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A Thousand Plateaus

transl. Brian Massumi

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152 **It is not simply linguistic, lexical, or even syntactic transformations that determine the importance of a true semiotic translation** but the opposite. Crazy talk is not enough. In each case we must judge whether what we see is an adaptation of an old semiotic, a new variety of a particular mixed semiotic, or the process of creation of an as yet unknown regime. For example, **it is relatively easy to stop saying “I”**, but that does not mean that you have **gotten away from the regime of subjectification**, conversely, you can keep on saying “I”, just for kicks, and already be in another regime in which personal pronouns function only as fiction.

153 **Significance and interpretation** are so thick-skinned, they form such a sticky mixture with subjectification, that it is easy to believe that you are outside them when you are in fact still secreting them...

A highly stratified semiotic is difficult to get away from.

Even a presignifying, or counter-signifying semiotic, even an asignifying diagram, harbours knots of coincidence just waiting to **form virtual centres of significance and points of subjectification**.

Of course, **an operation of translation is not easy when it is a question of destroying a dominant atmospheric semiotic**. One of the things of profound interest in Castaneda's book, under the influence of drugs, or other things, and of a change of atmosphere, is precisely that they show how the Indian manages to combat the mechanisms of interpretation and **instill in the disciple a presignifying semiotic, or even an asignifying diagram: stop!** You are making me tired! Experiment, **don't signify and interpret!** Find your own places, territorialities, deterritorialisations, regime, lines of flight! **Semiotize yourself instead of rooting around in your prefab childhood and Western semiology.** “Don Juan stated that **in order to arrive at “seeing” one had to “stop the world”**.”

“**Stopping the world**” was indeed an appropriate rendition of certain states of awareness in which the reality of everyday life is altered because the flow of interpretation, which ordinarily runs uninterruptedly, has been stopped by a set of circumstances alien to the flow. In short, **a true semiotic transformation appeals to all kinds of variables, not only external ones, but also variables implicit to language, internal to statements.**

Pragmatics, then, already displaced two components. The first could be called *generative* since it shows how the various abstract regimes form concrete mixed semiotics, with what variants, how they combine, and which one is predominant. The second is the **transformational component, which shows how these regimes of signs are translated into each other.**

Generative pragmatics makes tracings of mixed semiotics; transformational pragmatics makes maps of transformations.

154 Although a mixed semiotics does not necessarily imply effective creativity, and may content itself with combinatorial possibilities without veritable transformation, it is still the **transformational component that accounts for the originality of a regime** as well as for

the novelty of the mixes it enters at a given moment in a given domain. This second component is therefore the more profound, and it is the only means of measuring the elements of the first component.

154 There is no question that the most profound transformations and translations of our time are not occurring in Europe. **Pragmatics should reject the idea of an invariant** immune from transformation, even if it is the invariant of the dominant “grammaticality”. For **language is a political affair before it an affair for linguistics; even the evaluation of degrees of grammaticality is a political matter.**

What is a semiotic, in other words, the regime of signs or a formalisation of expression? They are simultaneously more or less than language.

Language as a whole is defined by “superlinearity”, it's condition of possibility; individual languages are defined by constants, elements, and relations of formal logical, syntactical, and semantic nature.

Doubtless, every regime of signs effectuates the condition of possibility of language and utilises language elements, but that is all. No regime can be identical to that condition of possibility, and no regime has the property of constants.

155 As Foucault clearly shows, **regimes of signs are only functions of existence** that sometimes span a number of languages and are sometimes distributed within a single language; they coincide neither with a structure nor with units of a given order, but rather intersect them and cause them to appear in space and time.

This is the sense in which **regimes of signs are assemblages of enunciation**, which cannot be adequately accounted for by any linguistic category:

what makes a proposition or even a single word a “statement” pertains to implicit presuppositions that cannot be made explicit, that mobilise pragmatic variables proper to enunciation (in corporeal transformations).

This precludes explaining an assemblage in terms of the signifier or the subject, because both pertain to variables of enunciation within the assemblage.

It is **signifiante and subjectification** that presuppose the assemblage, not the reverse. The names we gave to regimes of signs (“presignifying”, “signifying”, “countersignifying”, “postsignifying”) would remain evolutionist if heterogeneous functions or varieties of assemblages did not effectively correspond to them (segmentarisation, signifiante and interpretation, numeration, subjectification).

Regimes of signs are thus defined by variables that are internal to enunciation but remain external to the constants of language and irreducible to linguistic categories.

