they couldn’t decipher a message from the rhythm) – almost anyone can use it. And that’s the ultimate goal of making language stutter: to allow for as much creative variation in the assemblage as possible.
We’ve moved away from the Image of Thought/Language that required recognition, representation, logic, correct solutions to problems, rational methods, ‘good will’, and vigilance against error. Language, as a system in continuous variation, is no longer subject to function solely according to these eight rules – we’ve seen that more can happen if language operates literally, not linguistically – according to what David Byrne calls “freaky honking accidents” (Byrne 2012, 189). Of course, ‘more’ does not always mean ‘better’ (although sometimes it does). That more people could record their music at home using blank cassette tapes didn’t necessarily mean that their music was good. Likewise, language that stutters, that sets language in relation to music or painting or bodies, could result in some bad poetry, confusing and possibly meaningless texts, and yes: potentially even some bad stuff (racism, fascism, violence, who knows?). But to echo Deleuze (who echoes Spinoza): we don’t yet know what language can do, until we experiment:

This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 161)

Pushing language to its limit takes a lot of work – freaky honking accidents are not a matter of ‘winging it’. Care is required and there are so many ways to fail (the least of which is to not try at all).34

34 On making a BwO, Deleuze and Guattari write: “If you free it with too violent an action, if you blow apart the strata without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane you will be killed, plunged into a black hole, or even dragged toward catastrophe. Staying stratified—organized, signified, subjected— is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if
Pushing Language to Its Limit: Summary

In the third movement (pushing language to its limit), stuttering happens: 1. on the linguistic register by leaving the organizational force of a plastic syntax behind for the asyntactic BwO; 2. on the stylistic register by setting all of the pieces of an assemblage scattering off down lines of flight, dissolving the subject of enunciation and her style; and 3. on the metaphysical level by revealing the immanence of affective forces that underlie all systems in a rhizomatic network.

Now that language is not limited (linguistically, stylistically, or metaphysically) by the ‘everybody says’ of the Image of Language – and now that it’s not even limited to speech or words or functioning like a purely linguistic assemblage of enunciation, we’re left with (at least!) two immediate questions:

1. if language is a thing that can stutter, how could/should that change our language use? (Remember, the system of language as Deleuze and Guattari understand it requires that we take parole just as seriously as langue.)

2. what else (besides stuttering) is language itself capable of?

That second question is one for another project. But I’d like to leave this project by speculating about answers to that first question.

Conclusion

If language is a thing that can stutter, what can philosophers – as writers and teachers – do with that? Could language that stutters shape our discipline? How could we do philosophy in a way that unshackles itself from the Images of Thought/Language, and takes up stuttering

you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 161).
procedures as viable alternatives? What could that look like? How might it e/affect the academic assemblage?

Let’s return to Derrida and his cat, who we met in this paper’s Introduction. In “the Animal Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” Derrida tells the story of being embarrassed when seen naked by his cat. Thrown off both by the cat’s gaze and by his surprise at feeling vulnerable as a result, Derrida cannot immediately say what, exactly, a cat-who-suddenly-recognizes-a-person’s-nakedness should be called. “Animal” does not seem sufficient because “animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give” (Derrida 2009, 32) but in this case, Derrida is unsure where the animal stops and the human begins (or: where the reflexive rights-bearer/receiver differs from that which has no rights at all). “Animal” is an inaccurate word for Derrida’s cat because the cat has broken with the major understanding of what those that are called by the name “animal” are capable of. Instead, Derrida proposes the new word: “animot.” Pronounced in French, this alternative (1) plays with the plural “animaux” for the sake of expressing the heterogeneity of animals in a single concept and (2) requires attention to the suffix “mot” (the French for “word”) as pointing out the insufficiency of reducing all animals and animal capabilities to a word that we have given ourselves the right to bestow. Derrida creates a new word and puts it to work, not to solve philosophical problems but to invent a new concept.

Deleuze and Guattari attempt to get similar results when they take words like ‘rhizome’ from biology and make them work as philosophical concepts. In opposition to such a treatment, Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont (in Fashionable Nonsense) accuse Deleuze of lauding the abuse of non-philosophical terms, yielding vague, meaningless, and unjustified writing. In fact, this terminological ‘abuse’ is only vague and meaningless according to the standard model of the
‘everybody says…’ In attempting to realize new possibilities for language and thought by pushing the major language to the limit of what it can say, Deleuze and Guattari are absolutely justified in appropriating the word ‘rhizome’ to make it work in a new fashion.35

Doing the kind of philosophy that is at work here requires skills that most philosophers already have: textual interpretation, critical thinking, analyses, argumentation… but these skills get put to new uses. In order to create in the way that Deleuze and Guattari suggest, we need to move past using our philosophical skills to reinforce the Images of Thought and Language. Instead, we could use our philosophical skills to make BwOs. To push philosophy to its limit(s). And always with care toward how philosophical speech acts matter: how they affect incorporeal transformations in real bodies, how they deterritorialize or reterritorialize the philosophical assemblage, how they prohibit or encourage creative connections with what is ‘outside’ philosophy.

