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# THE MACHINIC UNCONSCIOUS

ESSAYS IN SCHIZOANALYSIS

**Félix Guattari**

Translated by Taylor Adkins

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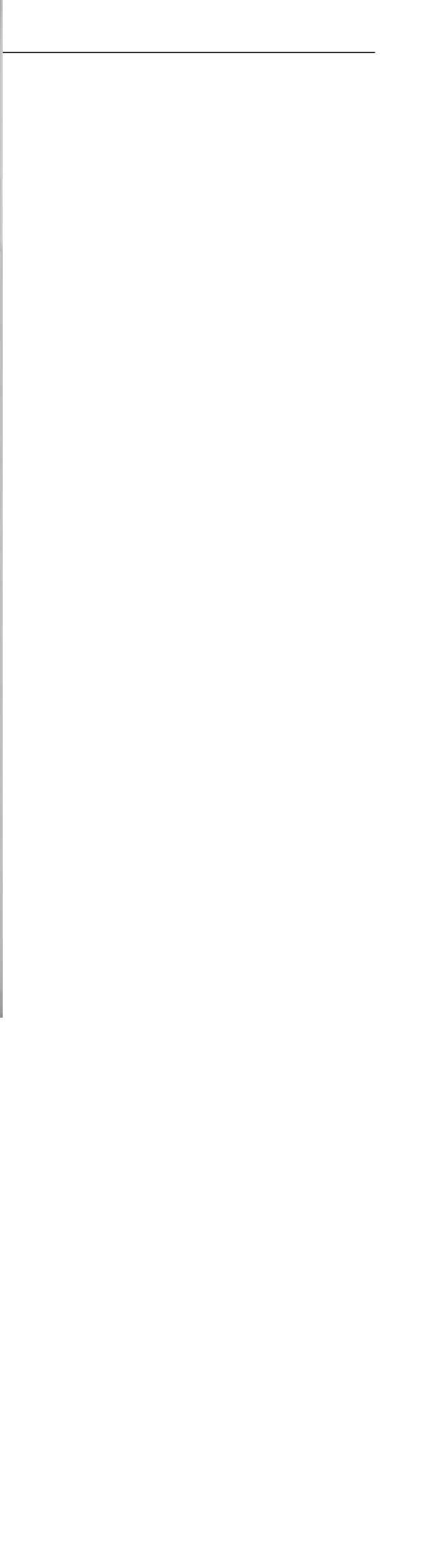
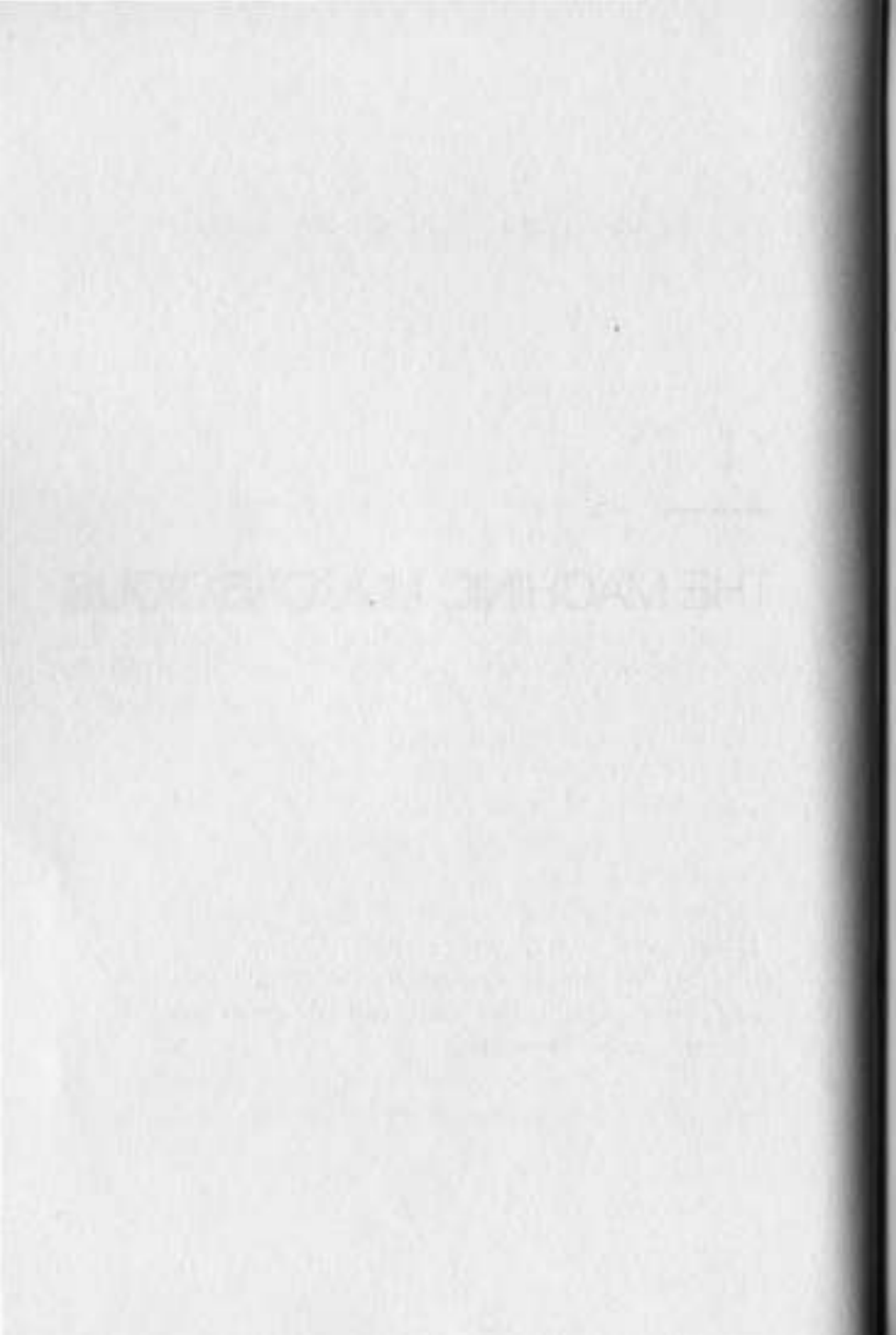
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## THE MACHINIC UNCONSCIOUS

