

2015

## The dictionaries in which we learn to think

Timothy Flanagan Dr.

*The University of Notre Dame Australia*, [timothy.flanagan@nd.edu.au](mailto:timothy.flanagan@nd.edu.au)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/phil\\_article](https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/phil_article)



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

This article was originally published as:

Flanagan, T. (2015). The dictionaries in which we learn to think. *Deleuze Studies*, 9 (3), 301-317.

<http://doi.org/10.3366/dls.2015.0189>

Original article available here:

<http://www.eupublishing.com/doi/10.3366/dls.2015.0189>

This article is posted on ResearchOnline@ND at  
[https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/phil\\_article/38](https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/phil_article/38). For more  
information, please contact [researchonline@nd.edu.au](mailto:researchonline@nd.edu.au).



Flanagan, Tim. (2015) The dictionaries in which we learn to think. *Deleuze Studies*, 9(3): 301-317.  
doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/dls.2015.0189>

## The Dictionaries in Which We Learn to Think

Tim Flanagan

To seek to know before we know is as absurd as the wise resolution of  
Scholasticus, not to venture into the water until he had learned to swim

Hegel (1991: 34)

### **FIRST THOUGHTS, INITIAL IMPRESSIONS**

For Hegel the problem with Kantian thought is that its studied movement from sensibility to understanding remains always and only ever an epistemological procedure, a practice to be forever rehearsed. The concerted undertaking to account for the appearances of things (rather than things in themselves) which animates the *Critique of Pure Reason* does not so much provide for a translation of intuitions into concepts, according to Hegel, as a gloss or marginal note which sits alongside or between the two. For while the ‘synthetic’ account of things which underwrites Kant’s uniquely *critical* development of transcendental philosophy is characterised by the application of certain rubrics, this is not the same thing as the very synthesis by which thinking itself takes place. In this way, the proposition that these rubrics are sufficient for the decipherment of things (or at least for a reading of them which might be justified) means that in the end Kantian discourse is articulated by an accent which prevents it from being a fluent or fully articulated account of things.

In the *Science of Logic* for instance Hegel explains, with reference to what ‘has always been one of the most difficult parts of the Kantian philosophy’ (1969: 584), that the unity of apperception is insufficient as an account of thought since the subjectivity thereby posited is something whose transcendental contrast with what is real makes it necessarily incomplete – an ‘empty identity or abstract universality’ (589). In place of this provisional account of thought, Hegel posits an

understanding in which the *I think* obtains in terms of a consciousness subject only to 'its own absolute character' (586). For as announced in the Introduction to this his major work, a procedure of reflection whereby the criteria or methods for thinking are set out may well be acceptable in other areas of inquiry but not in the case of that inquiry which concerns thought itself. The reason for this is that such a principle of inquiry cannot be deduced but can only be embarked upon since the knowledge it proposes is something Absolute rather than a knowledge of mere conditions – a distinction Hegel emphasises when he insists, in a subtle reversal of the 'Kantian' figure of Scholasticus, that 'this point... must not wait to be established within *logic* itself but must be cleared up *before* that science is begun' (586). Lest thinking flounder in a knowledge of things in general, it must resolve to think what there ultimately is: things themselves.

Notwithstanding Deleuze's ultimate suspicion of Hegelian thought, this historic critique of Kant is significant for the way in which it foreshadows his own critical engagement with transcendental philosophy (especially the role of 'conditioning') taken up in a number of his studies such as *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (91), *Difference and Repetition* (173) and *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (120). Ahead of these studies, however, Deleuze's brief remarks in a 1954 review of Jean Hyppolite's *Logic and Existence* merit special attention since they signal a set of points that he will draw upon in many of his later works. Furthermore that these points are sketched in a review of a key study on Hegel helps to situate Deleuze's work within the tradition of what has come to be described as post-Kantian thought by proposing that his place within this tradition is to be understood as emphatically *non-Hegelian*.

### **LEARNING (TO THINK)**

What makes Deleuze's review of *Logic and Existence* so significant for his own philosophical project is that it offers an alternative outlook in place of the Hegel's concerns with regard to the Kantian project of critique. A glimpse of this can be seen toward the end of this short piece where Deleuze

remarks upon Hyppolite's attention to the sense in which 'the problem of beginning in philosophy... is not only logical, but pedagogical'. The importance here of Hegel's work for Deleuze is that it reveals a thinking that is not what is already thought (or which might yet be thought once and for all) but rather the undertaking of 'total Thought', the 'Being that thinks itself' (2004: 17) – one which *comes to know*.