Attention to philosophy’s lines of flight could result in quite a different discipline and practice. Imagine a philosophy department cracked open, crisscrossed with lines of different disciplines (science, art, politics, music…). This isn’t strange to philosophy, of course; lots of professors are cross-appointed and lots of courses are crosslisted with other disciplines. There are experimental philosophers and philosophers who solve problems similar to those found in the hard and social sciences. There are sometimes courses on the “philosophy of” music (or art, science, animals, etc.). But push that to its nth degree: because there is no hierarchy in an

35 ‘Word play’ (like co-opting ‘rhizome’ or inventing ‘animot’) has its place here, in philosophy, but it also happens in some pretty major (and potentially sinister) ways, too. Politicians, for example, invent and transform words to their own end. Consider how the “Affordable Care Act” was transformed into “Obamacare,” for example, which has been adopted by both Republicans and Democrats in the United States, but for different reasons. Republicans use “Obamacare” as a slur; Democrats try to own the term as a source of pride in their President. Again, what’s at stake here is whether or not word play is experimented with for major or minor uses – to stabilize a homogeneous system or to create anew.
assemblage. At its limit, philosophy (the discipline) would give way to the flow of the force of concepts – the lines of flight that link the philosophical assemblage to its outsides. Put another way: if philosophy makes itself a BwO, that BwO could de/reorganize philosophy such that its parts might still be there, but functioning in new ways and in unfamiliar compositions. Philosophy could stutter (decompose, deterritorialize, push to its limit) its way toward non-philosophy: philosophy could make music, and vice versa. This would be a philosophy no longer constrained by the Image of Thought/Language, no longer restricted to just recognition, representation, logic, finding solutions to problems, knowledge, rational methods, common sense/good will, and fear of error. But it would also not be constrained by a new Image. It would be characterized by deterritorialization, a metamorphosizing assemblage, by lines of flight that multiply its capacities by collaboration with other disciplines. There is no Image proper to this movement – there is only what philosophy can do (i.e.: what it can create).

What could this look like in a (philosophy) classroom? Remember how much my students loved Merleau-Ponty? They loved him for telling them what they already (implicitly) ‘knew’ to be true. I don’t want to take that away from them. I do want to think about how to make that class stutter. I’d need to find ways of making the class stutter by decomposing it: that could run the gamut from something as simple as moving from a lecture model to a seminar model, or something as complicated as using community-engaged scholarship (in which students are asked to work with organizations in their communities to produce research or projects that have an impact). I’d need ways of deterritorializing the class: of trying to develop minor concepts and putting them to work in major centers of thought (say, in the proceedings of student government). I’d needs ways of pushing the class to its limit(s): on the model of Brian Massumi and Erin Manning’s Sense Lab, which is a laboratory, space, residency program, and publication
composed of artists, academics, researchers, dancers, writers. [They] work together to explore the active passage between research and creation. [They] consider research to be creation in germ, and creation to produce its own concepts for thought. [The Sense Lab was created] in an effort to conceive a working and thinking environment for the creation of new modes of encounter. (senselab.ca 2013, “About”)

In order to ‘do well’ in this course, students would have to develop the skills/knowledge that we currently expect from them (critical thinking skills, interpretation and analysis, writing skills, understanding concepts, etc.). But they’d be putting those skills to new uses: uses that are productive beyond the limits of the ‘typical’ classroom. These creative ways of doing philosophy could reshape philosophy (the discipline) – could make it stutter – and could push philosophy to its limits.

**Bibliography**


---. *Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside and Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him*. Trans.


DELEUZE’S “STUTTERING”


---. “The Laugh of the Medusa.” *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*. Eds. Elaine Marks and


DELEUZE’S “STUTTERING”


DELEUZE’S “STUTTERING”

196.


http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Charles-P-guy--2090


Lecercle, Jean-Jacques. *Deleuze and Language*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan,
2002.


62.


Rose, Mike, editor. When a Writer Can’t Write: Studies in writer’s block and other composing-


http://senselab.ca/wp2/about/


Wallin, Jason J. A Deleuzian Approach to Curriculum: Essays on a pedagogical life. Education,