The unconscious is a complex and dynamic system of mental processes that are not directly accessible to conscious awareness. It is the seat of drives, emotions, and conflicts that shape our behavior and personality. The concept of the unconscious was first introduced by Sigmund Freud, who proposed that the mind is divided into three parts: the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. The unconscious is the largest and most powerful part of the mind, and it is the source of much of our behavior. It is the seat of drives, emotions, and conflicts that shape our behavior and personality. The concept of the unconscious was first introduced by Sigmund Freud, who proposed that the mind is divided into three parts: the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. The unconscious is the largest and most powerful part of the mind, and it is the source of much of our behavior. It is the seat of drives, emotions, and conflicts that shape our behavior and personality.



## Introduction: Logos or Abstract Machines?

Does the unconscious still have something to say to us? We have saddled it with so much that it seems to have resolved to keep silent. For a long time it was believed to be possible to interpret its messages. A whole corporation of specialists worked away at this task. Nevertheless, the results were hardly worthwhile, for it seems likely they have all gone astray. Would the unconscious definitively speak an untranslatable language? It's quite possible. It would be necessary to start again from the beginning. First of all, what is this unconscious really? Is it a magical world hidden in who knows which fold of the brain? An internal mini-cinema specialized in child pornography or the projection of fixed archetypal plans? The new psychoanalysts have worked out more purified and better aseptized ideal models than the older ones: they now propose a structural unconscious emptied of all the old Freudian or Jungian folklore with its interpretative grids, psychosexual stages, and dramas copied from antiquity... According to them, the unconscious would be "structured like a language." Yet, it goes without saying, not like everyday language, but like a mathematical language. For example, Jacques Lacan currently speaks about the "mathemes" of the unconscious...