To be sure, the grounds for such a thinking are to be found in Kantian philosophy whose achievement was to have established a form of thought which was neither simply the sheer manifold of things that gives rise to thoughts (empiricism), nor a dogmatic account of the thing that thinks them (psychology) (15), but rather the location of one in the other which brings them both about. As Deleuze explains, 'Kant's insight is that thought is presupposed as given: thought is given because it thinks itself and reflects itself, and it is presupposed as given because the totality of objects presupposes thought as that which makes understanding possible' (16). As set out later in *Difference and Repetition*, integral to this formal development was the profoundly critical scrutiny to which Kant had subjected the Cartesian account of thought. For while the act of thinking undoubtedly implies one who thinks, the very being of the latter cannot be determined simply by the actual experience of having thoughts. It is for this reason, according to Deleuze, that there can be said to have emerged under Kant 'a fault or fracture in the *I* and a passivity in the self' (1994: 86). That this difference can even be remarked upon signals an awareness that thought itself is happening, but the strictly subjective form of this awareness in Kant assigns it to a cogito. In this way, Kant's Copernican outlook was one shot through with an epistemic parochialism since it contented itself only with the all too human form of *our subjective experience*. The contribution made by Hegel's reading is to have shown that in Kant thoughts are not regarded as things themselves but rather are understood to be merely passive objects, as that which a thinker thinks.

Despite his critique of Descartes, no sooner had Kantian philosophy revealed that the one who thinks cannot be determined simply by having thoughts, 'the fracture is quickly filled by a new form of

identity – namely active synthetic identity’ (1994: 87). In other words, in view of the fact that the grounds of thought extend beyond the horizon of what can be known, the critical project had sought to establish bearings which would provide things with an orientation. But just at the moment that Kant encountered the ‘unthought’ in thinking – an encounter which ‘constitutes the discovery of the transcendental’ (86) – he undertook to furnish this rupture with a ready-made structure in the form of an I who understands. In other words, by positing (by adducing, or rather *deducing*) certain categories by which thinking is possible, Kantian philosophy sought to guarantee thought by proposing a legitimate place for the subject.

What makes Hyppolite’s reading of Hegel so important for Deleuze then is that it proposes a real understanding in place of a justification of what can be subjectively understood; it shows that the place secured within the horizons of possible knowledge is only ever anthropological, its logical relation to any real ground is only ever synthetic. As Deleuze asks rhetorically in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, ‘what is concealed in the famous Kantian unity of legislator and subject? Nothing but a renovated theology, theology with a protestant flavour: we are burdened with the double task of priest and believer, legislator and subject’ (2002: 93). In place of this *ressentiment*, however, the speculative character of Hegelian philosophy understands the very claim that thought itself makes on things to be nothing less than something real; whereas thinking in Kant was only ever conditioned, given by appearances, for Hegel thinking is oriented by nothing less than what there is. Deleuze underlines this distinction when he writes

Thus, in Kant, thought and the thing are identical, but the thing identical to thought is only a relative thing, not the thing-as-being, not the thing-in-itself. Hegel ...aspires to the veritable identity of what is given and what is presupposed, in other words, to the Absolute.

(2004: 16)

To borrow the legal phrasing employed by the Kantian tribunal, Hegel's claim then is one which establishes its right in the very act of making its claim – its case does not proceed by means of a 'discourse *on* humanity', a 'discourse *of* humanity, in which the speaker and the object of his speech are separate' (15). Accordingly, the sanctions which limit Kantian thought are shown to be merely a preliminary Phenomenology moment: a *movement* which 'starts from human reflection to show that this human reflection and its consequences lead to the absolute knowledge which they presuppose' (16). The anthropology which grounds Kantian thought is thus replaced by ontology – '[philosophy] *cannot be anything else*' (16) – as thinking comes to be understood *discursively*, on its own terms, as Logic.

What this means is that the empiricism that attends the inquiry 'of' humanity and the psychologism that attends the inquiry 'on' humanity (15) give way to a discourse of nothing less than the Absolute since it is realised 'that there is no beyond of language' (17); 'the difference between thought and being has been surpassed in the absolute by the positing of Being which is identical to difference, and which as such thinks and reflects itself *in* humanity' (18 emphasis added). Indeed this transformed understanding of thought, from something extrinsic to something intrinsic, is why for Deleuze 'Jean Hyppolite's book is a reflection on the conditions of an absolute discourse... my discourse is logically or properly philosophical when I speak the sense of what I say, and when Being thus speaks itself' (17). But while Deleuze ultimately appreciates that the philosophical 'rationale for transforming metaphysics into logic, the logic of sense' is to escape the exteriority of essences (16)<sup>i</sup>, the aspect of Hegel that concerns him is the way in which it despatches difference, treating it as a by-product of a more profound dialectical contradiction. No matter how radically absolute, its thinking is oriented in the end by a familiarity not dissimilar to that which was shown to occupy the anthropological subject in Kant or perhaps even the methodological cogito in Descartes.

