

FOREIGNERS IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE:

An essay on our relation to language and its disintegration

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In his essay *He Stuttered*, Gilles Deleuze presents the idea of an “exploring artist” who pushes the limits of his own language. He observes that “great writers [...] make the language take flight, they send it racing along a witch’s zone, ceaselessly placing it in a state of disequilibrium”. They are “foreigner[s] in [their] own language [...], carv[ing] out a nonpreexistent foreign language within [their] own language”¹. This follows a citation from Marcel Proust, who says that the most “stunning books are written in a sort of foreign language”. This notion of a foreign language will constitute my initial point. What Deleuze is telling us is that this exploring artist is working, not outside language, but in the limits of language, meaning that what this artist shows us is less a conventional *modus operandi* than a more creative way of reworking those signs and meanings upon which we decide on our interpretation of a work of art. The exploring artist engages in experimentation on the boundaries of our language, deconstructing it to meet its origins and find more complex and even contradictory methods of encoding the possible meanings in his work. This happens, I believe, through the same kind of operation that the artist David Antin addressed to André Breton’s poetic antics: by detaching “objects from the world with a kind of surgical precision, depriving them of their commonplace (and misleading) contexts”. These contexts prove to be misleading, explains Marjorie Perloff, because “the commonplace is itself a fiction, being “legislated” and “negotiated” in advance rather than “experienced””². I would not be so drastic about this absence of experience, as all these legislations and negotiations concerning our language games are the product of our direct experience, play and familiarization with words and sentences.

“Language”, Wittgenstein argues, “is not *contiguous* to anything else”³. It is, indeed, an autonomous system, with its predetermined rules, which in their instance are conveyed by social and historical practices. Nevertheless, there is always a latent wish of tearing apart the tissue of language, to see what it is made of. Take, for instance,

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 109,110.

² Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1981), p. 295.

³ Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein’s Ladder* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p 22.

Samuel Beckett's wish to drill holes in language "in order to see or hear what was lurking behind". When asked to complete some poetry translations, Samuel Beckett replied in a letter dated from 1937:

It is indeed becoming more and more difficult, even senseless, for me to write an official English. And more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at things (or the Nothingness) behind it⁴

And he adds in the same letter:

Let us hope the time will come, thank God that in certain circles it has already come, when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused

What I aim to analyse in this paper is the reason for this mistrust for language and how, to a certain degree, the disintegration of artistic language and its consequent recreation can lead to an approximation to the core of things and to the reality that circumscribe us. Also, I would like to show how this disintegration of language and a closer approach to its operative systems allow us to understand our relation to words, many times deceptive, in the construction of ourselves and in our relation to others. If our usage of ordinary language, in an ordinary fashion, equals the limits of our world, shall we consider the artist who pushes the limits of ordinary language to be some kind of prophet who is able to disclose new forms of being, perception and to point us new realms of experience?

Why is Beckett saying that his own language "appears like a veil" to him? Indeed, he is referring to words he knows well, to their combination and selection into sentences, and how these, with their many possible interpretations and meanings, many times erroneous, can divert our attention from the things that are being described, the referents in reality to which they correspond, or from the feelings we would like to express, but fail to do so, at least in what we think it would be an accurate way of showing what we feel. And why does Beckett believe that there are some occasions when "language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused"? Shall we not consider this a contradiction? If we want to express something, our commonsense advises us on the clearest way of accomplish this goal, and confusion

⁴ Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder*, p.120.

between ideas or concepts, linguistic noise and lack of verbal skills surely are to be avoided at all costs. So is there any way of expressing something “efficiently” when language is being “misused”? And what does “efficiently” mean in this context? These questions remain at the core of my concerns within the frame of artistic language. Other of my questions is how we place and understand ourselves in the face of the nonsensical, in linguistic areas that lack context, clarity of expression and where there is barely any room for interpretation or identification of the pronouns “I”, “you” or “they”, or to what or whom they refer to.