We have the unconscious we deserve! And I must acknowledge that the structuralist psychoanalysts are even less appropriate in my view than the Freudians, Jungians, or Reichians. I would see the



unconscious instead as something that we drag around with ourselves both in our gestures and daily objects, as well as on TV, that is part of the zeitgeist, and even, and perhaps especially, in our day-to-day problems. (I am thinking, for example, of the question of "the society we choose to live in" that always resurfaces around the time of each electoral campaign.) Thus, the unconscious works inside individuals in their manner of perceiving the world and living their body, territory, and sex, as well as inside the couple, the family, school, neighborhood, factories, stadiums, and universities... In other words, not simply an unconscious of the specialists of the unconscious, not simply an unconscious crystallized in the past, congealed in an institutionalized discourse, but, on the contrary, an unconscious turned towards the future whose screen would be none other than the possible itself, the possible as hypersensitive to language, but also the possible hypersensitive to touch, hypersensitive to the socius, hypersensitive to the cosmos... Then why stick this label of "machinic unconscious" onto it? Simply to stress that it is populated not only with images and words, but also with all kinds of mechanisms that lead it to produce and reproduce these images and words.

We are accustomed to think of material and social facts in terms of genealogies, archaeological residues, and dialectical progress or in terms of decline, degeneration, and rising entropy... Time goes on toward better days or plunges blindly toward unimaginable catastrophes; unless it simply starts to vegetate indefinitely. We can bypass these dilemmas by refusing any sort of causalist or finalist extrapolation and by strictly limiting the object of research to structural relations or systemic balances. But no matter how one goes about it, the past remains heavy, cooled down, and the future seems largely mortgaged by a present closing in on it from all sides. To think time against the grain, to imagine that what came "after" can modify what was "before" or that changing the past at the root can

transform a current state of affairs: what madness! A return to magical thought! It is pure science fiction, and yet...

In my view there is nothing absurd about attempting to explore these interactions, which I would also qualify as "machinic," without initially specifying their material and/or semiotic nature. Neither transcendent Platonic idea, nor Aristotelian form adjacent to an a-morphous matter, these abstract deterritorialized interactions, or, more briefly, these *abstract machines* traverse various levels of reality and establish and demolish stratifications. Abstract machines cling not to a single universal time but to a trans-spatial and trans-temporal *plane of consistency* which affects through them a relative coefficient of existence. Consequently, their "appearance" in reality can no longer claim to be given all in one piece: it is negotiated on the basis of quanta of possibles. The coordinates of existence function like so many space-time and subjective coordinates and are established on the basis of assemblages which are in constant interaction and incessantly engaged in processes of deterritorialization and singularization causing them to be decentralized in comparison to one another, while assigning them "territories of replacement" in spaces of coding. This is why I shall oppose territories and lands to *machinic territorialities*. By distinguishing them from set logic, a "machinism" of the assemblage will only recognize relative identities and trajectories. It is only on a "normal" human scale—i.e. that which pertains neither to madness, childhood, nor art—that Being and Time will seem to thicken and coagulate to a point of no return. Having considered things from the angle of machinic time and the plane of consistency, everything will take on a new light: causalities will no longer function in a single direction, and it will no longer be allowed for us to affirm that "everything is a foregone conclusion."

