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'A Wider Range than Mental Lines can Keep':
Some Meditations on Metonymic Philosophies and Education

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During my time as a teacher, I would regularly teach the differences between similes, metaphors and metonyms. Though this paper will touch on my experience of teaching these things that is not its principal concern. Instead, I want to discuss the more general ways in which two philosophers (Derrida and Deleuze) privilege metonymic ways of viewing language. In a sense, I will be providing a metadiscourse 'of sorts' on metonymy and metonym. Metaphors, as they ordinarily appear, involve both division and suitability of fit. So, for example, if a poet refers to the sun as 'the eye of heaven' then we have a division between the sun (the real 'original' thing) and its metaphorical realisation as 'the eye of heaven'. Moreover, the implication is that we can logically determine what is being described because the sun is eye-shaped and it is up in the sky. Of course, to say the sun is eye-shaped is, in a sense, wrong—the sun is round. The fact that the wrongness here does not immediately strike us reveals a deeper metonymic quality to language. In this paper I look at contrasting philosophical approaches to metonymy as they feature in the work of Derrida and Deleuze. From there, I consider various issues pertaining to education and translation.

During my time as a school-teacher I frequently had to teach the difference between metaphor and metonymy: *Metaphors,* I explained, must replace other ways of putting things. So, for example, 'the sun' might be *replaced* with the 'eye of heaven'. This is based on the idea of there being some kind of resemblance between the metaphor and the thing it stands for. *Metonyms,* by contrast, were best explained by giving examples of what metonyms are: the crown stands for the king; in these cases a part of the thing in question is taken to stand for the whole.

Why does this matter? It matters to me because I want to introduce the idea that some kinds of philosophy—in fact, some ways of thinking more generally—are metonymic. Let's approach this by asking, first, how some kinds of philosophy (and thinking) may depend on metaphor. This brings us to philosophies that depend upon some kind of a gap between, for example, the actual and the ideal, perhaps between language and logic. Where there is such a gap, one element in the binary is privileged. A clear case of this is Plato's theory of the Forms (see, for example, Plato, 1999). The ideal forms, that for Plato are the most real things, contrast with the changing objects of our experience. Obviously this is crucial for what we think of as Western forms of

thought. This makes us believe that the actualities of our experience are somehow second-rate: they are inferior to the ultimate reality, the realm of the Forms. A version of this way of thinking is inherited by Christianity. We can see here the connection between this way of thinking and a certain kind of metaphysics: metaphor connects with metaphysics!

These concerns may seem remote from life in the 21st century, but they are not. Think for a moment of Takashimaya, the department store, where everything is arranged beautifully. We are presented with a kind of ideal world where everything is in perfect condition. When we go to the store and purchase something, we feel we are brought closer to this ideal world—almost perhaps as if this were like a religious experience. Just think for a moment of the compulsion that people feel to go shopping—as if they were spiritually drawn. On the negative side this can make us feel that our actual lives—our homes, our clothes, out kitchens—are second-rate, not how things should be. In fact, a similar process is at work through television. Advertisements work on us in this way, constantly presenting the world that we should aspire to live in. So also do series such as *Friends,* which glamorise a way of life, making us feel that this is really how people should be. All this is relevant to ordinary everyday unhappiness. Phillip Larkin's poem 'Essential Beauty' catches something of this:

> In frames as large as rooms that face all ways
> And block the ends of streets with giant loaves,
> Screen graves with custard, cover slums with praise
> Of motor-oil and cuts of salmon, shine
> Perpetually these sharply-pictured groves
> Of how life should be. High above the gutter
> A silver knife sinks into golden butter (Larkin, 1964, p. 45).

Larkin's depiction of advertising hoardings captures the lurid quality of images of perfection that are gathered above us. They look down at us as we languish in the gutter, cowed by the discrepancy between the mundanity of our ordinary lives and the golden promise that hovers in the night sky. We can also relate these images of an idealised world to the way the classroom has become. Instead of the dynamic and sometimes heated space that this used to be, it is now characterised more by the cool air of a climate-control system. The atmosphere has become antiseptic through an overreliance on ICT. Everywhere you look there are laminated cards with lists of learning objectives. Teachers will be smartly dressed and smiling, as if they were young executives efficiently managing the business at hand. Activities will be 'well targeted'. Lesson plans, and the discourse of the teacher during the lesson, must remain 'on message'.