In certain artists, those who aim to undermine the very materiality of language in order to take a look on what’s “lurking behind” it, there seems to prevail a common disbelief for language, related to the way that, in our everyday acts of communication, we get accustomed with its many uses and their recurrent indeterminacy in the process of making sense. This makes us consider *how* we mean and *what* we mean when we want to express the most concealed ideas, thoughts or feelings. In “*Finding a Replacement for the Soul*”, Brett Bourbon writes: “Wondering about ourselves, losing sense so that we lose ourselves is one subject for literature and thought”⁵. It is often when we wonder about ourselves that the feeling of nonsense arises, and the lack of directions is the most fertile soil to rethink our relation to language. We find ourselves to be in disequilibrium. Deleuze asks: “can one progress if one doesn’t enter the regions that are far away from equilibrium?”. Following this idea, I am willing to believe that through the nonsense of some works of art and its lack of clarity, for instance on who says “I” or what is what, we can lose sense of ourselves, by a voluntary blindness towards our interpretational world, and finally inaugurate a thorough revision of our relation to language in its most ordinary form, and our relation to ourselves and others based on the limits of that same language.

In his “*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*”, Wittgenstein famously states: “*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*” (T#5.6). The limits of my world are what I can understand through my use of language and what it presents to me. We can only see and understand what we can name and identify, and the language learning process provides us the necessary background for reasoning, argumentation and expression. Thus, our understanding of the world is limited to the scope of our very own language practices and to the language games we know how to play. Of course, we are always

⁵ Brett Bourbon, *Finding a Replacement for the Soul* (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2004), p.24

available to learn more and more of these games, in a constant negotiation of meanings and words. But take a work like James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, so celebrated for its opacity, its lack of meaning and resistance to interpretation. As Bourbon mentions, we do not know what those words mean, to what things or to whom they refer to, and our task of linking this and that aspect of fiction to some personal interpretation becomes impossible, as there is no stable referent, no names that we could associate to real persons, with real lives, practicing recognizable activities, with a coherent speech of their own, with a clear sense of the personal pronoun "I". We cannot find a context where we can fit those words, sentences or expressions of any kind. In Wittgensteinian terms, such strange expressions or combinations of words are out of circulation, we do not use them: "*When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation*"⁶. These sentences are disqualified as meaningless and thus have no use in prevalent of acts of communication, as they do not fit in any common language game. We should believe, for the case in question, that the reader doesn't quit trying to read *Finnegans Wake* after the first near to incomprehensible pages. In trying to grasp a meaning of sheer nonsense, isn't this reader marking a line between what he takes as sense and nonsense? Isn't he placing his ontological self in a location of pure disequilibrium, specifically between what he believes himself to be and he is not?

Now take another quote from Wittgenstein: "*Do not forget that a poem, although it is composed in the language of information, is not used in the language-game of giving information*". I would like to include some fictions and other kinds of artistic language in this conception of "poem" to analyse how a work of verbal art makes use of communication tools from our everyday language but nevertheless reframes it, aiming its target to a different purpose other than those of everyday speech (conveying information, clarification, and so on). Poems and fictions cannot communicate in the way that we use words to convey information with specific goals, directed towards a specific audience, in a given moment or context. They are just there, timeless, *still* in the opaqueness of indeterminacy of meaning and interpretation. Sometimes we read poems, fictions and even watch films that in their completeness of expression still fail to mean, although we can't deny that they are still grasping something of us, they still *do* something for us.

⁶ Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder*, p. 84.

We can feel their effect on our perception although we are not sure of what strings of cognition it touches in us. I understand some kinds of fiction to be something similar to what Brett Bourbon finds in the ancient oracles. For this matter we should forget about oracles' initial significance, that is, a *medium* for the voice of God, designed to *speak* religious faith, prophesies or some kind of transcendental visions, a speech act that has a predefined motivation and a specific target, to warn us about an approaching phenomenon, and so on. When we are left with the notion that there is no God, no *medium* backed by a divine presence, no predefined motivation or audience, just the words coming out of an absent speaker, we should try to understand what those words stand for and what they can do for us in terms of playing with our perceptions and emotions. When we read these words, just like when we read words from poems and fictions, we should ask: Are they related to us? Is he or she speaking to or about me? Bourbon says that, "we should accept [...] that neither oracles nor poems mean, but we should not then think that they do not say anything"⁷. Furthermore, he writes:

"The sense of poems and oracles is tied to how the nonsense of what they mean grips us, when they matter to us despite their nonsense. Oracles are like poems to the degree that in reading them we hear what they say, regardless of what they mean, as an expression of our relation to their words [...]"