A view of this broader concern is provided across Deleuze's later works. In particular, it is worth considering the essay on Kant (first published in English translation) which develops further the

account of the ‘fractured I’ set out in *Difference and Repetition* (86-87). In this short essay, Deleuze augments the imagery of the important distinction between the ‘I’ and the self – the distinction opened up by the ‘paradox of inner sense’ and which follows from the Kantian account of time – by describing the way in which it ‘constantly hollows us out, splits us in two, doubles us, even though our unity subsists’ (1997: 31). The important thing about this relation between the self and the I for Deleuze is that it comes about ‘only on the condition of a fundamental difference’ (29). Crucially, this distinction between the two does not presuppose the discrete activity of an I and passivity of a self but rather attests to the paradoxical sense in which somehow the activity of the I is *spontaneously* represented in the passive self.

I am separated from myself by the form of time and yet I am one, because the I necessarily affects this form by bringing about its synthesis... and the Self is necessarily affected by the I as the content of this form. The form of the determinable makes the determined Self represent the determination to itself as *an Other*.

(30 emphasis added)

The paradox of this unity is that, for all its passivity, the self ‘actively’ encounters the I of thought; the I and the self are clearly held apart, and yet *at the same time* what holds them together (and, following Kant, what provides for experience at all) is a ‘fundamental difference’: *an* ‘other’ that exceeds variety or alterity; the Absolute of difference-in-itself. It is for this reason that, the other is no ‘one’ but rather something characterised purely by its structural or perhaps *structuring* character. This is why Deleuze explains, in a critical note on Sartre, that while the ‘other’ oscillates within the polarity of self and I (poles which may well have respective functions<sup>ii</sup>) it is the other that establishes the poles, and not the poles that establish the other. The reason for this is that the other is the sheer expression of ‘a completely different structure’ which ‘refers only to the self for the other I and the other I for the self’ (1997: 260) – a structure he describes the following year in *Logic of Sense* as



‘transcendent with respect to the terms that actualize it’ (1990: 318). It would be a mistake then to view the difference between the self and the I as being a distinction *in general*. ‘For it is not the other which is another I, but the I which is *an* other, fractured I’ (1997: 270 emphasis added) – not ‘the’ other but *an* other since this ‘radical difference’ between the self and the I of thought is less something found ‘out there’ as something that is much more immediate and indeed individual.

This much is evidenced for Deleuze in the notion of a foreign language, when it becomes clear to me that I do not understand a discourse which I nonetheless find myself remarking upon. For what makes a language foreign is not so much that its unintelligibility renders it unnoticeable but that it is something we remark upon because it is unintelligible. It is not simply then that the other language given in this encounter might fail to express anything, but neither is it that this language merely expresses yet another world (one which would, after all, merely resemble our own). Rather, it expresses *an* other (whatever *this*, this other thing which is not our mother tongue, is) since however faint or fleeting there is a ‘moment at which the expressed has (for us) no existence apart from that which expresses it: the Other as *the expression of a possible world*’ (1994: 261).

Importantly, it is not only exotic or never-before-heard languages that attest to this intriguing and fundamental difference between our passive reception and our active incomprehension. This is why, Deleuze often draws upon Proust’s formulation that ‘Great literature is written in a sort of foreign language (Deleuze & Parnet 2006: 4)<sup>iii</sup>. To be sure the many great works have been written by authors in a language other than their mother tongue, but this observation owes nothing to a predilection for a ‘bilingualism or multilingualism’ which would simply preserve the respective ‘equilibrium’ of each language (1997: 109). Instead, what makes such literature great is that its writers stretch any given language to its limit so that it begins to lose its familiarity<sup>iv</sup>.

Accordingly, and much like the Hegelian development of Logic in Kantian thought, such literary discourse is not some extrinsic (anthropological) discourse ‘on’ or ‘of’ things but is rather the

discourse *intrinsic to things themselves*. For great literature does not so much come about when writers narrate this world (or imagine other worlds) as rather when they give expression to the limits of what can be said of this world. Crucially, the important difference however is that whereas Hegelian discourse reveals the Identity of what we think and what there is, for Deleuze discourse reveals the Difference in things.

It is for this reason that the achievement of great writers is not to have managed to write in a language whose range may not be as extensive as those with a more complex grammar or a larger lexicon<sup>v</sup> but rather to have articulated certain intensities of tone or timbre within a given language which ultimately make that language Different from itself. These authors ‘do not mix two languages together’, Deleuze explains, but rather ‘invent a *minor use* of the major language within which they express themselves entirely’ (1997: 109). In this way, these writers could be regarded as producing a or stunted literature<sup>vi</sup> but only in the same sense that bonsai trees are at once understood as trees and at the same time confront our understanding of what a tree is.

