Deleuze, Plato, and the Paradox of Sense

How should we understand the legacy of Deleuze for political thought and *praxis*, today? As numerous commentators have emphasized, this is an essential question for any contemporary thinking of the relationship of philosophy to politics. It touches on all of the following questions: the significance of identity and difference, the status of Plato and Platonism, the possibility of metaphysics or ontology, the nature of production, the meaning of “global” capital and the possibility of “resisting” or supplanting its unified regime, the meaning of language, the nature of Being and Becoming, the problem of the One and the Many, and indeed the ongoing possibility of philosophy itself. As I shall attempt to document here, *all* of these questions are intimately related to the formal question of politics whose more general version is the most ancient question of philosophy as such: the problem of the relation of the One of the community, social whole, or state to the Many of its constituents and parts.

The most mainstream contemporary reception of Deleuze makes much of his invocation of a “reversal of Platonism,” considering the Nietzschean imperative of this inversion to demand an affirmation of difference, the multiple, and the sensible over (what is supposed to be) the unifying claim of the intelligible Idea. However, as I shall follow Badiou in arguing, this interpretation is, at best, seriously misleading. In fact, it fails almost completely to grasp the specificity of the determination of such key Deleuzian concepts as the virtual, the sense-event, ‘pure immanence’, and multiplicity itself. More specifically, as I will argue, Deleuze’s thought in these domains, far from being determined by a simple “reversal” of the rights of the One, or by the simple “affirmation” of difference over identity, is much more the consequence of a rigorous thinking of *totality* and the relentlessness of its identifying power. This is in fact a thoroughgoing *affirmation* of the unifying force of the formal, up to the paradoxical point of its internal diremption. Thus, Deleuze’s thinking of the paradox as the “passion of thought” invokes a problematic, and practices a method, that is quite opposed to that of the contemporary celebration of heterogeneity and difference which is today most often associated with his name.¹

More precisely, Deleuze’s thought is in its totality a leading contemporary example of the orientation in thought that I have elsewhere called the “*paradoxico-critical.*”² The specificity of its key concepts

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² See chapter 1, above.
emerges directly from a rigorous thinking of the paradoxical limits of totality: of the totality of language, or of the world, or of Being itself. Tracing the paradoxes of these limits as they are reflected in the everydayness of language that proposes and also deposes them, Deleuze’s thought discerns the contradictory and paradoxical as the originary dimension of the a-subjective and pre-personal production of sense and phenomena. Its central operations thus amount to limit-operations and documentations of the scission between a totality and itself, operations at the boundaries that demonstrate the strict in-closure of any total regime of sense. These are, as I have argued elsewhere, none other than the fundamental operations bequeathed to critical thought in our time by the outcome of the twentieth century critical practice that reflects on structures and their total determination.

Admittedly, any reading that allies Deleuze with the contemporary legacy of critical thought that continues the traditional Kantian “critique of metaphysics” and is represented, as well, by the most significant outcomes of the analytic tradition, Wittgenstein, and the “linguistic turn,” is bound to seem incongruous for several reasons. The first and foremost of these is Deleuze’s own self-description as a “pure metaphysician” and his related insistence on the productivity of philosophical thought. For Deleuze, this thought goes far beyond any doctrine of critical limitation or the restriction of conceptualization to the legitimacy of pre-determined boundaries. Indeed, his lifelong insistence on the productivity of philosophical thought goes hand-in-hand with Deleuze’s ultimate definition of philosophy, in the late text What is Philosophy written with Guattari, as essentially consisting in the “creation of concepts.”

Moreover, throughout his career Deleuze is, of course, sharply critical of Kant and the entire legacy of his attempt to limit thought to the “legitimate” application of concepts within the boundaries of empirical knowledge. For Deleuze, by contrast, the inherent productivity of thought amounts to its production of a “transcendental” field of singularities that are “pre-individual, non-personal, and a-conceptual.” The mark of such singularities is not their resemblance to empirical particulars or their ability to serve as conditions for the possibility of those particulars, but rather their intrinsic difference, thought as pure “intensity” and as defining a virtuality that is “not opposed to the real” and has “nothing to do with possibility” but is simply opposed to the actual. In Difference and Repetition, Deleuze vehemently opposes the Kantian conception of the transcendental legislation of reason; such legislation, he argues, is always directed toward the enforcement of a “logical common sense” that depends ultimately on a

3 Deleuze and Guattari (1991)
4 Lofs, p. 52; see also Protevi (1999).
5 Deleuze (1968); (henceforth: D&R), p. 144; p. 191; p. 208.
sovereign “model of recognition,” thought here as the simple reinstatement and enforcement of the unity of a thinking subject. 6 “Such an orientation,” Deleuze asserts, “is a hindrance to philosophy;” 7 its consequence even in the development and practice of Kant’s innovative critique of illusion can only amount to an orthodoxy, a “respectful” legitimization of reason in its “natural” state and a policing and rejection of all that ventures beyond it. The Deleuzian conception of the productivity of thought thus extends all the way to his rejection of what he terms Critique: an operation that “has everything – a tribunal of justices of the peace, a registration room, a register – except the power of a new politics which would overturn the image of thought.” 8

All of these longstanding features of Deleuze’s project would thus seem at first to militate against any interpretation of Deleuze as a critical thinker drawing on the legacy of Kant’s traditional critique. However, as I shall attempt to show here, by grasping Deleuze’s thought as an exemplary instance of paradoxico-criticism, we can see precisely how far its thinking of totalities and their paradoxical boundaries can in fact contribute to the “creation of concepts,” and indeed how little the set of operations and productions characteristic of Deleuze’s thought is in fact opposed to the contemporary legacy of Kant’s critique of metaphysics, once this critique is itself exposed to the transformative effects of a constitutive reflection on the paradoxes of the boundaries and manifestation of sense. For it is, as I shall show here, precisely this reflection, as developed in his consideration of the constitutive paradoxes of sense and their capacity to determine the original status of the singular, that can indeed equip critique, according to Deleuze, with the “power of a new politics” that originates every revolution and every great transformation of thought and action.

