

Sphacelated Grammars (or: Language Likes to Hide).

By Kane X. Faucher

Like all men of the Library, I have traveled in my youth; I have wandered in search of a book, perhaps the catalogue of catalogues”(Borges, “The Library of Babel”).

The Library is unlimited and cyclical. If an eternal traveler were to cross it in any direction, after centuries he would see that the same volumes were repeated in the same disorder (which, thus repeated, would be an order, the Order)” (Ibid).

To begin with an anecdote. A few years after the publication of *The Order of Things*, both Foucault and Chomsky--who had then produced his own Cartesian linguistics--appeared on Dutch television for an *entretien*. Both figures were somewhat in agreement on the development of what we can now call the birth of Catholic semiotics, but they were at odds concerning the fate of language; Foucault stressing that a rigid linguistic code cannot think difference in itself, and Chomsky’s view that there is indeed a universality to language which makes communication possible. During this exchange, Foucault’s hands were fiddling under the table, and once Chomsky had noticed this, Foucault came clean with what he was doing. Foucault produced a rolled joint and asked Chomsky if he would like to partake in a puff or two. Chomsky, in a shock he could not quite conceal, declined emphatically, demonstrating perhaps a humorous example of how communication between cultures and nations do not always flow in harmonious universal rhythms.

Since then, the grail of a universal grammar has not been abandoned, but relocalized in cognitive science that is keen to prove its theory that there is an innate neurophysiological predilection to grammar, and that the advent of AI, studies in DNA, etc., will somehow yield to us the veracity of their claims. However, one cursory glance through *The Order of Things* furnishes us with the insight that this methodological trajectory echoes the birth of the human sciences, an old quest dressed in the raiment of more sophisticated technology. The anatomization of language is nothing novel, and in fact predates even the meticulous osteological fervour of the mid-18th century at the genesis of cataloguing the names, functions, and particular compositional structures of the first female skeleton under anatomical science. Even the localization of language under the rubric of physiological sciences already had its manifestation in derivations from Descartes and the birth of “depth psychology”. Of course, the autopsy of language, we should not forget, is as the autopsy of bodies for the purposes of classification. And,

indeed, we should also not forget the etymological character of autopsy from the Greek term *autopsia*, meaning “beatific vision.” We will not speak on behalf of those who find vivisection beatific, but move forward to discuss the mapmaking of language according to the methods of the Port-Royal et al. We will herein consider, obliquely, the “Grammarians Gaze” and the institutional Aopsis (since we cannot say that institutions “see” per se, but that they are altered edifices, appended and renovated according to the Master Vision of the “linguistadors” of the episteme). But this seeing is already culturally encoded perception, and just as Masons perceive according to the Grand Architect, institutions perceive according to an embedded formula of signs, with the vain hope of moving toward pure identity-as-unity. Heterotopias are not repeatable instantiations; the grammatopia is the Sisyphusan effort to ground a system of universal signs that will represent the basic code by which all our concepts are discursively derived, ampliatively and explicatively. The Synergon (synergetic enclcyo-*paedia*) is the synergy of elements, a fractalogue masquerading as a catalogue. It is indeed the invention of a new beast in the field, *Homo Pro Grammaticus*: The Pro-Grammarchs of the episteme.

The Return OF and TO language

Let us proceed by a few general remarks:

The philology which developed in the 17th century is in fact the posing of the Enlightenment question meant to clandestinely dismantle or deracinate tradition’s Absolute and put in its place a new metastable order. The return of exegesis is not the revelatory variety, but the shrewd project of enlightened disillusionment--and I mean this term in the literal sense as a dis-illusionment, as the revelation *behind* the object of the revelatory. Why is it that language returns, and not we to it? This re-appearance of language, initially suppressed and exiled by the privilege accorded mechanism and mathesis against the stagnation of scholasticism, signaled the violent rupture of the gridwork of classical knowledge. Ironically, as Foucault states, the first embroidered stitch that loosed itself or was set into upheaval was the very first stitch that birthed this opulent structure of "universal knowledge". This renewed violence against a system of knowledge that came to be embodied as the episteme post facto through historical reflection had its constituent cause for dissolution by its most originary institution: discourse itself. But, it was the transition from one kind of discourse to another that truly heralded this dissolution: when discourse’s *chanson* ceased to be the stagnant rigidity of kingly *parole*, and instead took on the puissance of *critique*. The return of language authored both the creative and destructive aspects of its genesis. “Language is the original form of reflection, the primary theme of any critique...It is this