There seems to be a precondition for this kind of language, which is the absence of the pronoun "I", and the absence of any prepositional content. We can't use a sentence from a poem or an oracle in order to assert something meaningfully, with a specific intention, in the way we say, "It's raining" or "fetch me that book". In poems and oracles, something is being said on behalf of an absent speaker, who nevertheless uses the text as a *medium*, to convey something, even if that message is meaningless when included in conventional speech acts. This message touches us, speaks to us, but does not really mean anything, at least in the way that those common speech acts mean. This is an idea that I find very curious: when a poem or a fiction "touch us", it plays with our understanding, even though we cannot actually figure out what is being conveyed in terms of meaning. For when the very tools of language are being undermined, the reader also loses sense of language for the lack of interpretative

⁷ Bourbon, *Finding a Replacement*, p.130.

methods, and ultimately loses sense of the “I”, where knowledge and meaning ultimately converge.

Oracular language refers in this sense to language that is still comprehensible (grammar is still correct, recognizable) but is nevertheless difficult to grasp, as it doesn't belong to any common usage of words, and we fail to associate it with any of the language games we know. Also, we fail to understand the purpose of the message, who is the addresser or the addressee, in what context does it occur. We can still identify ordinary language, only it is decontextualized, out of place, in a continuous present tense. No past, no future, no pre our posthumous assumptions about what is said. For instance, no matter how many times we open a book and read the same poem over and over again, as usual we are bewitched by its words, the enchanting sound it produces, but no sense, no overall meaning arises from it and we can't establish causal connections between signifiers and their referents. Words are only just that, words, and we are face to face with the materiality of the signifier, as this is the only thing that is left when all the possible connections to our interpretational world are blocked by an awkward use of language.

I consider that the great contribution of a more subversive use of language in fictional texts is to highlight the strangeness of something we use in our daily lives: language, and how this can be deconstructed and subjected to certain violence. This process, so common among artists especially concerned with expressive possibilities, only shows us how through the lack of meaning we can rethink how we stand towards language and the world we inhabit.

Usually we answer fictions with more fictions, which in their turn become part of extensive historical, psychological, or political discourses. Each interpretation is an allegory of what is said in a poem or prose. I agree with Bourbon in the sense that this is not what is intended when we want to take a closer look on how poems and fictions mean and how we find ourselves “within” these texts. Let us consider the examples of oracles and poems again. Bourbon says that “in reading them we hear what they say, regardless of what they mean, as an expression of our relation to their words”. What Bourbon seems to be suggesting is that, first, putative meaning in this kind of language is not essential, at least in the way that it is in everyday propositional speech acts, which have a functional purpose and a defined audience. Secondly, in this kind of enigmatic language, precisely because of its enigmatic nature, we can see how we find our ontological selves through its words, on our way of getting through them,

survive to their turbulence of contradictions and indeterminacy, and finally emerge from them with new interpretative possibilities and a renovated sense of “what we are when we are not” (Bourbon). When words are in such a state of indeterminacy and lack referentiality, we test them, the “porosity” of their materiality, and try to give them a name according to what we are made of, our beliefs, concerns, moralities, fears, certainties, doubts, superstitions, and so on. On facing some kinds of nonsense we are forced to rethink our position in *our* world, to rethink its limits through a revision of the limits of our language. Like in Beckett’s late short fictions, Gertrude Stein’s experiments in poetry or Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, or even in the uncertainty of space, time and identity in John Cassavetes’s films, which relegates the audience to a continuous present tense fed by impulsive and seemingly empty speech acts, the failure of words to mean and to link us to referents in reality precipitates “the need to fit ourselves into things and words”. And indeed, it is through this process that “we make our names correct”⁸, illustrating nonsense with sense.

When I say that a certain kind of literature makes us find our ontological selves through language, by losing sense and consequently fitting ourselves into things and words, I am not suggesting that we can fit whatever possible meanings we would like in a given poem or prose. Rather, the indeterminacy of a certain text has a general direction, an aboutness that should be taken into account, even if this aboutness refers to contrasting ideas, emotions or concepts. But the boundless language that constitutes this kind of text refers to a fictional space that we are welcome to *experience*. The word “experience” couldn’t have a more literal sense here. The openness of signs, their lacking of sufficient information for the consequent elaboration of parallels with external referents and the tracing of mimetic qualities in the text forces us to *feel* the words, and to get to grips with their arbitrariness. Most importantly, this works also as a means of understanding the nature of language as something fragmented and disjointed. The creative language that I’m concerned with is “language in its autonomous (dis)functioning, freed from its obligations to express and to represent”⁹. In this kind of fictions, we need to find our way through the ruins of language. This gives us the opportunity to find out in what way we are related to language. Bourbon states the following:

⁸ Bourbon, *Finding a Replacement*, p.185.