LYOTARD: PHRASES, GENRES AND DIFFERENDS

So how might we think beyond these forms of 'idealisation'? The philosopher Lyotard may help us here. Lyotard has no hope that we can fully escape the kind of perfectibility described above. However, that is not to say that nothing can be done. For Lyotard the answer lies in the philosophy of language and an original reading of the Kantian sublime that emerges from that

philosophy. In the subsequent section we shall consider what this amounts to. The reading of Lyotard presented here will be in keeping with Gordon Bearn's and I will not (intentionally) depart from it. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, I find nothing to disagree with in Bearn's reading of Lyotard (I will however attempt to consider one or two issues that Bearn ignores that will seem peculiar to thought that is of a rationalist disposition).

Bearn argues that we must read Lyotard's interest in 'the sublime' in accordance with the latter's philosophy of language and his discussion of 'phrases', 'genres of discourse' and 'differends'. Let us begin with phrases. Lyotard does not provide a definition of a 'phrase' but rather gives examples such as 'a fleeting blush; a tapping of the foot; give me a lighter' (Lyotard qtd in Bearn, 2000, p. 233)—it seems that virtually anything can count as a phrase. Phrases are to be thought of as 'events'—they are 'nothing cognitive or significant at all' (*ibid.*) and are the only thing that survives universal doubt. What does this mean? When Lyotard speaks of 'the phrase' he is thinking of that entity/event prior (in a non-chronological sense) to its being linked and situated within discourse—the phrase/event is simply an 'it happens' or an 'is it happening?' (Lyotard, 1988, sect. 131) which once it is linked is realised as 'what happens'. Therefore, the phrase is 'a presentation before the chronological present' an 'event' prior to linking. When phrases are linked they bring the chronological realm into being. This is because linking is bound up with goal directedness—it binds the phrase to a past/present/future, which divides experience and unites it in accordance with the goal of linking. We can only gain an understanding of the present because linking has constituted it (Bearn, 2000, p. 233).

When a phrase is linked it is done so in accordance with a number of possible phrase regimens such as reasoning, knowing, describing, recounting, questioning, showing and ordering. Different regimens serve to 'throw the chain over the abyss of not-being that opens between phrases', therefore suturing over the 'eventness' of a phrase. However, to think solely in terms of regimen gets us nowhere. This is because the functioning of regimen is determined by the genre of discourse in which they are utilised. Genres of discourse guide particular moves. Because several linkages across genres of discourse are possible, once a genre takes hold of a phrase this produces a 'differend'—only one kind of linkage can happen at a time. So what is a differend? Well, 'as distinguished from a litigation, a differend would be a case of conflict between at least two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments' (Lyotard, 1988, sect. 40). Because we link in one way, we cannot link in another and this produces a differend. Phrases could always have been linked in other ways. Dislocating the phrase from the chronological present is therefore an imaginative leap that flies in the face of rationalist concerns for an impossible completeness and consistency 'The differend is reborn from the resolutions of supposed litigations' (*ibid.*, sect. 263). With this in mind, genres of discourse cut off other avenues of thought, hold phrases in their grip and impose 'the finality of a necessary causality'. This is what leads Lyotard to write:

> No matter what its regimen, every phrase is in principle what is at stake between genres of discourse. This differend proceeds from the question, which accompanies any phrase, of how to link onto it. And the question proceeds from the nothingness that separates one phrase from the 'following'. There are differends because, or like, there is Ereignis [an event, an occurrence]. But that's forgotten as much as possible: genres of discourse are modes of forgetting the occurrence,

they fill the void between phrases (*ibid.,* sect. 188).

Here, Lyotard draws our attention to the fundamental irony that the absent quality of the phrase (its non-chronological 'is it happening?') is what allows for genres of discourse to grip it and smooth over the absence. It seems that Lyotard has led us to an impasse. However, he does not simply give up. Rather he turns to Kantian aesthetics of the sublime. This turn is in keeping with what he sees as the philosophical necessity of bearing witness to differends through finding 'idioms' for them. The idiom is a linguistic mode accessible only to those ways of thinking that are 'not' bound by genres of discourse—the arts, philosophical thinking and philosophical politics (I think we can safely assume that Lyotard does not mean all art, all philosophical thinking or all philosophical politics). To bear witness to the differend is to bear witness to the 'now' before chronology. It can only happen if we question/negate 'everything including thought' and accept that something will 'happen that reason has not yet known'. That way, we accept the occurrence of what is 'not yet' determined. Lyotard describes such philosophical work in terms of 'Peregrinations in the desert' (Lyotard, 1991, p. 74).

