Gaffe/Stutter

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Men may dream in demonstrations, and cut out an illusory world in the shape of axioms, definitions, and propositions, with a final exclusion of fact signed Q. E. D. No formulas for thinking will save us mortals from mistake in our imperfect apprehension of the matter to be thought about. And since the unemotional intellect may carry us into a mathematical dream-land where nothing is but what is not, perhaps an emotional intellect may have absorbed into its passionate vision of possibilities some truth of what will be—the more comprehensive massive life feeding theory with new material, as the sensibility of the artist seizes combinations which science explains and justifies.

At any rate, presumptions to the contrary are not to be trusted.

— George Eliot, Daniel Deronda
Twelve or so people came to the first meeting of the Logic of Sense reading group, paper copies of the “First Series of Paradoxes of Pure Becoming” crackling in their hands.

My memory of the meeting inheres in its configuration: bare knees under a plastic tabletop, a backpack slumped below; my friend’s black fountain pen, poised over the blazing white page.

As we worked our way through the chapter, his hand kept urging his pen toward the paper, eager to materialize some evidence that he understood the text, that it made sense;

He – we, all of us – littered our margins with ink blots, lines, the occasional asterisk noting a flash of insight since lost; claw marks from a pack hungry for meaning.
Desire for knowledge had held together a series of objects that the charge of awkwardness eventually dispelled; and by the group’s third meeting, attendance had plunged to four people, where it more or less stayed for the next twenty weeks.

We were an odd bunch, comprised of the professor who had initiated the group, with whom I was taking a pleasurably labyrinthine, if slightly incomprehensible class on ecology, realism and gift-giving; a third-year in the English PhD program with an affinity for Guattari, and a warmness toward Deleuze by association; a recent graduate of the Literature program and the sharpest reader of Continental philosophy I’d ever met; and me. Looking back, it seems odd that I stuck with it. Yet like my friend’s hand, urging his pen to paper, something pushed me to seek out these regular encounters with nonsense.
Our meetings came to form the horizon of my week – an experience I was always simultaneously both approaching and retreating from.

From my vantage point, I could see a boundary point in the distance, could even assign it a signifier like ‘horizon’; but this frontier was an impossible meeting of sky and earth, illusively produced by the space I inhabited and my own stance within it. Because this space was so singular, speaking – a fundamentally communal activity – felt impossible, having no subject which expresses or manifests itself in it, no object to denote, no classes and no properties to signify according to a fixed order. So I observed instead. I especially enjoyed watching the Recent Graduate talk – how he framed phrases in the air, then looped them together into unicursal mazes of thought, bafflingly complex in their form yet wholly comprehensible. The Professor didn’t talk like the Recent Graduate but instead tried to pin down terms: what bodies are, what manifestation is, bulleted lists of expressions (see Figure 1). His was a different, more reasoned relationship to the material, one that I respect in its own right; but, still: listening to the Professor talk made feel as if I could never make sense of Deleuze’s logic, and would never want to anyway (of what relevance?). Listening to the Recent Graduate, though, was more like watching crystals become and grow out of the edges.

**Figure 1.** Today’s task is to make the empty square circulate and to make pre-individual and nonpersonal singularities speak – in short, to produce sense having been spread out because width.
I checked out books on Logic of Sense, books like James Williams’s Gilles Deleuze’s Logic of Sense: A Critical Introduction and Guide. These are profoundly learned yet fundamentally absurd projects, pulled in one direction by their medium and by their message in another. As these guidebooks will readily affirm, Deleuze’s book does not comment on Alice in Wonderland but rewrites it. That is, there’s no place for annotation in its world, no marginal space waiting to be filled with pithy summation; there is only the infinite regress of repetition with a difference – only the same chapter, the same point reproduced along a 34-item series. Only trained academics could enter this hall of mirrors and, instead of warping the presence of their own bodies – larger, smaller, one’s image constantly eluding the present – drop a paper trail, so as not to lose their way home.

I’m being too harsh. Observing how another person wades through a text as dense as Logic of Sense can be illuminating – but only obliquely, with the scattered radiance of a raking light on the page’s surface. And I’m more of the flashlight-in-the-hall-of-mirrors type. Insight comes from the disorienting blindness of confusion, and the struggle to find a new sense with which to make sense. If I couldn’t speak, I had to find another way.

So I began to sketch. I drew diagrams, concepts, the vectors between them; machines for the production of sense and for the survey of the surface. Graph paper enabled a relationship with the text that the book’s margins had foreclosed, carving out a space for a material engagement not possible in the mist of conversation. *If you say something, it passes through your lips,* Deleuze quotes of Chryssipus; *so, if you say ‘chariot,’ a chariot passes through your lips.* To sketch was to force a chariot through my lips, replacing the depth of language with the surface of the grid.

And then –
I heard an ad on the radio this week.

It was for ______, ‘the windshield experts.’ They talked about how it’s dangerous to drive around with a crack in your window – I mean a crack from a rock or something; because it might have caused imperceptible damage, hairline cracks in the glass that spread out from the edge. One day, you’ll be driving along, then boom, your windshield caves in. All because you followed a garbage truck too closely six months ago.