ambiguous thing, as broad as knowledge, yet always interior to representation, that general grammar takes as its object.”¹ This new grammar is the new exegesis, euphemistically tokenized, as that which attempts to funnel the elements of current language and (re)trace to a point of the pre-Babelian, the genesis point. In fact, the transition marked by discourse to critique recasts the very study of an object of knowledge. To briefly import Sloterdijk, early critique speaks and operates as though *behind* or *in* the object of critique in order to perform its task of unmasking and demystification, comparable to what Foucault calls the “always interior to representation” which functions to reconstitute the elements of the discursive exterior of language, much in the way that a sneeze erupts from within to rattle the body and result in a revelatory discharge and subsequent relief, i.e., order and intelligibility (although, what is discharged in the rhapsody of signs is a special topic unto itself, but what is created is a new economy of signs). We witness the unlocking of the sign as reflective instance, or inner experience. That is, the instauration of a universal language on the basis of a general grammar that could furnish the occluded content of every representation, a kind of pre-Esperanto Rosetta Stone for the de/re-coding of all conceptual knowledge through the barest particularities of graphemes and phonemes common to all languages. If this kind of science sounds ambitious, it was, but it is the very nature of the Classical period’s general grammar and its search for synchronic depths and diachronic relations that authored its own dissolution--akin to Zeus’ unseating of Chronos, the torch of the grand project is passed to *critique*. The linkages that unite the segmentarity of representation undoes itself at the very site of its establishment.

“At once characteristic and combinative, the universal language does not re-establish the order of days gone by: it invents signs, a syntax, and a grammar.”² This *invention* is itself the principal mechanism that imposes new structure on old, venerable contents; namely, old confusions in prior ordering structures are cleaned up, a fresh set of uncrossed eyes views historical content, and speaks its findings with a tongue no longer twisted by crude immediacy. Far from declaring the unlocking of all knowledge, it provides us with a more credible fiction: *the conditions of possibility by which knowledge is connected according to an attentiveness to the universal origo of language*. This prefigures the hermeneutic project of defining the possibility and limits of reflection and understanding of universally valid cognition for the human sciences. There is a comfort in this original link tying together all remnants and disjecta membra of knowledge into paediae and curriculum, and it will not be until the full

1 Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage Books, 1973. 84.

2 Ibid., 84.

emergence of critique (in the form of Kant who will assign the a priori conditions of all possible knowledge) that problematizes the new paint job will the linkages be shown to be performed at the inadequate site of language.

The puissance of language/discourse is that it functions as the raw element that provides “adequate signs for all representations” and establishes “possible links between them.”³ The same reason for rejoicing eventually succumbs to the reason for discomfort and despair: the order of things (not the book!) is still too closely bound up in representational thinking. Representational knowledge still exudes its reflective double, much like Calvino’s eyeless snail does its shell--which is to say that it cannot attain the inner experience it seeks to explain by representation.

“There must exist within it at least the possibility of a language that will gather into itself, between its words, the totality of the world, and inversely, the world, as the totality of what is representable, must be able to become in its totality, an Encyclopaedia.”⁴ If the “given” of this possibility is thrown into dubiety, as it was so thrown in the age of critique, Kant’s question, “what can we hope for?” gains in considerable hue by orienting intellectual endeavour.

Classification is still combinative according to the presupposition that knowing and speaking vigorously participate in concert within the domain of representation. Thought and word find their common ground in the sign. But this new sort of encoding by the post-Renaissance *ars critica* (whilst others returned to *de interpretatione*) was not first discovered in its relation by Foucault. As early as 1900, Dilthey, in his *Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik* also identifies this crucial shift in interpretation becoming “grammatical, factual and historical” in its nature of study, reconstituting the kludge of textual monuments according to a new philological rigour. To believe Dilthey’s story, however, this philology passes through critique relatively unharmed to announce a sophistication of a rule-based method of gleaning objective knowledge in the form of the hermeneutic tradition. This leaves the problem of inner experience open for the phenomenological, and later, the Bataillean perspective; *res ipsa loquitur*: “The difference between inner experience and philosophy resides principally in this: that in experience, what is stated is nothing...what counts is no longer the statement of wind, but the wind.”⁵ A more moderate approach after Dilthey would be the compromise Gadamer suggests in *The Beginning of Philosophy* where a notion of fresh incipience that will neither prejudicially side with the subjective or objective.