Following René Thom,<sup>1</sup> it even seems possible one can "take back one's throws," since, according to this author, the logos of the

biological species would be able to operate a sort of "smoothing of time" in the direction of both the past and future. Due to the definition of these *logoi* and so long as "space-time figures, as well as their variations, conform to a principle excluding discontinuities and angles," the phenomena that refer to them would be able to influence their predecessors and their successors. Here as well, all in all machines become independent of their immediate manifestations while "smoothing" a plane of consistency that authorizes every intersection possible! And yet, these *logoi* inspire only a relative confidence in me. I fear that they merely have an irresistible inclination to escape from the physico-biological world in order to rejoin the mathematical universe of their origin! What particularly worries me is that they can only be factored in, as René Thom explains, so that the most abstract are arranged with the most elementary and the most concrete with the most complex. This simple fact seems to condemn them to definitively fail to maintain their hold on reality. The difference between Thom's *logoi* and abstract machines, such as I conceive them, stems from the fact that the former are simply carrying abstraction, whereas the latter in addition convey singularity points "extracted" from the cosmos and history. Rather than abstract machines, perhaps it is preferable to speak of "machinic extracts" or deterritorialized and deterritorializing machines. In any event, I consider that they should not be comparable to entities attached once and for all to a universe of forms and general formulas. By preserving the expression "abstract machine" in spite of its ambiguity, it is the very idea of abstract universals that I aim to dispute. Abstraction can only result from machines and assemblages of concrete enunciations. And since there is no general assemblage that overhangs all of them, every time we encounter a universal enunciation, it will be necessary to determine the particular nature of its enunciative assemblage and analyze the operation of power that leads it to lay claim to such a universality.

The ideal of order—the systematic formalization of every mode of expression, the control over semiological flows, and the repression of the lines of flight and lines of dissidence—that dominates university research and the practical fields of the social sciences can never be completely attained, primarily because it is the stake of political and micro-political power struggles, but, perhaps more basically because, as we shall see, languages drift in all parts. Scientific formalization fortunately does not make an exception to this rule. The exhaustive dichotic analysis, binarist reduction, and radical “digitalization” of every semiotic practice, whose model has been elaborated by information theory, seems to function today (in league with behaviorism and Pavlovian theories, with which it also has certain affinities) as a sort of instrument of contention in the field of linguistics and the social sciences. We believe that such a method could in principle be applied to any type of social phenomenon. And if we manage to implement it through some sort of sleight of hand, we are then convinced to have grasped the essence of the phenomenon in question: we can stop and pass on to something else. Unless, while pushing things to the extreme, we come from that position to no longer consider any event except in terms of its probability of occurrence, and then, in the name of the sacrosanct second principle of thermodynamics, to proclaim that everything must tend towards a state of equilibrium or that every structural phenomenon must necessarily evolve towards a reduction of tensions and disorder.<sup>2</sup> A few universal principles hang over contingencies and singularities, precisely with respect to probabilizing events on a diachronic axis and structuralizing them on a synchronic axis: this is what the ambition of the various structuralist schools is reduced to! In fact, I believe that this kind of operation always turns up in order to “sweep under the rug” the socio-machinic assemblages which are ultimately the only effective producers of rupture and innovation in the semiotic fields that interest us here. Chance

and structure are the two greatest enemies of freedom. They induce the same conservative ideal of the general axiomatization of the sciences that has invaded their field since the end of the 19th century. And since they have furthermore become inseparable from the philosophical tradition as a pure subject of knowledge inaccessible to historical transformations, they return us very quickly to the meddlesome and sclerotic discourse of epistemology. It is always the same juggling act: through the promotion of a transcendent order founded upon the allegedly universal nature of the signifying articulations of certain enunciations—the Cogito, mathematical and scientific laws, etc...—one endeavors to guarantee certain types of formations of power, simultaneously consolidating the social status and the imaginary security of its pundits and scribes in the fields of ideology and science.