⁹ Perloff, *Poetics of...*, p.3.

If literature is a painting for us, of anyone, then it is also a mirror, and we should read it with the recognition that we understand and express ourselves with words as if paintings and mirrors were interchangeable – a if there were no difference between mirrored glass and canvas¹⁰

Literature can be a painting of everyone, a representation of what we are, of how we act, and so on. But, according to Bourbon, this painting also functions as a mirror. This happens because in the very act of following the traces of fictional language, what it voluntarily omits or reveals, lies our capability to understand what we are in this world, by “showing ourselves to ourselves” through a more critical dialogue with the words that we use.

We are more than what we express. Words, alone or combined into sentences are not sufficient to describe what we think or what we are. It falls short on the complexity of what we are, what we feel and the way we react to the complex net of events of everyday life. We mean more than what we say, only that we are forced to play the language games we are familiar with, thus many things are left unsaid, unspoken, half-spoken. The plasticity of language redirects us to the way we find ourselves within language and to how we can retrieve any meaning from anything at all. A great part of the corpus of modern and postmodern literature can be read like *FW*, maybe not as extreme in its obscure interplay with signifiers, but still constituting an intentional disfiguration of language in an attempt to reach its origins, warning the interpretative reader on how he can be wrong about the assumptions he has towards the most basic games of perception and denotation. When we strive to find a meaning in opaque fictions like *Finnegans Wake*, we are inaugurating a system of meanings, and making sense of the strange and even alien names that populate this fiction. Devoid of context, of a referential function, we are faced with words alone, which, as Wittgenstein puts it, “look at us”, waiting for us to make them alive through practice and circulation. This awareness, of course, does not occur in the ordinary practices with language, when everything is preconceived and no specific attention is given to the divergent layers of possible meanings stored in each word. And this is the source of confusion and also of a suspicious behaviour towards language that the Deleuzian “exploring artist” denounces by playing with a “foreign” use of words and sentences. This kind of literature, which continually forces the boundaries between sense and

¹⁰ Bourbon, *Finding a Replacement*, p. 259.

nonsense, reminds us of the distance that remains between the “I”, the cognitive subject, and the physical world from which we draw our beliefs, interpretations, meanings and assumptions.

The role of the “creative stutterer”, as Deleuze calls it, is to avoid the delusion of an objective meaning, the creative utterance being one that does not exclude or choose between different ideas or concepts but rather insists on their simultaneous existence, “passing through the entire set of possibilities”¹¹. And these possibilities can result in contradiction, indeterminacy and language breakdown. This is, I believe, what Samuel Beckett is trying to accomplish when he writes that “language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused”.

Reading some kinds of poetry or fiction can tell us what kind of things we are. Also, we can find out that what we are in relation to others and to ourselves is thoroughly constructed upon language structures. And this happens only when we are faced with the strangeness of a sort of literary text that is particularly engaged in a direct confrontation with the nature of language, divesting it from any common use we might associate to a sentence, text, character or plot. This happens with Samuel Beckett’s works, particularly those like *Watt* and his trilogy, it happens with Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, with most of John Cassavetes’s films, with Nuno Bragança’s novels like *Directa* or *A Noite e o Riso*, and so on. I believe that all these artists have one thing in common, which is an obsession with expressive possibilities.