For Lyotard, the activity of bearing witness to the differend resonates with Kant's treatment of the sublime. The sublime works in accordance with the movement from a no to a yes it is 'a pleasure that arises only indirectly: it is produced by a feeling of momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger'. For Kant, it seems that our imagination will fail to deal with something at first and then reason can think the infinite as a totality, though the totality could never be presented as such in an intuition. Bearn argues that bearing witness to the differend might be rather like this—first we feel pain at the differend then we try to find idioms to present what escapes presentation. This will involve the negation of desires goals and purposes.

METONYMIC PHILOSOPHIES

Though Lyotard's philosophy might lead us away from a particular kind of idealisation, it operates entirely through an ascetic turn toward nothingness. What little salvation there might be involves a nod to linguistic disjuncture. Lyotard represents 'groundlessness as a completely undifferentiated abyss, a universal lack of difference, an indifferent blank nothingness' (Deleuze qtd in Bearn, 2000, p. 242). If anything comes out of this nothingness it will be 'incomprehensible: as terrifying as dread or as wonderful as grace' (Bearn, 2000, p. 242), perhaps full of sound and fury but signifying nothing. Moreover, what Lyotard seems to offer is simply another form of metaphoric idealisation symbolised by the 'metaphor' of the desert— thinking 'the blank' may be impossible. In this part of the article I will consider less 'negative' or self defeating ways of challenging the empty forms of perfectibility that seem to characterise the postmodern world. Such alternative approaches can be regarded as 'metonymic' philosophies. An example can be found be Derrida's philosophy of language. For Derrida, like Lyotard, it is not the case that there are truths to the world that are already there waiting to find words. Rather, language generates a metaphysics through its own workings, through the repetition of words in connection with other words. Meaning is only possible

through interdependence, and there is no final stability. This is metonymic because meaning is generated through contiguity (where one thing touches another) and not through representation (where one thing stands for or replaces something else). A crown ('crown' is a metonym that denotes the monarch) touches the head of a king or queen, and part of what you see when you see a king is the crown on that person's head. From a Derridian perspective Lyotard makes too clear a distinction between 'genres of discourse' as such genres would be reliant on one another to give the impression of distinctiveness.

There is another kind of philosophy that is also metonymic. If Derrida's ideas about language derive especially from a Heideggerian and Levinassian background, the philosophy I now want to consider is more Nietzschean in character. It is developed especially by Deleuze and Guattari—by a philosopher collaborating with a psycho-analyst. The most famous of their works in which this is elaborated is *A Thousand Plateaus*. The first image of thought that they discuss is the image of the tree.

Describing tree-like thought is fairly straightforward. Here we have (1) the image of roots, often invisible to the naked eye—think of God or Hegel's conception of spirit, and (2) the firm insular trunk from which branches spread. A tree (as image) is a self-enclosed entity, an arborescent 'structure'. Deleuze and Guattari maintain that the law of the tree-like structure always follows the logic of the one that becomes two. Here we might think of Genesis, and the creation of Eve from Adam's rib. In this sense 'the tree is already the image of the world, or the root the image of the world-tree' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 5). The law of the 'One that becomes two' is effectively also the law of reflection. The book is projected as the reflection of the world. There is therefore a matching of thought and world in representation. Within this model, thought is not conceived as an active element in the world.

The contrasting image employed by Deleuze and Guattari is that of the rhizome. Whereas trees grow in accordance with an arborescent 'structure', rhizomes do not behave in this way; they grow round the edges and between gaps and are always on the outside. Grass is a rhizome—here we might note the peculiar resistance to destruction displayed by grass. It may be obliterated in one place but simply grows up again elsewhere. We tend not to think of grass in terms of its individual blades; by the same token, ants are not generally thought about in this way. Rhizomes are multiplicities. We cannot even speak coherently about 'a rhizome'—we must simply refer to 'some' of a rhizome (p. 9) as we might speak of a patch of grass, which is already multiple. Rhizomes are therefore 'always in the middle'.