3 Ibid., 85.

4 Ibid., 85.

5 Georges Bataille. *Inner Experience*. Trans. Leslie Anne Boldt. New York: SUNY, 1988. 13.

Discourse is representational and explicates the concept, “one of the most primitive breaks with the immediate.”⁶ It is the glue that binds ideality, as precursor to Kant: “as a sequence of verbal signs... This sequence is artificial in relation to the simultaneity of representations, and in so far as this is so language must be in opposition to thought.”⁷ Languages lack a congruity and complicity in an alleged sequentialism of signs: the synchronic difficulty is always the scene of chasing the origin, the fount from which divers languages emerge, reterritorializing their constituent parts to encode upon and be encoded upon by experiential vicissitudes individually, collectively, historically, and reflectively. The purpose of universal grammar is to level the foundation of language so that an elegant edifice of articulation and order may be built upon it, reflecting the mirror image of an origin with the invention of new signs and presupposing a great deal of *oughtness* in terms of language; i.e., given the conditions of what is known now, we would have articulated our conditions of knowledge much more cohesively, etc. Its aim and object was to attain the pre-Babelian unity, echoing the Borgesian law of the Library of Babel: “for all the books, no matter how diverse they might be, are made up of the same elements: the space, the period, the comma, the twenty-two letters of the alphabet”⁸--where the uniformity of orthographical marks is analogous to the unity of languages at some given point of genesis prior to being scattered. But to attain this point of origin, the grammarchs and encyclopaedists had to begin with the given and work regressively, almost according to the Fibonacci sequence or the Golden Number method of retrograde movement; again, Borges explication services this point: “Someone proposed a regressive method: To locate book A, consult first a book B which indicates A’s position; to locate book B, consult first a book C, and so on to infinity...”⁹ It is not difficult to derive the consequences of such an action, which is perhaps why even the formation of an encyclopaedia, in its fidelity to an ordering system, may have to engage in a proscriptive attitude in order to deselect certain elements that will only infinitely regress or monstrously import elements that threaten the secure unity of a system of orderly knowledge. The essential presupposition is always an immediacy of knowledge that must compound itself reflectively through the artifice of language, thereby engaging in a Fibonaccian endeavour to encyclopaediate an ordered structure to knowledge.

6 Foucault. *Ibid.*, 83.

7 *Ibid.*, 83.

8 Jorge Luis Borges. “The Library of Babel” in *Labyrinths*. Eds. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby. New York: New Directions, 1964. 54.

9 *Ibid.*, 56

[Example 1: Presupposing an instant 1 wherein is contained all knowledge as a unity of multiplicity, and working backward to incorporate the now of instant 1 with an “already-have-been” of an instant 2. The sequence is always working back on itself to carve out a sequentialism of historical knowledge that always adds up to the instant 1, but originates in a time that has already passed. The sequence is as follows: $\acute{\alpha} = 1$ as presupposition of static point of unified knowledge as starting point, Ω = the totality of all possible knowledge ; $\acute{\alpha}$,1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55... Ω --This formula attempts to achieve the origin and then inverts the result as a mirror image so that the presupposition becomes certain origin, and the totality of all knowledge manifests in this instant. It is akin to extrapolating backward in time, only then to transpose the origin as reinscribed in the present. Without the presupposition of an alpha point, no omega point can be reached, and so the assignation of an origin cannot begin. Therefore, the omega point cannot switch places with an alpha point without the presupposition being first grounded as axiomatically given.]

In order for this project to emancipate itself, it must dissolve the fetters of rhetoric to achieve its goal, to de-ornamentalize and re-instrumentalize language. This is an idealistic hope since arguably the practice of doing away with any rhetorical instantiation would be tantamount to mere mathematical speaking. To do this, it performs no return to the origin of language, but invents a new origin: the *ought of an ordered primacy*. It must function as a reliable interlinguistic tablature of signs, just as all musical scores are reducible to the level of universal notation. This is not an *art brut* method of re-sequentializing discourse by force, but a sly placing it in time, pounding out a rhythm to restore order to a perceived rhapsody. Knowledge cleans out its messy closet. We will forever fail to realize the appeal of such a move if we do not understand the tricky logic that undergirds this process. The trick is this: presuppose an origin point, invent signs as a clarification procedure to obtain its veracity, and proceed to piggyback the past by restructuring the contents of historical epochs in order to prove the primacy of both the present and the origin. The antinomianism of this logic would force any who would dispute it to consider the opposite position, which is to deny all origin whatsoever, and to declare that order is impossible--a move that is not made until the emergence of Nietzsche's genealogical method that chooses a third option; i.e., the origin of value and the value of origin which is the scene of real critique for Nietzsche, thereby avoiding the false problem this logic of forced choice presents.