They are great writers because of this minorization: they make the language take flight, they send it racing a long a witch’s line, *ceaselessly placing it in a state of disequilibrium*, making it bifurcate and vary in each of its terms, following an incessant modulation.

(109 emphasis added)

Since they come to resemble less and less the very language they draw upon these minor literatures present a challenge to the homogeneity or ‘equilibrium’ of any one language, and indeed of discourse at all. But unlike the thought of Hegel which proposes to resolve itself through dialectical contradiction, these literatures exhibit the sense in which whatever has been thought or whatever can in principle be thought is not the same Thing as thought itself. In this way they render Difference.

Lest this discourse remain a murmur, it should be said that thinking is of course guided by the identity of principles and indeed these principles themselves thereby testify to a certain logical rectitude in thought. The point here for Deleuze however is that while the spontaneity of this active moment seems to arise from within, neither do these principles yield to the intuitions of a subjective understanding nor can the subject that knows them do so Absolutely since they are only ever to be found when they are unexpected – that is, as something other. Significantly, Hegelian thought is unaffected by things in this way for Deleuze ‘since the other is *its* other’ (2004: 18); in this way, the I that thinks may well be informed or mediated by a dialectical development, yet the contradiction by which its discourse posits itself remains a familiar, inner dialogue.

In place of this dialectic of contradiction, the discourse proposed by Deleuzian logic is one whereby thought participates in what could be described as an ecology of sense: the thoughts I think are mine not simply because I happen to think but rather because some *other* thing forces me to think them<sup>vii</sup>. It is for this reason that I do not think each and every the thought I have since, like the experience of the swimming champion set out in Kafka, many of them remain foreign to me (1997: 5)<sup>viii</sup>. It is in view of this ‘minorization’ or disequilibrium, and against the synthetic discourse Kant and the dialectic of self-contradiction in Hegel, that Deleuze finds this use of language reveals the Difference which elicits thinking, a thinking of thoughts themselves rather than whoever happens to think them. Thinking without the identity of subject, then, in this way it can be said that

if an organism may be regarded as a microscopic being, how much more is this true of the Other in psychic systems. It gives rise there to local increases in entropy, whereas the explication of the other by the self represents a degradation in accordance with law... It is true that the other disposes of a means to endow the possibles that it expresses with reality, independently of the development we cause them to undergo. This means is language. Words offered by the other confer reality on the possible as such; whence the foundation of the lie inscribed within language itself.

There is a duplicity in discourse then since if it is natural to think, this is only because the nature of things forces us to think. *We must learn to think* since thinking is not the same thing as those orientations which can be given in advance of thought ('synthetic unity'; 'self-contradiction'), thinking is something that must *be learnt*. This much can be seen in the figure of the apprentice discussed across his later works, a figure which first emerges in the book on Proust where it receives extensive development<sup>ix</sup>. It is taken up again in the middle chapter from *Difference and Repetition* which shares a title with a part of the earlier work on signs. And though its treatment over a decade later in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* is much briefer, the discussion there is nonetheless worth considering since it nonetheless offers a vivid account of how thought for Deleuze arises by means of an apprenticeship.

There, in his consideration of the distinction between analogical and digital methods of representation, Deleuze explains how whereas digital representation 'passes through a codification, through a homogenization and binarization of the data, which is produced on a separate plane, infinite in principle' (2004a: 116), analogical representation does not so much proceed by means of instructions as rather by 'moments' which are actual and sensible. The reason that this analogical method cannot simply be taught or acquired is that it does not obtain in relation to the abstraction imposed by digital methods of representation; 'in the absence of any code, the relations to be reproduced are produced by completely different relations, creating a resemblance through non-resembling means... instead of being produced symbolically, through the detour of the code, it is produced 'sensually', through sensation' (115-6). In other words, but without recourse to other materials, the analogical method is one that must take place and indeed begin with only the immediacy of what there is (which at once provides for but also exceeds any form of subjective experience).

Pedagogically speaking this is not to say that the analogical method of representation remains a naïve imitation of things. Rather it is simply to say that it cannot be taught. This can be seen in certain works by Bacon where, following Cézanne, the conditions for the work itself (and the emergence of the painting's figure) are to be found nowhere beyond the intense chromatic complexity of the very colours by which the work was produced. In this way, painting reveals itself to be the 'analogical language par excellence' (113); that there are those such as Bacon who have developed a proficiency in this form of expression evidences, according to Deleuze, 'the necessity of a lengthy apprenticeship for the analogical to become language' (114); what makes this apprenticeship so involved is that it must include its means in its ends. It is not something that can be imparted, but neither is it simply innate. It must be brought about in the work itself, but pass beyond it.