What is particularly relevant for present purposes is that Deleuze and Guattari speak of the tree in this explanation as a metaphor, whereas the rhizome is said to be a metonym—it is a metonym that resonates with the intensities of the world. But what exactly is an 'intensity'? According to Deleuze and Guattari, an intensity is an experience that is allowed to move across a flat plane. But what then does that mean? Intensities do not happen all the time. They are a matter rather of what happens in the middle, when things are allowed to flow. Thus, in the teaching of a class one can find that there are different phases. The class starts slowly, the planned activity is set out and the children begin to work. But then, somewhere in the middle, a question is asked, a discussion takes place and something happens that breaks with the lines of the lesson-plan or that opens it to new possibilities. And then in the midst of this activity, teacher and children become absorbed in what they are doing: things become intense.

The point here is to see that this is not something to be frightened of. It is not something that makes us unhappy. On the contrary it may be associated with some of the more memorable aspects of our teaching and learning, or indeed of our lives more generally. It is the kind of thing that it is hard to capture in a formal account. Something like this is suggested in these lines from 'Corsons Inlet' by A. R. Ammons. The exploratory nature of the words here, which seem almost to be feeling their way, suggests something of the kind of thought, the way of being and living that is needed:

I went for a walk over the dunes again this morning
to the sea,
then turned right along
   the surf
        rounded a naked headland
        and returned
   along the inlet shore:
it was muggy sunny, the wind from the sea steady and high,
crisp in the running sand,
     some breakthroughs of sun
   but after a bit
continuous overcast:
the walk liberating, I was released from forms,
from the perpendiculars,
     straight lines, blocks, boxes, binds
of thought
into the hues, shadings, rises, flowing bends and blends
      of sight:
        I allow myself eddies of meaning:
yield to a direction of significance
running
like a stream through the geography of my work:
   you can find
in my sayings
        swerves of action
        like the inlet's cutting edge:
   there are dunes of motion,
organizations of grass, white sandy paths of remembrance
in the overall wandering of mirroring mind:

but Overall is beyond me: is the sum of these events
I cannot draw, the ledger I cannot keep, the accounting
beyond the account:

I have reached no conclusions, have erected no boundaries,

shutting out and shutting in, separating inside
    from outside: I have
    drawn no lines:
    as
manifold events of sand
change the dune's shape that will not be the same shape
tomorrow,
so I am willing to go along, to accept
the becoming
thought, to stake off no beginnings or ends establish
    no walls:

by transitions the land falls from grassy dunes to creek
to undercreek: but there are no lines though
    change in that transition is clear
    as any sharpness: but 'sharpness' spread out,
allowed to occur over a wider range
than mental lines can keep (Ammons, 1972, pp. 147–149).

Here Ammons captures the experience of being caught up in the midst of things where transition though 'clear' is 'spread out'. The distinction between 'inside and outside' no longer holds. Why is this metonymic? The point is that thought is not confronted with a gap between one thing and something else it resembles; it is not a matter of representation—say, of the way that the tree relates to the world. Rather there is a contiguity (things touch!), and thought is allowed to flow as it touches this thing and another and another. Whereas the tree generates an 'arborescent' structure: it frustrates touch, being preoccupied with the gaze that seeks representation.

It is interesting to note, moreover, that the tree-rhizome distinction is not a straightforward binary opposition. This is partly because of what we saw earlier about the fact that tree is a metaphor and the rhizome a metonym. The rhizome does not represent but it is continuous with those aspects of the world to which it relates. It may seem ironic then that a forest is a rhizome: trees make up a forest, but a forest goes where it can go, like the moss that gathers around the stones in the temple garden or the water that flows across the river valley.

METONYMY AND TRANSLATION

Perhaps on the strength of these thoughts, it is worth making connections here with the idea of translation. But two possibilities emerge here. On one understanding translation involves a conversion of thought from one language to another, where the languages in question are understood to have a more or less pure form: the function of translation then takes on a coldly communicative quality. Problems in converting the words of a sentence from the home language to the target language are understood as technical difficulties, ideally to be overcome.