Two attitudes or two politics are possible with regard to form: a formalist position that begins with transcendent universal forms cut off from history and which are "embodied" in semiological substances, and a position that begins with social formations and material assemblages in order to extract some (to abstract some) of the semiotic components and abstract machines from the cosmic and human history that offers them. With this second path, certain "accidental" conjunctions between "natural" encodings and sign machines will affirm themselves, will "make the law," during a given period. However, it will be impossible to consider them independently of the assemblages that constitute the nucleus of their enunciation. It is not a question, as one could be tempted to say, of a re-enunciation. Indeed, there is no meta-language here. *The collective assemblage of enunciation speaks "on the same level" as states of affairs, states of facts, and subjective states.* There is not, on the one hand, a subject that speaks in the "void" and, on the other hand, an object that would be spoken in the "plenum." The void and the plenum are "engineered" by the same deterritorialization effect.

Connections are only possible at the point where abstract mechanizations and concrete, dated, and situated assemblages enable a connection to their deterritorialization. Also, assemblages are not delivered randomly to the axiomatic of universals: the only "law" they uphold is a general movement of deterritorialization. The axiomatic returns to the assemblage more deterritorialized in order to solve the impasse of previous systems of enunciation and untie the stratifications of the machinic assemblages that correspond to them. Such a "law" does not imply a pre-established order, a necessary harmony, or a systemic universal of anything.

René Thom, who knew how to denounce the "dream of information theory" with humor, or rather the dream of those whose hopes depend upon a set of formal systems and morpho-genesis,<sup>3</sup> perhaps did not come to the end of his intuition. Does he not lend himself to the brunt of his own criticism when he sets out in search of a system of algorithms that would be able to give an account of *every* morphogenetic change, of *every* "catastrophe" capable of affecting an assemblage?

He rightly considers that the "abstract *logoi*," immigrants of the physical and biological world, never stop "invading" the cerebral world. But there are many other continents from which such "invasions" develop, beginning with the world of socio-economic assemblages and that of the mass media. According to him, every interaction is brought back to phenomena of formal resonance in the last analysis (page [200]). On the contrary, I will start with the idea that assemblages of flows and codes are first compared in relation to differentiations of form and structure, object and subject, and that the phenomena of formal interaction constitute only a particular case, that of a borderline case, within the machinic processes that work upon the assemblages before the substance-form coupling.

Abstract machines do not function like a coding system stacked on from the "outside" on the existing stratifications. Within the

framework of the general movement of deterritorialization that I evoked earlier, they constitute a sort of *transformational matter*, what I call an "optional subject"—composed of the crystals of the possible which catalyze connections, destratifications, and reterritorializations both in the living and inanimate world. In short, abstract machinisms emphasize the fact that deterritorialization in all its forms "precedes" the existence of the strata and the territories. Not being "realizable" in a purely logical space but only through contingent machinic manifestations, they never involve simple combinations; they always imply an assemblage of components irreducible to a formal description. "Descending" from the pragmatic fields to the assemblages, from the assemblages to the components, and then from the components to the matters of expression, we shall see that we will not necessarily pass from the complex to the simple. We will never be able to establish a final systemic hierarchy between the elementary and the compound. Under certain conditions, the elementary can always make new potentialities emerge or make them *proliferate* and include the remainders within the assemblages to which it is related. Also, rather than starting with the elementary, which is likely to be merely a lure, the analysis will attempt to never simplify or reduce what seems preferable to call a *molecular level*. Machinic molecules may carry the keys of encoding that lead to the most differentiated assemblages. Moreover, the scope of the "most complex" generally seems to depend upon the fact that these molecular machinisms are more deterritorialized and more abstract.

If it is true that abstract machines arise neither from the subject-object phenomenological couple, nor the set-subset logical couple, and consequently escape from the semiological triangle denotation-representation-signification, then how do we conceive the possibility of saying anything about them? What will become of representation when there is no longer a subject to record it? These