In the case of painting, then, the apprenticeship in colours comes to articulate a discourse in the manner of a minor literature since it 'integrates its own catastrophe, and consequently is constituted as a flight in advance' (102-3). What this means is that the conditions of Bacon's works hold neither by means of a deduction of things in general (space, time or categories) nor in the dialectical realization of things (by means of a self-contradiction), since in either case the proposed discourse is one whose logic does not suffice to be the articulation of what there is (the Difference of things themselves) and must posit ends beyond its means. The conditions of things in Bacon's paintings however emerge in the works themselves when, instead of being depicted, figures emerge through a certain colouring relation or organisation which replaces that of form and ground (118, 134). For Deleuze then, the 'analogical language' of Bacon's work is significant because the modulation of colour expresses a logic whereby the things are not so much given by terms as to be found in the encounters *between* terms.

In this way this analogical language is neither an intuitive mother tongue nor is it an object of knowledge to be understood (and in which proficiency might be acquired by means of instruction) but rather one that comes about by an apprenticeship – an encounter with an interstitial, ramifying

and pullulating discourse<sup>x</sup> which is all too clearly not the language of common sense yet neither is it a language which might be codified through generic parts of speech.

## TWO DICTIONARIES

Despite this proscription, and working out from Deleuze's account of the diagramme (113), there is a sense however in which verbs (rather than nouns or adjectives) might be understood as the articulation of this discourse – a discourse expressed in minor literature, colourist paintings and as announced for Deleuze in the problem of univocity, a discourse which takes place *in spite of itself*. This peculiar role of verbs is sketched across a number of Deleuze's works but a key outline is provided in *Logic of Sense* when Deleuze describes how 'the Epicureans created a model based on the *declension* of the atom; the Stoics, on the contrary, created a model based on the *conjugation* of events' (1990: 183). Anticipating the position set out in the later book on Bacon, it could be said that for Epicurean thought colour was secondary to the depiction of things but for the Stoics there was only colour. In this way, separating what are ultimately transcendent principles of generation from those that arise immanently, it can be said that

that the Epicurean model privileges nouns and adjectives; nouns are like atoms or linguistic bodies which are coordinated through their declension, and adjectives like the qualities of these composites. But the Stoic model comprehends language on the basis of 'prouder' terms: verbs and their conjugation, in relation to the links between incorporeal events.

(183)

This is not at all to say that verbs provide a didactic model for thinking. And yet their characteristic role in discourse serves as a philosophical heuristic for how things might be understood. Key to this

understanding for Deleuze is the sense in which the relationships established by verbs are predicative and not attributive. The difference here is that while attributive relations take place via propositions which only ever express things from the point of view of a subject, the propositions expressed by predicative relations are themselves their own statement on things. ‘The predicate *is the proposition itself*’ (1993: 53). In other words, whereas the attributive scheme affirms things of a subject, the predicative scheme is affirmation itself<sup>xi</sup>. And while it would jar with this very scheme of things to state the definition of verbs independently of their expression – to give the instruction independently of the lesson – the examples provided by two dictionaries serve as a ‘motif’ (2004a: 113) for what thinking in this way is like.

Indeed following Deleuze’s own suggestion, Spinoza’s *Compendium Grammatices Lingua-Hebraeae* merits attention for the way which it ‘brings out certain characteristics that constitute a real logic of expression’ (1992: 364)<sup>xii</sup>. For instance in his discussion of the six different forms of infinitive nouns (including active and passive moods) Spinoza explains that ‘the Hebrews are accustomed to relate an action to the first cause which brought it into being’ and yet this is not always sufficient for what is required of discourse. For this reason ‘it was necessary for the Hebrews to form a new and seventh kind of infinitive which should express an action recorded simultaneously in the active and passive’. This new form combined both active and passive, according to Spinoza, since its ‘imminent cause’ was expressive of a certain relation which held the two together (2002: 629). Significantly, this anticipatory relation between activity and passivity could well be likened to the passive spontaneity or active passivity that attended the discovery of the transcendental Deleuze claims Kant had overlooked – a modular function whose discourse would articulate the minor literature of colourism.