A grammatical interlude is here necessary to demonstrate the improbability of a universal

grammar. I reside on the absolute borders beyond analytic philosophical discourse, yet we must still take care to contend with the somewhat clandestine way that philosophers of “natural language” have obliquely answered Foucault’s analysis of universal grammar--not only in demonstrating the viability of said project, but in revamping the model to work out the proverbial bugs and non-starter analyses that have hitherto problematized the attainment of the Ur-langue. However, let us look at two instantiations of grammar across a few select languages to witness how the universal rules work or cease to hold any cross-linguistic viability. Although Foucault focuses on the verb, let us push the analysis further as a departure point:

[Example 2: The rules governing the usage of definite versus indefinite articles are somewhat standard in all Western languages. The indefinite article, ‘a’ has only one usage: to depict an undetermined concept such as “a dog”, and we utilize it as well to introduce a concept into our discussion, after which we use a definite article once we have satisfied the determination of the concept thereof. The definite article ‘the’ is only employed when the concept is fully determined by means of either explication or that there exists only one of a particular object or subject by which no confusion can result. For example, The Hague, or the King of England in 1917. The indefinite article operates in such a way as to exist temporally and spatially in undifferentiation, while the definite article cuts across this horizon to create a gridwork or coordinate--an axis of rational determination. This is borne out in other languages as well. In French, ‘un’ or ‘une’ depicts an undetermined concept, just as ‘le’, ‘la’, and ‘les’ are full determinations. In German, the difference is between ‘das’ and ‘die, der’. The only other way of furnishing more determinate content if employing an indefinite article is with the use of demonstratives and indexicals such as ‘here, there, now, then, this, that’. The problem emerges when we consider how these concepts are determined spatially and temporally across languages with the use of other articles.]

<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Italian</i>
<i>IN 2004</i>	<i>EN 2004</i>	<i>NEL 2004</i>
<i>ON Nov. 22</i>	<i>(no article)</i>	<i>(no article; determined by relation)</i>
<i>AT 3 PM</i>	<i>á 15h00</i>	<i>ALLE 3:00</i>

--NB: The more specified, in English, the space and time, the more distant the visual representation, showing an incongruity between determination and spatiality.

IN London *DANS London* *IN London*
ON Western Rd. *SUR la route Western* *IN Western Rd.*
AT the University *à le Universite* *al università...]*

The traditional method for universal grammar is the creation of taxonomic orders (the super- and subordinations in classical semantics) under which certain words can be inputted. However, such a method can only think in terms of the identical, and not according to a system of affirmative difference. What of those words that cannot be placed comfortably under a particular categorical heading (Foucault points to poetry as the destabilization of categorical systematicity)? Descartes considers this problem in his *Meditations*, albeit obliquely: the concept of ‘centaur’, although a mythical and aberrant creature, can still be classified under the dual concept of man in conjunction with horse. However, even in the repetition of certain words or propositions, although the syntax and grammar can be identical, their meaning can be altogether different; the famous example is the poem by Robert Frost, ‘Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening’:

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
 But I have promises to keep,
 And miles to go before I sleep,
 And miles to go before I sleep.

One of the ways in which Foucault wants to highlight the general failure of general grammar is by way of the quadrilateral of language which has its analogue, oddly enough, in Kant’s own pure physiological table of the universal principles of natural science (and so we can cheekily assume that Foucault plays on two tables of refutation: one against the viability of universal grammar, and the other against Kantian dogmatism, although the latter is not openly acknowledged).¹⁰ I can only provide a brief, and perhaps weak, gloss of this connection, as it would entail a lengthier treatment:

Proposition, or the meaning of the sentence, forms the first “corner” and is generally isolatable

10 Cf. Immanuel Kant. *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*. Trans. Paul Carus. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977. 49; for the purposes of brevity, we are resigned to only provide a gloss of this intriguing relationship. Whether Foucault himself realized that this quadrilateral of language echoed or perhaps formed a potential point of departure for Kant’s table is uncertain. A full treatment of this relation would, of course, render this connection only analogically, and not by the rigour of a complete or perfect transposition. I retain it here for interest’s sake, and perhaps as a heuristic device for explication.

according to a near-mathematical procedure of parsing out verb-subject, representable through modal logic. The cardinality of the proposition is dinumerable, and is as such the application of mathematics to the experiential in language (subsumed under the category of QUANTITY). This is precisely how Kant speaks of the *axioms of intuition*. Words begin as prepositional-nomials (placeholders with sentential meaning). In essence, these function as the “given” in language; the very starting point by which “speaking” can even begin.