In 1963, Nuno Bragança wrote that “the act of writing (repeated so many times as the number of times it ends up failing) enable us to find an affinity with things. And this would be impossible without the emancipation of written language from the rigidity that it carries inside”. Like Bragança suggests, affinity with things is achieved through a continuous dialogue with words, moulding its plasticity in order to get our naming-games correct and in accordance to what we want to mean. Meaning is found in a continuous questioning process towards language. The act of writing is repetitive but permanent, and for the creative artist the last word is always the penultimate word. This implies a continuous recreation of expressive possibilities, with no death of creation in sight. The last word or the assumption of a definite expression would mean the death of the creative process, the final assertion of its end. Furthermore, Bragança states, “the novelist aims to go beyond mere description to get closer to the heart of things”. Again, the rigidity of language, the self-sufficient structure of grammar is to

¹¹ Deleuze, *Essays*, p. 111.

be defied, analysed, and, by the end, destroyed. One can say that conditions are gathered to recreate a language only when the writer is conscious of this rigidity of the everyday language, when he questions the expressive possibilities and stands in a sort of ontological abyss, in a position of danger towards the “I” when the words that link a sense of the self to reality do not have a determinate and absolute meaning.

Marjorie Perloff argues that Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* had an enormous relevance on alerting some of the modern and postmodern writers on the deceptive nature of language, followed by the deconstruction of meaning and the physicality of language itself. Perloff finds four different perspectives on the concept of language-game, from which I would like to highlight the first three:

the emphasis on the strangeness, the enigmatic nature, of everyday language; (2) the awareness that “the world is my world” [which] shows itself in the fact that the limits of the language (the language which I understand) mean the limits of my world. (3) the recognition of the self as, in no small measure, a social construct, a cultural construction. [...] There is no unique “I” [...], subjectivity always depending upon a language that belongs to a culture long before it belongs to me¹².

Perloff draws heavily on the works of writers such as Gertrud Stein and Samuel Beckett to illustrate how the assault upon language can be achieved using the most ordinary language but in the most unusual contexts. Rather, Perloff argues, one shouldn’t assume that words do not carry any meaning, but to take them out of their conventional family associations in order to “create new relationships between them”. From this procedure of defamiliarization, she finds how ordinary language can sound so strange and out of place, hence an instrument for the renovation of linguistic codes of creation and interpretation. This is what Wittgenstein chose to do in parts of his work, to find out the deceptive nature of everyday words and expressions and to understand how we are constantly deceived by the numerous reincarnations of words in their multiple language games.

Following this sudden consciousness of how we construct ourselves and our world through a predetermined use of words and sentences, many authors belonging to the modern and postmodern literary tradition focused on the crisis of language, its incapacity to convey a precise meaning, while they were underlining a necessary

¹² Perloff, *Wittgenstein’s Ladder*, p. 20.

detachment between the materiality of the signifier and what is being described. Something mysterious is left to explain, specifically what resides between our perception of things and the language we use to construct and explain ourselves as cognitive subjects. Accordingly, Wittgenstein states in his *Philosophical Investigations* that “Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from *one* side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about” (#203).

The many kinds of innovations in terms of style and aesthetics conveyed by such authors as Stein, Beckett, Joyce (in *FW*), Thomas Bernhard or Nuno Bragança had as its main goal to empty the language of its conventional meaning, avoiding obvious contexts for the sentences and the speaking subjects. What we are then left is with a strange fiction that looks at us, waiting for us to take it out of its strangeness and place it on a world that *we understand*. But it is on the nature of these fictions to resist any attempt to contextualize or explain meaning. We simply cannot recognize their words in any given fictional context (or in the lack of it). I am not saying that this kind of fictional works are devoid of possible ways to mean, that they are alien to any act of communication or function as a kind of private language game. And for certain, many times the work of art communicates the very impossibility to convey meaning: “Even when we postulate that the interiority of each man is incommunicable to other man, or that the reality of things is not cognoscible to men, the work of art *communicates* that incommunicability and *says* this cognitive incapacity”¹³. And Antonin Artaud will illustrate this take on the impossibility to *say* in the following statement:

*I made my debut in literature by writing books in order to say that I could write nothing at all. My thoughts, when I had something to say or write, were that which was furthest from me. I never had any ideas, and two short books, each seventy pages long, are about this profound, inveterate, endemic absence of any idea*¹⁴ (*Emphasis mine*).

In order to understand how an artist can operate in the language of the unknown, divesting words and sentences from its conventional interpretations and meanings, one should follow Roman Jakobson’s study on language disturbances in order to

¹³ Vítor Aguiar e Silva, *Teoria da Literatura (8ª edição)*, Coimbra, Almedina, 1991, pp. 195-196.