Albeit a fable, a second example of a dictionary somehow eliciting thought is to be found in a short story by Borges. What makes this story significant for Deleuze’s thought is that it takes up the riddle posed amid his discussion of the apprentice not only in *Difference and Repetition* but also *Proust and*

*Signs* regarding how one learns Latin<sup>xiii</sup>. In Borges story, the narrator relates how by the time of his second visit to Fray Bentos he had

had embarked upon a systematic study of Latin... In my suitcase I had brought with me Lhomond's *De viris illustribus*, Quicherat's *Thesaurus*, Julius Caesar's commentaries, and an odd-numbered volume of Pliny's *Naturalis historia* – a work which exceeded (and still exceeds) my modest abilities as a Latinist.

(1998: 133)

After only a short while in the town he received a letter from the story's eponymous Ireneo – the once nimble youth briefly seen running through the streets during the earlier visit, nowadays consigned to bed, having since been crippled in a horse-riding accident – in which, as the narrator relates, quoting the missive in part, the boy had asked 'that I lend him one of the books I had brought, along with a dictionary 'for a full understanding of the text, since I must plead ignorance of Latin'' (133). While the anecdote is well known for the extraordinary account of memory (and perception) which it goes on to detail, this epistolary request is significant in its own right.

The reason for this is that whereas at the time of writing the letter the boy admitted no knowledge of Latin, somehow, in little more than a month, he had come to be able to speak the language – having learned it, along with several others, 'effortlessly' (137). As with so many of the events from Borges' tales, little explanation is given for this feat other than the implication that Ireneo had made use of 'Quicherat's *Gradus ad Parnassum*' – an incredulity shared by the narrator who, upon receiving the letter, 'didn't know whether to attribute to brazen conceit, ignorance or stupidity the idea that hard-won Latin needed no more teaching than a dictionary could give' (133). And even though the means by which this end were reached are not detailed in the story, the clue to the boy's extraordinary ability at learning languages is given in the testimony of his memory and perception. For these are shown to



signal a heightened power to be affected and indeed his experience of things is one exhausted by constantly encountering the world unexpectedly as if via an apprenticeship.

With one quick look, you and I perceive three wineglasses on a table; Funes perceived every grape that had been pressed into the wine and all the stalks and tendrils of the vineyard. He knew the forms of the clouds in the southern sky on the morning of April 30 1882, and he could compare them in his memory with the veins in the marbled binding of a book he had seen only once, or with the feathers of spray lifted by an oar on the Río Negro on the eve of the Battle of Quebracho.

(135)

These remarkable powers of mind, the narrator relates, are to be explained by the unlimited exercise of two mental faculties, each goading the other, much like the violent encounter with limits which took place in the apprenticeship of learning (Deleuze 2000: 101). Funes' 'present was so rich, so clear, that it was almost unbearable, as were his oldest and even his most trivial memories... his perception and his memory were perfect' (Borges: 1998 135). The significance of this perfection is that it comes about through a method of exhaustion in which nothing could be forgotten since everything could be perceived, and everything could be perceived because nothing could be forgotten.

Accordingly, this simultaneity of two powers without limits (indeed their relation *in a single power*) is why in the example above Funes could contemplate the 'spray lifted by an oar' even if it had taken place forty years earlier, or the wine that had filled the glasses: he could trace the effects of events through time, since no event (let alone its effects<sup>xiv</sup>) was too subtle for him. 'His own face in the mirror, his own hands, surprised him every time he saw them... Funes could continually perceive the quiet advances of corruption, of tooth decay, of weariness. He saw – he *noticed* – the progress of death, of humidity' (136). In short, his experience was at once so momentary and so eternal that, for Funes time did not so take place (one moment after another) as happen all at once.

Moreover, within the vortex of such an encounter with the world, this unique perspective on things is all the more acute in Funes' experience of language – and it is this that best serves to demonstrate the radical transformation of transcendental philosophy that is to be found in Deleuze. This role of language is given by the narrator's closing reflection on the boy at the end of the fable, where he notes that Funes

had effortlessly learned English, French, Portuguese, Latin. I suspect, nevertheless, that he was not very good at thinking. To think is to ignore (or forget) differences, to generalize, to abstract. In the teeming world of Ireneo Funes there was nothing but particulars – and they were virtually *immediate* particulars.

(136)

It could be concluded following this summation that, no matter his linguistic abilities, ultimately Funes' experience was one informed by his faculties of memory and perception. But despite its impotence (relative at least to his other faculties which were without limit) Funes' faculty of natural language is key since it signals that none of the languages he knew sufficed to articulate his thoughts. In effect, then, his thoughts remained formless since they could not be designated in any way which might make things discursively understandable – and yet they were Absolutely real. That this experience exhibited a sense in which the logic of things (themselves) provides for and yet exceeds the subjective form of our discursive understanding is shown by Borges when he relates:

Not only was it difficult for him to see that the generic symbol 'dog' took in all the dissimilar individuals of all shapes and sizes, it irritated him that the 'dog' of three-fourteen in the afternoon, seen in profile, should be indicated by the same noun as the dog of three-fifteen, seen frontally.