Articulation forms the second corner, and it “gives content to the pure and still empty form of the proposition.”¹¹ It stands in opposition to the proposition. This is the Kantian *anticipations of perception* insofar as articulation would function as the ordinality of language, and therefore not measurable in the way that the axioms of intuition are. Articulation is outside of space and time, but by sensation assigns degrees of placement in space and time. So, for example, articulation has infinite divisibility according to degrees, such as lightness and darkness, hotness or coldness, etc. In this sense, articulation is *relational and ordinal*.--Or, what Kant will call the *mathesis intensorum*. In sum, articulation identifies the sense of the utterance, ushering in the necessity for the invention of analogies, including metaphoric and metonymous use.

Designation, which “reveals the point of attachment of all the nominal forms cut out by articulation”¹² resides in opposition to articulation. As such, they are analogously related, or rather that designation presents the possibility for analogous relations between terms. In Kant’s formulation, this is the function of the *analogies of experience* insofar as these analogies resist dialectical formation in favour of the dynamical, and these analogies are granted veracity if held under the sheaf of a priori principles. Designation and analogy grants the possibility of connecting objects as having real existence represented by words. Without designation, which is always of things, naming would become ridiculously infinite; names would have to be given to every instantiation of the thing, for it is only designation that isolates the thing in accordance to the rule of generality and taxonomic tables for the purpose of linguistic nomenclature.

Derivation “indicates the continuous movement of words from their source of origin, but the slipping that occurs on the surface of representation is in opposition to the single stable bond that links one root to one representation”¹³ and this inevitably must trace itself back to the proposition without

11 Foucault 115.

12 Ibid., 115

13 Foucault 115; also see p.119.

which designation would be mired in mere particularity and dangerous singularity. The comparison to Kant's discussion of the *postulates of empirical thought in general* are deserving to be quoted at length: "the cognition of the agreement and connection, not only of appearances among themselves in experience, but of their relation to experience in general, belongs to judgments of experience. This relation contains either their agreement with the formal conditions which the understanding cognizes, or their coherence with the material of the senses and of perception, or combines both into one concept and consequently contains possibility, actuality, and necessity according to universal laws of nature."¹⁴ Derivation presents the possibility of inventing new propositions insofar as alphabetic writing (combination as the scene of invention and the use of figures) can allow for a multitude of propositions to be formed in order to better classify the unforeseen.

As Foucault points out, there are two diagonal lines that connect these four corners of language, producing the coordinate of the *name*. The name represents the "success" of a linguistic analysis, and such nomination makes representation possible. However, the vertiginous movement that occurs behind the veil of the name is an imperfect science, for the problem of differentiation in the process of derivation creates the scene of a multiplicitous disharmony of elements, which thereby creates fissures and breaks that render the veracity of the name dubious. If the name is guaranteed by a perfect genealogical descent or analytic redaction, then the name would be able to shine forth in its ultimate legitimacy; unfortunately for the Grammars, the very conventions of language's innate differentiation renders nomination as fraught with either admitting to the impossibility of naming or that the name itself will abolish all discourse and resonate with the figure of representation. The very attempt to reign in all analogical figures and rhetoric under the herald of the name will inevitably fall into the failure of not being able to speak of anything outside the name. If naming is meant to ascribe the name to particular beings, even this ascription must be subject to its own nomination, its own representation that names the being of this ascription. What would follow is a regress where we must name the naming of being, naming the ascription itself, and so on. To force language to rally around the name as the fulfillment of language itself is to identify it with the being of representation.

We could only skirmish here with a few elements of universal grammar; doubtless a fully penetrative study would take us into the deep and chasmic reaches of Rousseauian, encyclopaedist, and Port Royal language analyses, a study even Foucault acknowledges that he avoids in order to trace the trajectory of how language analyses have been performed during a particular episteme. However, what

¹⁴ Kant 50-1.

we retain here is that the residual problematic of hiding language behind the name will eventually give way to a focus, in the nineteenth century, on the Word and the emergence of a philology proper.

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