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 8.

understand, primarily, how language works and what exactly happens when one or more qualities of speech happen to be defective. The importance of this particular setting in Jakobson's work is that he focuses on patients with language impairments in order to further develop the notion of how in fact language operates, specifically in two strands, as showed originally by Ferdinand de Saussure: the metaphoric (based on word selection) and the metonymic (based on combination) discourses. But Jakobson goes further on to explore this binary opposition, detecting two types of speech functions that are localized in our brain and that can be considered as responsible for the making of two different types of literary endeavours: fiction and poetry.

Jakobson writes that "aphasic regression has proved to be a mirror of the child's acquisition of speech sounds; it shows the child's development in reverse"¹⁵. And he goes on to explain that the analogy between aphasiac disturbances and child language is bound by many "*laws of implication*". These laws of implication refer to how we acquire speech and how with time and training our net of contexts and acquired meanings becomes more and more complex, reaching its peak with the fictional texts populated with metaphors and metonyms, where language can be regarded as performing in its totality. Hence the creative artist engaged in new expressive possibilities finds himself working voluntarily in the aphasiac manner, unlearning all the language conventions and showing how what we mean is tightly bound to the basic framework of recognizable language operations.

Following Jakobson's study, aphasiac patients can suffer from *similarity disorder* and/or *contiguity disorder*, and this shows how we are trained to describe our most complex emotions, concepts and ideas through our the channels of similarity and contiguity. The *similarity disorder* shows us a type of speech where "the major deficiency lies in selection and substitution [of words], with relative stability of combination and contexture". So the aphasiac patient will have his verbal utterances totally dependent on the context of the conversation, not being able to start a conversation from scratch. It is a literal type of discourse, based on the use and functionality of language in a given context. "The sentence "it rains" cannot be produced unless the utterer sees that it is actually raining"¹⁶. An isolated word, detached from a specific context, is the same as linguistic noise, babbling, pure materiality. Thus, for instance, when asked to identify the colour "black", the patient

¹⁵ Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature* (London, Harvard University Press, 1987), p.96.

¹⁶ Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, p. 101.

will reply “what you do for the dead”. For him, there is only one meaning for the word “black”, and it is not even the colour, rather it is what you do for the dead, when we dress in black, when mourning the dead. Fortunately, in our normal speech, are able to recognize a separate word as a complex sign containing several possible meanings, and we do not associate it straight away with only one use for it in a given context. We are able to rationalize language according to the historically and socially constructed selves that we are. It would sound rather strange if we would talk in a kind of language only made up with metonyms or synecdoche, incapable of practicing the transaction of meanings that occurs when we want to say something but with different words.

The *contiguity disorder* affects aphasic patients who find themselves deprived of word combination and speech context, while the capability for word selection and substitution remains operational. This refers to the sort of aphasiac patient who can identify words and find family resemblances for their meanings, using similar words, but is unable to fit those same words in a given context. In this case, words have no real use as there is no association between their meaning and the thing which is described in a given language game. This refers to what Jakobson calls *agrammatism*, where the “syntactical rules organizing words into higher units are lost”. The word and its stock meanings are still present in the patient’s mind, simply there is no intrinsic logic in grammar to decide on the possible combinations between those same words. With the contiguity deficit, the word is treated like a phoneme, a small unit of sound that does not refer to anything but to its own sound shape, its materiality. In this case, the word is a dead-end, isolated from other words, its rigidity being impossible to be “dissolved” in derivations of the same word or in concordances in a sentence or speech act.

Following this, Jakobson reminds us that there are two basic verbal responses to verbal stimulus: one that is metaphorical and one that is metonymic. Thus he gives the example of a psychological test, when a child is asked to react automatically to a verbal stimulus. And the child’s response “is intended either as a substitute [through the use of metaphor] or as a complement to the stimulus [through the use of metonym]. So if the doctor says “airplane”, the child might react with an expression that works as a substitute, for instance “silver bird”, or with one that works as a complement, when saying, for instance, “wings”. Jakobson states that literature and other arts gravitate on this “bipolar structure of language”, in reaction to external

stimulus, which in aphasia becomes manifest through “the fixation on one of these poles to the exclusion of the other”. He takes prose works to be fundamentally based on the language of metonyms and synecdoche, specially fiction from the “Realist trend”, which, he argues, draws heavily on the surroundings and ambiances, the time and place where it occurs, and where the realist author “metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time.” On the other hand, of course, poetry in Romanticism and Symbolism is highly metaphorical, and for that matter Surrealism, with its particular characteristics.