But at this point, everything turns around, and the reason why a regime of signs is less than language also become the reasons why it is more than language. **Only one side of the assemblage has to do with enunciation or formalises expression; on its underside, inseparable from the first, it formalises contents, it is a machinic assemblage or an assemblage of bodies.** Now contents are not “signifieds” dependent upon a signifier in any way, nor are they “objects” in any kind of relation of causality with the subject. They are their own formalisation and have no relation of symbolic correspondence or linear causality with a form of expression: **the two forms are in reciprocal presupposition, and they can be abstracted from each other only in a very relative way because they are two sides of a single assemblage.**

We must therefore arrive at something in the assemblage itself that is still more profound than these sides and can account for both of the forms in presupposition, forms of expression or regime of signs (semiotic systems). This is what we call **the abstract machine**, which **constitutes and conjugates all of the assemblage's cutting-edge of deterritorialisation**.

156 We must say that **the abstract machine is necessarily "much more" than language**. When linguists (following Chomsky) rise to the idea of a purely language-based abstract machine our immediate objection is that their machine, far from being too abstract, is not abstract enough because it is limited to the form of expression and to alleged universals that presuppose language.

Abstracting content is an operation that appears all the more relative and inadequate when seen from the viewpoint of abstraction itself. **The true abstract machine has no way of making a distinction within itself between a plane of expression and the plane of content because it draws a single plane of consistency**, which in turn formalises contents and expressions according to strata and reterritoralisations.

The abstract machine in itself destratified, deterritorialized; it has no form of its own (much less substance) and makes no distinction within itself between content and expression, even though outside itself it presides over that distinction and distributes it in strata, domains, and territories.

Boe: Ist es möglich zu denken, dass LoF (und die Einführung von sieben Schritten zwischen distinction und Namen) im Bild der Abstrakten Maschine gefasst werden könnte?

An abstract machine in itself is not physical or corporeal, any more than it is semiotic; it is diagrammatic (it knows nothing of the distinction between the artificial and the natural either). It operates by matter, not by substance; by function, not by form. Substances and forms are of expression "or" of content. But functions are not yet "semiotically" formed, and matters are not yet "physically" formed.

The abstract machine is pure Matter-Function - a diagram independent of the forms and substances, expressions and contents it will distribute.

We define the abstract machine as the aspect or moment at which nothing but functions and matters remain. A diagram has neither substance more form, neither contents nor expression. Substance is a formed matter, and matter is a substance that is uninformed either physically or semiotically.

Whereas expression and content have distinct forms, are really distinct from each other, function has only "traits" of content and expression, between which it establishes a connection: it is no longer even possible to tell whether it is a particle or a sign. A matter-content having only degrees of intensity, resistance, conductivity, heating, stretching, speech, or tardiness; and the function-expression having only "tensors", as in a system of mathematical, or musical, writing. Writing now functions on the same level as the real, and the real materially writes. **The diagram retains the most deterritorialized content and the most deterritorialized expression, in order to conjugate them.**

Maximum deterritorialization sometimes starts from a trait of content and sometimes from a trait of expression; on that trait is said to be "deterritorializing" in relation to the other precisely because it diagrams it, carries it off, raises it to its own power. The most deterritorialized element causes the other element to cross the threshold enabling conjunction of their respective deterritorialisations, a shared acceleration.

157 This is **the abstract machine's absolute, positive deterritorialisation**. That is why

diagrams must be distinguished from *indexes*, which are territorial signs, but also from *icons*, which pertain to reterritorialisations, and from *symbols*, which pertain to relative or negative deterritorialisation.

Defined diagrammatically in this way, and abstract machine is neither an infrastructure that is determining in the last instance nor a transcendental idea that is determining in the supreme instance. Rather, it plays a piloting role. The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is not yet to come, a new type of reality.

Thus when it constitutes points of creation or potentiality it does not stand outside history but is instead always “prior to” history. Everything escapes, everything creates - never alone, but through an abstract machine that produces continuous of intensity, effects conjunctions of deterritorialisation, and extracts expressions and contents.

This Real-Abstract is totally different from the fictitious abstraction of a supposedly pure machine of expression. It is an Absolute, but one that is neither undifferentiated nor transcendent. **Abstract machines thus have proper names (as well as dates), which of course designate not persons or subjects but matters and functions.**

The name of a musician or scientist is used in the same way as a painter's name designates the colour, near ask, don't, or intensity: it is always a question of a conjunction of Matter and Function. The double deterritorialization of the voice and the instrument is marked by a **Wagner abstract machine**, a **Webern abstract machine**, etc. In physics and mathematics, we may speak of a **Rieman abstract machine**, and in algebra of a **Galois abstract machine** (defined precisely by an arbitrary line, called the adjunctive line, which conjugates with the body taken as a starting point), etc. There is a diagram whenever a singular abstract machine functions directly in a matter.