The other conception is based on the thought that there is something wrong with the above

picture. Languages do not come in such pure forms. Bakhtin draws attention to the way that translation is already at work within language. Derrida's and Deleuze's viewpoints, as outlined above, extend this thought, and they do this in different ways. For Derrida, translation is in a sense impossible. And it is impossible because language generates a metaphysics, rather than seeking to represent the way things are. What is germane in one language—what germinates —must be different from what occurs in another. Nevertheless, translation does take place. The impossible, translation, becomes possible, but never in any full sense—never in any pure or exact or mimetic way. The impossible, as so often in Derrida, must be what orients us.

A Deleuzian approach here requires us to think in terms of contiguity. A word touches another. It functions, as is well established, not so much through its correlation with the thing it represents as with its connections with other words. These contiguities are not exclusive to a home or target language but exist in endless chains that extend from one language to another. Deleuze and Guattari often use linguistics as a model for demonstrating the distinction between rhizomes and trees. Put simply, tree-like approaches to linguistics champion models of grammatical correctness, which conjure the figure of an ideal speaker or listener. In contrast rhizomatic thinking on language turns away from such power markers and approaches language in a different way:

> A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts sciences and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs and specialised languages. There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogenous linguistic community (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7).

There are several important things to note here. A rhizome, characterised by the line as opposed to the point establishes connections between linguistic zones, which are kept separate by tree-like thought. By the same token, rhizomatic thinking brings certain aspects of language 'the perceptive, mimetic, gestural and cognitive', which are ignored by traditional linguistic models, to the forefront. We are therefore encouraged to think of language in terms of *intensities* as well as 'meaning'. The linguistic universals formulated in traditional grammar are replaced by an understanding of language which celebrates its multiplicity of 'dialects, patois, slangs and specialised languages'. Perhaps more than this, we might say that the 'standard' forms of language enact a kind of tree-like violence against the *forest* of languages. Multiple languages are 'forced' outside to continue their rhizomatic behaviours around the roots of the dominant 'standard language'. This is why Deleuze and Guattari argue that conventional linguistic models do not represent 'a method for the people' whereas, 'a method of the rhizome type', on the contrary, can analyse language only by decentring it onto other dimensions and other registers. A language is 'never closed in on itself, except as a function of impotence' (p. 8).

What does this have to do with translation? Any act of translation must involve 'decentring' one language onto other dimensions and registers. Consequently, if one adopts this approach to translation it becomes a never-ending journey through dimensions and registers. This will appear hopeless if we crave transparency but thrilling if we embrace intensity.

CONCLUSION

Both Derrida's and Deleuze and Guattari's metonymic visions of language point to the unhappiness of linguistic theories that are based on a false and debilitating metaphysics. Though Deleuze and Guattari undoubtedly present a more expansive all-embracing vision of language than what Derrida provides, I do not want to choose between them. Derrida and Deleuze and Guattari draw our thought away from the kind of idealisation that is home to so much human misery. All three have something important to say about translation that takes us away from the debilitating search for pure and transparent communication across borders.

Barring some allusions to what might happen in the middle of lessons I have not explicitly thematised the significance of metonymic philosophies in regard to 'conventional' educational concerns such as teaching and learning or curriculum development. This is partly because what I have been attempting to describe is a kind of orientation to the world or perhaps an attunement to it. This is perhaps a more unconventional 'educational' concern. That said, some 'clearer' educational implications may follow on from the argument presented above. The account of translation hopefully has something to say to the importance of language learning whereby such learning has a philosophical richness that takes it beyond functionality and transparency. A metonymic philosophy of education may also have something to say to how we think about curriculum development. Alternatives to a curriculum based on the disciplines have sometimes taken on a rather empty form with an emphasis on skills or processes. Metonymic thought perhaps provides the kind of orientation that flies in the face of disciplinary boundaries and the metaphysics that accompanies them. However, this is a process where thought goes where it can go and does not require the artificial abstractions that may squeeze it into unnatural forms. To approach the curriculum in this way may put extraordinary demands on teachers and students alike, but perhaps it says something depressing about our current educational climate that 'the extraordinary' sounds like a synonym for 'the impossible'.

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