are a few of the difficulties that will lead us to call the status of the modes of semiotization and subjectification into question. The assemblages do not acknowledge—as of yet—objects and subjects: but that does not mean that their components do not have anything to do with something that is *of the order of* subjectivity and representation, but not in the traditional form of individual subjects and statements detached from their context. Other processes of encoding and “ensigning,” independent of a deixis and an anthropocentric logic, will thus have to come to light. Universality will no longer have the discourse of a subject, incarnating itself in a word, a revealed text, or a divine or scientific law, as a compulsory reference. Logical propositions will be crafted according to *machinic propositions*. The singular features of a non-semiologically formed matter will be able to lay claim to universality. Conversely, the universality of a process of coding or a signifying redundancy will be able to “fall” into contingency. While conferring onto singularity points a particular power of crossing stratified fields, the signs-particles conveying quanta of possibles will only equip them for a limited number of universal capacities. Indeed, the assemblages that embody the singularity-abstract machine conjunctions remain prone to being undone for the purpose of opening up other possibles and contingencies. Universalist thought always conceals a reverential fear with respect to an established order—be it religious or natural. On the contrary, the thought of assemblages and molecular machinisms should continue connecting all sorts of practices situated in the perspective of the changes and transformations of the existing orders and the diminishing of their power.

Linguistics and semiology occupy a privileged place in the field of the humanities and social sciences. Many problems that other disciplines in this field are unable to solve are reinvestigated by the linguists and semiologists who are supposed to know the real story. Benefiting from a favourable bias due to their achieving fashionable



status, and credited with a high degree of "scientificity," linguistic and semiological theories are frequently used as an alibi for all sorts of pretexts. One refers to them as though they were dogma or holy texts. Several generations of psychoanalysts thus spouted forth an incredible amount of Saussurian "signifying" without any critical distance, and even, for most among them, without really knowing what they were talking about. The attitudes of linguists and semiologists have seemed in my view to coincide perfectly with that of psychoanalysts on an essential point: everyone agrees to avoid any overstepping of their respective problematics regarding political, social, economic, and *concrete* technological domains which are in their common territory. The reflections and suggestions that I devote to questions of linguistics and semiotics at the beginning of this book will focus mainly on a questioning of this shared problematic.

In these essays we will successively approach:<sup>4</sup>

—questions of a linguistic and semiotic nature whose examination, in my view, constitutes an essential precondition for any revision of the theory of the unconscious and in particular the manner in which the problem of pragmatics is posed today;

—questions relative to assemblages of enunciation and pragmatic fields considered from the angle of unconscious phenomena in the social field;

—two fundamental categories of the redundancies of the machinic unconscious: faciality traits and refrains;

—the bases upon which a schizoanalytical pragmatics can be constructed that would be non-reductive with regard to political and micropolitical problems;

—in addition, a "machinic genealogy" of the set of semiotic entities proposed throughout this work which, in my view, seems to be able to function within the framework of a pragmatics that would no longer be exclusively a matter for linguistics and semiotics.<sup>5</sup>

A second essay will be devoted to the trajectory of faciality traits and refrains in the work of Marcel Proust.

In order to help the reader familiarize themselves with a few of the problems and terms that will constantly reappear during this essay, but which will be approached from partial angles, I here present a sort of synthetic glossary of some of the essential conclusions.

Against the model of the syntagmatic tree, analytical pragmatics and schizoanalysis will oppose something that is not a model, but a "rhizome" (or "lattice"). It will be defined by the following characteristics:

—contrary to Chomskyan trees, which start at a point *S* and proceed by dichotomy, rhizomes may connect any point whatsoever to any other point;

—each trait of the rhizome will not necessarily refer back to a linguistic trait. Every sort of semiotic chain will be connected to a wide variety of encoding modes: biological, political, economic chains, etc... bringing into play not only all the sign regimes, but also all the regulations of non-signs;

—relations existing between the levels of segmentarity within each semiotic stratum will be able to differentiate inter-stratic relations and will function on the basis of the lines of flight of deterritorialization;

—under these conditions, a pragmatics of rhizomes will renounce any idea of underlying structure; unlike the psychoanalytic unconscious, the machinic unconscious is not a representational unconscious crystallized in codified complexes and repartitioned on a genetic axis; it is to be built like a map;<sup>6</sup>

—the map, as the last characteristic of the rhizome, will be detachable, connectable, reversable, and modifiable.