Strictly speaking, therefore, **there are no regimes of signs on the diagrammatic level, or on the plane of consistency**, because form of expression is no longer really distinct from form of content. The diagram knows only traits and cutting-edges that are still elements of content insofar as they are material and of expression insofar as they are functional, but which draw one another along, form relays, and meld in a shared deterritorialization: **particles-signs.**

158 **Expression then constitutes indexes, icons, or symbols that enter regimes or semiotic systems.** Content then constitutes bodies, things, or objects that enter physical systems, organisms, and organisations. The deeper movement for conjugating matter and function – **absolute deterritorialization, identical to the earth itself - appears only in the form of respective territorialities**, negative or relative deterritorializations and reterritorializations.

All of this culminates in a language stratum that installs an abstract machine on the level of expression and takes the abstraction of content even further, tending to strip it of any form of its own (the imperialism of language, the pretensions to a general semiology). In short, the strata substantialize diagrammatic matters and separate a form to plane of content from a form plane of expression.

160 A **regime of signs** has more than just two components. It has, in fact, four of them, which form the **object of Pragmatics**. The first is the **generative component**, which shows how a form of expression located on the language stratum always appeals to several combined regime, in other words, how every regime of signs or semiotic is concretely mixed. On the level of this component, one can abstract forms of content.

161 The second, **transformational, component**, shows how one abstract regime can be translated, transformed into another, and especially how it can be created from other regimes. This second component is obviously more profound, because all mixed regimes presuppose these transformations from one regime to another, past, present, or potential (as a function of the creation of new regimes).

The third component is diagrammatic: it consists in taking regimes of signs or forms of expression and extracting from them particles-signs that are no longer formalised but instead constitute uninformed traits capable of combining with one another. This is the height of abstraction, but also the moment at which abstraction becomes real; everything operates through abstract-real machines (which have names and dates). **One can abstract forms of content, but one must simultaneously abstract forms of expression; for what is retained of each are only uninformed traits.**

That is why an abstract machine that would operate purely on the level of language is an absurdity. It is clear that this diagrammatic component is in turn more profound than the transformation all component: the creations-transformations of a regime of signs operate by the emergence of ever-new abstract machines. Finally, the last, properly machinic, component is meant to show how abstract machines are effectuated in concrete **assemblages**; it is these assemblages that give distinct form to traits of expression, but not without doing the same for traits of content - the two forms being in reciprocal presupposition, or having a necessary, uninformed relation that once again prevents the form of expression from behaving as though it were self-sufficient (although it is independent or distinct in a strictly formal way). **Thus pragmatics (or schizoanalysis) can be represented by four circular components that bud and form rhizomes.**

163 This final research simultaneously brings into play, on the one hand, **abstract machines, diagrams and diagrammatic functions**, and, on the other hand **machinic assemblages**, the formal distinctions they make between expression and content, and their investments of words and organs according to **a relation of reciprocal presupposition.**

Boe: conditioned coproduction

For example, the "I love you" of courtly love: what is its diagram, what abstract machine emerges, and what is the new assemblage? These questions apply as much to de-stratification as to the organisation of strata. In short, there are no syntactically, semantically, or a logically definable propositions that transcend or loom above statements.

All methods of the transcendentalization of language, all methods for endowing language with universals, from Russell's logic to Chomsky's grammar, have fallen into the worst kind of abstraction, in the sense that they validate a level that is both too abstract and not abstract enough.

Regimes of signs are not based on language, and language alone does not constitute an abstract machine, whether structural or generative. The opposite is the case. **It is language that is based on regime of signs, and regimes of signs on abstract machines, diagrammatic functions, and machinic assemblages that go beyond any system of semiology, linguistics, or logic.**

There is no universal propositional logic, nor is there grammaticality in itself any more than there is signifier for itself. "Behind" statements and semiotizations there are only machines, assemblages, and movements of deterritorializations that cut across the stratification of the various systems and elude both the coordinates of language and of existence. That is why **pragmatics is not the complement to logic, syntax, or semantics, on the contrary, it is the fundamental element upon which all the rest depend.**