(136)

What makes this significant for an account of transcendental philosophy is that there is here adduced in *Funes* a pronounced disequilibrium which dislocates the dialectical logic of self-contradiction in Hegel and the synthetic discourse of things guaranteed by Kant by means of a pensive (at once active and passive) anticipation of a language to come.

Locke, in the seventeenth century, postulated (and rejected) an impossible language in which each individual thing, each stone, each bird and each branch, would have its own name; Funes once projected an analogous language, but discarded it because it seemed too general for him, too ambiguous. In fact Funes remembered not only every leaf of every tree of every wood, but also every one of the things he had perceived or imagined it.

(136)

It may well be concluded then that despite his linguistic abilities Funes could only think very little, but only on condition that thought here be understood as a subjective form of knowledge. Instead, Funes' unlimited perception and memory (which could only be given logical expression by a narrator) testify to an experience of thinking which takes place in light of the unexpected encounter with the Difference of things themselves.

Whether the discursive form of this encounter would include or could be found in a reading of Quicherat's *Thesaurus* or Spinoza's *Compendium* remains to be seen, since either dictionary could well serve as an 'other' for the apprenticeship of thought. What can be said however is that if thinking did arise from them it would do so only by virtue of this pedagogic encounter and not following any didactic intention.

## Notes

---

<sup>i</sup> Deleuze's enthusiasm for this project is worth noting. 'It is indeed thanks to Hyppolite that we now recognize philosophy, if it means anything, can only be ontology and an ontology of sense' (18).

---

<sup>ii</sup> Deleuze explains how ‘they experience qualities in general as already developed in the extensity of their system, but they tend to explicate or develop the world expressed by the other, either in order to participate in it or to deny it (1997: 260).

<sup>iii</sup> As indicated by the translators in their introduction, Deleuze himself authored the opening chapter.

<sup>iv</sup> ‘This limit is not outside a particular language, nor language in general, but it is the outside of language... it is none other than the language we speak – it is a foreign language *in* the language we speak’ (2006: 370).

<sup>v</sup> Consider Deleuze’s interest in the way in which ‘American English is worked upon by a Black English, and also Yellow English, a Red English, a broken English... Oh no, it is not a question of imitating patois or restoring dialects like the peasant novelists... It is a case of making language shift, with words which are increasingly restrained and a syntax which is increasingly subtle. It is not a question of speaking a language as if one was a foreigner, it is a question of being a foreigner on one’s own language, in the sense that American is indeed the Blacks’ language’ (dialogues 44).

<sup>vi</sup> Consider Deleuze’s examples from ‘modern literature’ such as ‘Mallarmé’s book, Péguy’s repetitions, Artaud’s breaths, the agrammaticality of Cummings, Burroughs and his cut-ups and fold-ins, as well as Rousel’s proliferations, Brisset’s derivations, Dada collage, and so on’ (1988: 131). In this regard consider too Jarry’s project which ‘is not a question of etymology, but of bringing about agglutinations in the other-language [*l’autre-langue*] so as to emerge in the-language [*la-langue*]. Undertakings like those of Heidegger or Jarry should not be compared with linguistics, but rather with the analogous undertakings of Roussel, Brisset, or Wolfson (1997: 97). What these examples show, for Deleuze, is that ‘language does not have signs at its disposal, *but acquires them by creating them*, when a language<sub>1</sub> acts within a language<sub>2</sub> so as to produce in it a language<sub>3</sub> an unheard of and almost foreign language. The first injects, the second stammers, the third suddenly starts with a fit (1998: 98 emphasis added).

<sup>vii</sup> Note the ‘violence’ of these encounters (1994, 2000 *passim*.)

<sup>viii</sup> Compare the remark in the lecture on Spinoza ‘we use all the languages in order to try to better understand the languages that we don’t know’ (1981).

<sup>ix</sup> Consider especially the discussion of the hieroglyphics and the apprenticeship of the Egyptologist set out in the study on Proust (2000: 4, 92).

Consider too the figure of the ‘new Meno’ sketched in that study (1994: 166 & 180); given his interest later in that work of those ‘‘things’ that only an embryo can do, movements that it alone can undertake or even withstand (215), the process by which Ideas are encountered in chapters four and five of *Difference and Repetition* and the closing lines of his essay on *The Method of Dramatization* (2004:103) could well be described as meiotic rather than maieutic.

<sup>x</sup> Consider the respective discussions of stammering and stuttering in *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1997).