It is imperceptible, incorporeal, and ideational.
We were discussing cracks in the “Twenty-Second Series: Porcelain and Volcano” – surface cracks; imperceptible fissures skimming the tops of Events. The Professor was analogizing Deleuze’s image to a cracked egg, to cement, images layered over images, while the Recent Graduate poked his finger forcefully into the book’s gutter.

*Everything noisy happens at the edge of the crack*, Deleuze writes, *and would be nothing without it*. If there was noise, it was white noise, rushing in my ears; if there was a crack, it was the kind of crack only _______ could fix: imperceptible and yet persistent; dangerous. *The real difference is not between the inside and the outside, I read, for the crack is neither internal nor external, but rather at the frontier.*
Our reading group petered out shortly after that meeting. Summer happened; travel happened, dissertations happened, books happened, job-hunting and jobs happened. My primary field of study is book history, and book historians don’t read Deleuze much. Life flowed forward.

In a last-ditch effort to salvage something tangible from the experience – something other than inkblots and graph paper and incomprehensible annotations – I began planning a web-based diagrammatic (r)e(n)dition of Logic of Sense. Before I had begun to code, the project had already become elaborately impossible. At its center (I imagined) would be high-resolution scans of the diagrams I had been producing; these, then, would be zoomable and annotatable in both text and image, such that any online visitor could respond to my diagram with one of their own. In other words it was to be an anti-book: a visual reading schematic that eschewed the line of text in favor of regimented grids, the ink-soaked grain of the remediated pen over the laser-burned face of print; playful reaction rather than academic protraction. *This is not an analogy, or a product of the imagination*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari would write in *A Thousand Plateaus*, but *a composition of speeds and affects on the plane of consistency: a plan(e), a program, or rather a diagram, a problem, a question-machine.*

Yet question-machines are easier to produce in printed books – of the type that Deleuze and Guattari produced – than in code. Though our daily experience of web browsing is increasingly dynamic, the compilation of markup and scripts that engineer this experience is text-based and rigidly hierarchical. The `<HEAD>` of each webpage defines its organs – what to call them, how they’ll look, how they’ll move together – and the `<BODY>`
(proceeding downward, in anatomical fashion) contains the organs being defined in their proper order. While the ordering of each part can be changed by redefining its ‘z-index’ in the \texttt{<HEAD>}, the \texttt{<BODY>} defaults to a linear left-to-right, top-to-bottom sequence, such that the organ that appears first in the body’s markup will appear in the top left corner of the page – just as in a printed book.

In other words, in my attempt to create a multi-planar, diagrammatic anti-book, I had actually turned to one of the most strictly sequential media structures ever devised. Like the critical guides I had found so frustratingly paradoxical, my website was to be torn apart limb from limb the moment it came into existence.

Given this, it’s no surprise to me that this project failed to reach completion. I had started prototyping with prefabricated platforms like Wordpress or Omeka but quickly realized that these systems could only define my drawings according to the type of media object they were, rather than the use I imagined for them. jQuery plug-ins, which I turned to next, were similarly limiting. While writing code that zooms and pans across large images is easy enough, getting these snippets of code to play nice with some form of annotation system that stores user input was beyond my level of skill at the time. Thus although it was once an active space for testing new assemblages of code, the ‘logicofsense’ directory on my server is now a graveyard of inert demos: an image of Trafalgar Square at dusk, annotated with the words “Flag,” “Small people on the steps,” “A Statue,” and “National Gallery Dome”; an empty HTML file titled ‘delete.html’.

Over the course of a few months, I spent less and less time trying to configure the elements into a functional project. And, since working on the website had interrupted my sketch-reading, I stopped drawing too, which all but ended my dives into the dark and immaterial depths of each paradox. I knew the project was finally dead when I received an email from a reading group in Baltimore that
wanted me to cede ownership of the abandoned Wordpress account “LogicOfSense” so that they could start a page for their own discussions. After some administrative wrangling, I managed to transfer ownership to them. Though I presume they flourished there for a time, the site is now also, and again, defunct. It seems the Baltimore reading group didn’t just abandon the project, as I had, but destroyed all evidence that it ever existed, leaving only a standard Wordpress notice: “The authors have deleted this site.”

The state in which I left my own page is the state in which it remains today: that is, a single image, my first drawing, can be zoomed and panned using two magnifying glass icons in the bottom right corner of the screen, and two red rectangles adorn the top corners of the page but do nothing, link nowhere. The visitor who may happen to wander into this dead-end corner of the web would find herself stuck on Deleuze’s definition of a paradox as initially that which destroys good sense as the only direction of becoming, but also that which destroys common sense as the assignation of fixed identities. Alice is larger now; she was smaller before.

*Alice does not grow without shrinking, and vice versa.*

This is the simultaneity of a becoming,

*we read,*

whose characteristic is to elude
It is a bad play on words to suppose that nonsense expresses its own sense, since, by definition, *it has none.*
never state the sense of what I am saying. But on the other hand, I can always take the sense of what I say as the object of another proposition whose sense, in turn, I cannot state. I thus enter into the infinite regress of that which is presupposed.

– Gilles Deleuze, “Fifth Series of Sense,” Logic of Sense