Within a rhizome, tree structures will be able to exist. Conversely, the branch of a tree could begin to send out buds in the

form of a rhizome. We will classify the pragmatic components into two categories:

1. *Interpretative components*, which we shall indifferently call generic or generative transformations and which imply a primacy of semiologies of resonance and signification over non-interpretative semiotics.

They will also be divided into two general types of transformations:

—*analogical* transformations depending, for example, on iconic semiologies.

—*signifying* transformations concerning linguistic semiologies.

Each of these types of component will only be able to occupy a dominant position within the framework of a particular mode of subjectification of the contents and formations of power: territorialized or reterritorialized assemblages of enunciation for analogical transformations and individual assemblages of enunciation and capitalist subjectivity for signifying transformations.

2. *Non-interpretative components*, which we shall generally refer to as transformational components due to the fact that the preceding components of formal resonance do not constitute anything other, as I already mentioned, than a particular or borderline case. They will also be divided into two general types of transformation:

—*symbolic* transformations concerning "intensive" semiotics (on the level of perception, gesture, mimicry, etc... but also on the various verbal and scriptural levels that escape from analogical redundancies);

—*diagrammatic* transformations concerning asignifying semiotics that proceed through a deterritorialization relative both to the formalism of content and expression by setting into play mutant abstract machines (systems of signs-particles and quanta of possibles working simultaneously within the register of material and semiotic realities).

At the semiotic level of *coordinates of efficiency*, we shall distinguish two modes of *redundancy*:

—redundancies of *resonance* corresponding to the semiological components of subjectification and consensualization (faciality, "refrains," etc...);

—machinic redundancies or redundancies of *interaction* corresponding to asignifying diagrammatic components (semiotic or not).

At the level of *existential coordinates*, we shall distinguish three levels of *consistency*:

—the *molar* consistency of strata, significations, and realities such as the dominant (or dominated) phenomenology proposes (complete objects, subjects, individuals, etc...);

—the *molecular* consistency that expresses the degree of manifestation or real machinic embodiment of an assemblage (but on this level we can neither distinguish assemblages from fields nor components);

—the *abstract* consistency that specifies the "theoretical" degree of possibility of the two preceding consistencies. The intersection of these two frames of reference ends in six types of fields of resonance and fields of interaction: cf. table page 51.

#### Notes:

1. Here, I have obviously not employed the expressions "generative component" and "transformational component" in the same sense as the Chomskyans. According to the latter, the generative capacity of a system stems from a logico-mathematical axiomatic, whereas I consider that the generative constraints (of a language or a dialect) are always intrinsically related to the existence of a power formation. This includes the concept of transformation. The Chomskyans conceive it with geometrical and algebraic analogies (one will say, for example, of the transformations of an equation that they modify the latter's form by preserving the "profound" economy of the ratios

involved). I will use this word in a sense that could be brought closer to what, in the history of the theories of evolution, resulted by opposing transformism (or mutationism) to creationism. In fact, we shall see that it involves only a very small share of the derision and provocation of this "abusive" use of the Chomskyan categories insofar as I have used them as a guide *a contrario*.

2. In opposition to the historic decision of the "International Association of Semiotics," I propose, with the same arbitrariness, to maintain a distinction (and even to reinforce it) between:

—*semiology* as a trans-linguistic discipline that examines sign systems in connection with the laws of language (Roland Barthes' perspective); and

—*semiotics* as a discipline that proposes to study sign systems according to a method which does not depend on linguistics (Charles Sanders Peirce's perspective).