<sup>xi</sup> Compare how in *Logic of Sense* Deleuze describes how ‘instead of a certain number of predicates being excluded from a thing in virtue of its concept, each ‘thing’ opens itself up to the infinity of predicates through which it passes, as it loses its centre, that is, its identity as concept or as self’ (174); ‘Rather than signifying that a certain number of predicates are excluded from a thing in virtue of the identity of the corresponding concept, the disjunction now signifies that each thing is opened to the infinity of predicates through which it passes, on the condition that it loses its identity as concept and as self’ (296).

<sup>xii</sup> It should be noted that in addition this study, Deleuze later wrote a dictionary on Spinoza’s philosophy (1998b).

<sup>xiii</sup> ‘Who knows how a schoolboy suddenly becomes ‘good at Latin’...? We never learn from the dictionaries our teachers or our parents lend us’ (2000: 22). ‘We never know in advance how someone will learn: by means of what loves someone becomes good at Latin... or in what dictionaries they learn to think’ (1994: 165).

---

Michael Clarke, Professor of Classics at the National University of Ireland (Galway), begins his contribution in *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language* with the arresting claim that ‘I do not really know Ancient Greek, nor do any of the authors to this *Companion*’ (2010: 120). Among other things, his essay undertakes to provide a critical reflection on the dictionaries used in learning Greek, explaining that ‘the standard LSJ is muddled and treacherous, especially for the commonest words, but becomes much more effective if supplemented by Chantraine’s [1999] sane and sensitive *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*’ (132-133).

The tradition which considers *how* learning takes place (alongside *what* it is that is learnt) is one surveyed in studies like those of Ong (1983) and Rossi (2006). Beyond this staple of Renaissance letters – consider Copenhaver’s (1990: 107) discussion of certain middle and late fifteenth century works which ‘advance[d] Europe’s general command of Latin’, such as *De orthographia, Cornucopiae* and *Thesaurus linguae Graecae* – even before the Greeks, the tradition of Babylonian scribal schools is to be noted in this regard. See for instance Vanstiphout’s criticism of a seminal article by Kramer in which the former underlines the difficulty of learning dead and (especially given that Sumerian is understood as an *isolate*) foreign languages. According to Vanstiphout, Kramer ‘does not explain how Sumerian was taught after its *demise* as a spoken language. Must we assume that this was done by means of the lists of paradigms and the ‘dictionaries’ mentioned by Kramer... or was this instruction in his view based on the ‘considerable oral and explanatory material’ with which ‘the teacher and the assistants... supplemented the bare lists, tables and literary texts’...?’ (1979: 118).

<sup>xiv</sup> Consider Deleuze’s development of the example, itself found originally from Leibniz and earlier addressed by Nietzsche, that no two leaves are the same. ‘Replace two leaves with forensic scientists: no two grains of dust are exactly identical, no two hands have the same distinctive points, no two typewriters have the same strike, no two revolvers score their bullets in the same manner’ (1994: 26).

## References

- Borges, Jorge Luis (1998) *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley, London: Penguin
- Clarke, Michael (2010) ‘Semantics and Vocabulary’, in *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, ed. Egbert Bakker, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Copenhaver, Brian (1988) ‘Translation, Terminology and Style in Philosophical Discourse’, in Charles Schmitt & Quentin Skinner (eds), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles (2006) *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges & Mika Taormina Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press.
- (2004) *Desert Islands and other texts 1953-1974*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- (2004a) *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* trans. Daniel W Smith, London: Continuum
- (2002) *Nietzsche and Philosophy* trans. Hugh Tomlinson, London: Continuum.
- (2000) *Proust and Signs*, trans. Richard Howard, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- (1997) *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W Smith & Michael A Greco Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- 
- (1994) *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, London: Athlone Press.
- (1993) *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley, London: Athlone Press.
- (1992) *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin, New York: Zone Books.
- (1990) *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, New York: Columbia University Press.
- (1988) *Foucault*, trans. Séan Hand, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- (1988b) *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley City Light Books: San Francisco.
- (1981). Spinoza Seminar 10 March 'The Actual Infinite-Eternal, The Logic of Relations' available at <http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=42&groupe=Spinoza&langue=2>
- Deleuze, Giles & Claire Parnet (2006) *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam, London: Continuum.
- Hegel, G.W.F. (1991) *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusatz*, trans T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting & H.S. Harris Indianapolis: Hackett.
- (1969) *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller, London: Allen & Unwin.
- Kant, Immanuel (1929) *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith London: Macmillan.
- Ong, Walter (1983) *Ramus: Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Rossi, Paolo (2006) *Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language*, trans. Stephen Clucas London: Continuum.
- Spinoza (2002) *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael Morgan, Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Vanstiphout, HLJ (1979) 'How Did They Learn Sumerian?', *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, 31:2.