Jakobson fundamentals the bipolar structure of language using the examples of aphasiac patients who are deprived of one of these two aspects: similarity or contiguity. The absence of one of these functions originates an awkward type of discourse, which in the first case can be a constant and redundant babbling that doesn’t really say anything in particular but revolves in the same grammatical area with no linguistic improvements or innovations. It reminds us of a certain type of maniac discourse that focuses on irrelevant details, empty descriptions and thoughts and ideas that lack precision. In the second case, we can notice a “telegraphic style”, when “words endowed with purely grammatical functions” such as pronouns, prepositions or articles disappear and we are left with words out of context, and with no interaction between them to generate interpretation. This type of expression is one that I associate with many of the demonstrations of, for instance, poetry belonging to the second half of the twentieth century, in works such as *Tender Buttons*, by Gertrude Stein, or in the works of Artaud, Beckett, William Carlos Williams or John Ashbery. Marjorie Perloff identifies this kind of disjointed writings with a necessity to flesh out the materiality from which the linguistic sign is made of, in order to get a closer look to what kind of conventions bind us to language, to words and to their meanings.

I would like to make a specific point here in regards to Jakobson’s analogy between aphasiac patients and how language works, and this will explain, I hope, the reason for which I brought this perspective into the dialogue of the disintegration and recreation of artistic languages. I began this paper with a notion of an “exploring artist” who pushes the limits of his own language to infer other possible modes of expression from the outskirts of that same language. This refers to another Deleuzian term, the “creative stutterer”, who intentionally stutters in his mother tongue, plays with syntax and attacks language, making it *his* language. He will undermine the

writing tools themselves, subvert and disfigure them until he reaches a point where a new language is born in “the *outside*”¹⁷ of language.

Following Jakobson’s idea of the aphasiac condition as a language learning process in reverse, creative stuttering is also a process of an intentional unlearning of language, when words and sentences are separated from its conventional meanings through a process of defamiliarization. For the aphasiac, as for the stuttering artist, conventional language is set aside: it “has [...] become meaningless and inaccurate has an instrument.”¹⁸ When language is being voluntarily shattered, we can see exactly where it cracks. Some modern and postmodern writers who engaged in a transfiguration of fictional language sound many times just like those aphasiac patients whose writing and speech deficiencies were thoroughly annotated and analysed as clinical case studies by neuropsychologists like Kurt Goldstein or A.R. Luria. But what is more interesting is that Jakobson takes the functionality of language into the realm of literature, explaining how fictions work mainly between the basic poles of metaphoric and metonymic discourse, for poetry and prose, correspondingly. The Deleuzian creative stutterer, Marjorie Perloff’s poetics of indeterminacy or Brett Bourbon’s perspective on *Finnegans Wake* show us that language doesn’t always follow this well-delineated path designed by Jakobson in the realm of fictional discourse. In fact, many times experimental poetry and fiction provocatively chooses only one of the poles – metaphoric or metonymic –, even amplifies its scope to the degree of distorting any possible meanings, showing that the ways of reacting to external stimulus are far more complex when we are dealing with a certain kind of fictional discourse that provokes an implosion within the text and shatters the conventions of grammar, syntax and semantics, that resists the “laws of implication” through contrasting forces of expression. Ernst H. Gombrich addresses these same forces to Cubism, an art form that “destroys mimetic illusion” and counters the “transforming effects on an illusionist reading [of the art work] by the introduction of contrary clues” that defy our interpretation and sense of familiarity to what is being represented. These contrary clues place us in the borderline of meaning, in a state of ontological disequilibrium, by negating us an all-rounded composition of familiar images, word associations, recognizable human or non-human features, coordination of space and time, in or outside the text, and so on. So even if a fictional

¹⁷ Deleuze, *Essays*, p. 112.