## Escaping from Language

### The Wastebasket of Pragmatics

It is undoubtedly due to the repeated difficulties which linguists and semiologists have come up against in order to determine the status of content that pragmatics today certainly occupies a privileged place in the endeavors of many among them. For functionalism, content primarily remained a tributary of phonological chains reducible, in the final analysis, to a struggle of binary oppositions. The dominant position that information theory occupied at the core of linguistics at that time led to the adoption of a definition of language as merely a means of transmitting messages, the remainder being simply noise and redundancy. Because the question of its interpenetration with the social field was never posed, problems relating to the context of communication seemed to have to remain marginal. Through a sort of imitation of the objectivity of the exact sciences, linguistics was put in a position authorizing it to keep away from any embarrassing social problems. It was mainly a matter of "being" scientific. (Let us note that psychoanalysts employed the same kind of process: after being supported for a long time by concepts of a biological, moreover very approximate, nature, they clung to all the disciplines that appeared "serious" to them, in particular to structural linguistics.)

From the start, generative linguistics wanted to dissociate itself from functionalism while reproaching it for being unable to account

for the creative character of language. According to the first Chomskyan model, the phonological machine only intervened in the final formation of statements on a level understood as a surface. Statements were supposed to be generated and transformed on the basis of major syntactic structures without losing any nuance or any semantic ambiguity. But the "semantic question" in the following models only adds to the mystery of these "profound" operations. Whereas orthodox Chomskyans claimed to base the production of semantic compositions only on a single mathematized syntax—a syntactic topology—the dissidents of "generative semantics" instead charged this task to a particular logic called "natural logic" (articulating abstract "semantic atoms," "atomic predicates," and "postulates of sense").<sup>1</sup>

Eager to avoid the reductive nature of structuralism's various variants, a linguistics of enunciation has also pursued the study of the pragmatic components of communication. But, as we shall see, it does not appear to have properly seized the social-political implications of its object. Furthermore, in current semiotic and linguistic research, it is ultimately only a question of an enunciation in general outside of space and time, separated from the real struggles and desires of men and women; in short, it is a question of an alienated enunciation.

At every important stage of their development, linguistic theories will have done nothing but displace the pragmatic "wastebasket"—to renew an expression of Chomsky's.<sup>2</sup> With structuralism's binary phonological reduction, the wastebasket was semantico-pragmatic. With the topology of generative semantics, one takes into account the contents, but still not the social assemblages of enunciation, and the wastebasket is pushed back towards a pragmatics with indefinable contours. With the linguistics of enunciation, one finally starts to treat pragmatics seriously, but one endeavors to constitute it via a restrictive mode. It is treated in the

manner of signifying contents; the semantic as well as pragmatic fields are flattened, structuralized and finally forced to remain dependent on syntactic and phonological machines. Admittedly, we are referring to systems much more elaborate than those of Martinet's structuralism, but the pragmatic components are always supposed to fit at one point or another into structural junctions—deep or superficial—without taking into account the contingent socio-historical traits and singularity points that specify them. Everything happens as if the socius were thought to be folded within language. Linguists appear to accept as self-evident that semantic fields and pragmatic fields can be binarizable in a way similar to machines of expression conveying "digitalized" information; they give the impression of being suspicious of contents and context, agreeing to take them into account only on condition of having the certainty that they will be able to rigorously grasp them by means of a systematic formalization supported by a system of universals. Nicolas Ruwet, for example, considers that the semantic creativity of language essentially could not be exerted except within the framework of a syntactic axiomatic system concerning language in its totality. He turns away from the perspective opened by Hjelmslev which consisted in admitting that semantic creativity can discover its origin in the concatenation of figures of expression and figures of contents. Undoubtedly, he does not completely exclude existence from such a type of creativity, but he relegates it to a marginal position, which seems to echo, on the linguistic plane, what mad children, and poets experience on the social plane.<sup>4</sup> How do we make sense of this, since deviants and subject-groups manage to invent words, break syntaxes, inflect significations, produce new connotations, and generate linguistic alterations parallel with other levels of social transformations?

Linguists are imperialists! (It's true that they aren't the only ones!) They claim to dominate all the domains related to language,



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