¹⁸ Marius Buning and Lois Oppenheim (ed.), *Beckett in the 1990s* (Rodopi: Amsterdam, 1993), p. 285.

narrative is totally composed by metonymical logic, its sentences can refer to non-existent or indeterminate referents in reality. A writer can highlight the artificiality of language and our circumscribed relation to it by using false or contrary clues for our interpretational task of the literary text, clues that seem to point out a specific situation, context or subject in reality but that nevertheless, due to contradictory forces of expression, are prone to many other possible interpretations. This can happen, for instance, through incessant repetition of the same subject or situation, with minor though contradictory variations, or through an unruled process of describing, in constant contradictory terms, what the narrator is observing. Repetition leads an exacerbation and consequent disintegration of what is being endlessly repeated, as a process of defamiliarization occurs that erases the conventional meanings attributed to a particular use of a word or sentence. Hence, repetition, contrasting forces of expression, the erasure of conventional meaning in each signifier and the nonsense conveyed by apparently immaculate causal sentences, all these address what John Ashbery calls “an open field of narrative possibilities”¹⁹.

I would like to suggest that some of the literature today is, idealistically, closer to the dysfunctional language of aphasic patients than to the rigid bipolar structure of metaphors versus metonyms that is found in narratives like *War and Peace* (metonymic) or in Surrealist works (metaphoric). Perception of the deceptive nature of language reveals to be very productive in some poetry and fiction as it makes the play between signifiers on the surface of the text and its lack of precise referentiality to simulate the uncertainty, confusion and the contrary forces that take part in our thought formation. This is a way of bringing us closer to the reality of our beings through the revelation of ourselves in the words that we read and write, the mirrored-painting of us that literature provides. At this point I believe that we are able to explain Beckett’s apparent contradictory assertion that “language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused”. Misused in a sense of voluntary aphasiac dysfunction, by showing how a voluntary defective speech, precisely due to its intrinsic recognition of being defective, can be more efficient in the difficult task of portraying the always-shifting construction of our thoughts, concepts and emotions. So what I am suggesting here is that the value of the disintegration of language, far from being a simple aesthetic and nonsensical exercise, resides precisely in our

¹⁹ Perloff, *Poetics of...*, p. 314.

confrontation with what words and sentences are to us, how we make sense out of nonsense in this world, and how we can find ourselves through language.

Such an effect upon the perception of ourselves is what Brett Bourbon advocates as a result of a closer reading and the search for meaning in Joyce's complex *Finnegans Wake*. "*Finnegans Wake* blinds us", he says, and "reading [the *Philosophical Investigations*] can show us how blind we sometimes are." Joyce's work, like many others in modern and postmodern literature engaged in a similar project of distrust for grammar, inevitably force us to reevaluate the line that we draw for the construction of ourselves between sense and nonsense, between what we believe or discredit, as we get closer to the limits of language, the limits of us as cognitive subjects, and ultimately to the limits of our world.

I take some of the experiments within literary fictions as an assault upon ourselves as human beings, on our assumptions, of what we take mostly as granted by the deceptive meanings and interpretations, a certain "form of life" that we have misleadingly adopted as being contiguous to ourselves since we took part in our first language games. When Bourbon asks us to take a good look on the *Wake*'s language, he knows that almost nothing in this particular work will redirect us to our own patterns of meaning and interpretation. Joyce's work "blinds" us in a way that it sabotages our understanding of language and the world as we understand them to be.

In this paper, I focused on language disintegration in its literary form and the consequences of using operative tools such as indeterminacy and defamiliarization of words and sentences in order to create a kind of fiction that reevaluates our relation to language and ultimately to ourselves as human beings and to others in a given space and time. I tried to show how this is bound to happen when we are faced with the nonsense of some fictional texts, especially through misleading directions conveyed by the artist who wants to temporarily displace the reader from its referential world and provide him with alternate experiences of perception and understanding. I consider the Deleuzian creative stutterer as being able to provide a more complex sense of meaning, of what we are, through a "misused" language, when he stutters in his own grammar, syntax and semantics, producing a kind of a foreign language that can also *say* more than what it actually *means*, a language that can also be music and vision, precisely due to the contradictory forces of thought and narrative that lurk behind it and make those words, just like those of the oracle, "say something", even if they do not "mean anything". As Deleuze asserts, the limit of language "is made up of

visions and auditions that are not of language, but which language alone makes possible²⁰. This foreign language has an intrinsic strangeness that make us feel estranged from ourselves as meaningful subjects, always on the verge of becoming others, just like those indeterminate subjects, emotions or thoughts we approach in some fictions as never referring to a precise instance in reality, rather remaining in an obscure process of becoming another.

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²⁰ Deleuze, *Essays...*, introduction, xlvi