Indeed, as I shall show here, by grasping Deleuze’s great motif of production as the outcome of an unparalleled consideration of the affirmative consequences of the paradoxes of the One, we approach a surprising image of this singular thinker of the twentieth century as a radical disciple of the productive force of forms in their paradoxical relation to matter, or indeed of the creative generativity of the Idea in relation to the particular instances it governs. This is an image of Deleuze, not as the thinker of a difference or heterogeneity that would simply be opposed to the One of formal unification and identification, but as the productive thinker of the paradoxical synthesis of becoming that joins and disjoins the one to the many, the idea to its participants, and thus affirms, between the idea and its instances, a “pure becoming” that moves in both directions at once, a becoming of participation itself that

7 D&R, p. 134.
8 D&R, p. 137.
is opposed, not to the Idea, but to its fixation in stasis or presence. One is tempted to call it, not without some irony, the image of a “Platonist Deleuze.”

I.

In considering the legacy of Deleuze’s thought today, we may reasonably begin with the problematic which, as we have seen, itself remains one of the most significant legacies of structuralist and analytic thought alike: the problem of the foundations of language. As it is elsewhere in 20th century thought, this problem is developed, for Deleuze, in a comprehensive logical reflection on the boundaries of sense and their own immanent reflection in signs. From its first pages, Deleuze’s remarkable inquiry in The Logic of Sense is dedicated to this problematic, which he pursues by describing a set of telling paradoxes of linguistic signification. These successive paradox of signs and their meaning, presented through his reading of Lewis Carroll’s texts (principally Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass), demonstrate, for Deleuze, the original constitution of sense as the domain of a “pure becoming,” or a category of “pure events,” the constitutive basis for all kinds of change, transformation, and manifestation.

Deleuze’s theory of sense draws heavily upon the structuralist picture of signs and their systematicity held in common by theorists from Saussure to Lévi-Strauss and Lacan. According to this picture, the basic element of language is the sign, split between a linguistic signifier and an extra-linguistic “signified,” and both connected to each other and defined by relations of similarity and difference on both levels. While developing this basic picture, Deleuze also theorizes sense as the pre-condition for this structure of signs, a kind of original dimension of language that is presupposed by all of its functions and cannot be understood simply in terms of any one of them. As such a condition, sense is whatever underlies and determines the stable directional relations of definition, inference, and reference that signs bear to each other and to things in the world. At the same time, though, sense for Deleuze equally underlies the instability of meaning and, even more generally, the phenomena of change, flux, and becoming. Indeed, because of this bivalent tendency to underlie both stability and instability, both being and becoming, sense cannot be understood, Deleuze insists, as simply opposed to nonsense, conceived that which is simply outside the possibility of sense. Rather, sense moves in “both directions at once,” both toward the constitution of a full, determinate meaning, and simultaneously toward the dispersal and

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9 Lofs, pp. 1-2.

10 See above, chapter 3.
dissolution of any such meaning in contradiction and nonsense, with which it bears a special and “specific” internal relation.\textsuperscript{11}

This bi-directionality is essential, according to Deleuze, for understanding change and becoming in themselves. For instance, as Alice becomes taller than she was before, she is also smaller than she will be. At the same moment, and in relation to her becoming, she is thus characterized by contradictory predicates, and this contradictoriness demonstrates an \textit{essential} bivocality or opposition at the root of becoming that is inherent to all becoming and change as such.\textsuperscript{12} The paradox, which was already suggested by Plato, demonstrates, as well, the more general relation of sense as such to the paradoxes that characterize the appearance and manifestation of language. Bidirectional sense itself thus exists in an original relationship of sense to what is classically determined as its “other,” the nonsense of paradoxes, contradiction, word-play, and the unlimited reversals of pure becoming, as eminently demonstrated in the plays, ruses, and adventures, often genuinely undecidable between the sense of narration and the nonsense of pure language, that make up the strange “substance” of Alice’s adventures.

Given this bi-directional character, sense is para-doxical in the original meaning of the term (that is, as running “contrary” to opinion or doxa). It is only subsequently that it sense can be rendered unidirectional by the orthodoxies of what Deleuze calls “good sense” and “common sense.” In particular, whereas \textit{good sense} “affirms that in all things there is a determinable sense or direction,” \textit{common} sense distils from this ostensibly determinable direction the assignation of stable identities, the identification of substances and subjects as the bearers of fixed names and determinate properties. However, in its original articulation of sense as such, “paradox is …that which destroys good sense as the only direction, but it is also that which destroys common sense as the assignation of fixed identities.”\textsuperscript{13} This original articulation is, moreover, deeply linked to the problematic of language and its limits. Thus, “It is language which fixes the limits (the moment, for example, at which … excess begins), but it is language as well which transcends the limits and restores them to the infinite equivalence of an unlimited becoming.”\textsuperscript{14} It is, in other words, language as a totality of possible signification that determines sense as unidirectional meaning or reference to being; but this linguistic determination and staging of sense also evinces sense as the condition for a transcendence of the specific limits of language in the excessive dimension that again allows an unlimited affirmation of bidirectional becoming.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{LofS}, p. 77, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{LofS}, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{LofS}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{LofS}, pp. 2-3.
Both in the attempt to identify a level of sense underlying the ordinary functioning of language, and in the recognition that the attempt necessarily involves an encounter with paradox, Deleuze is in good company. As he recognizes, the theory of sense as that which is expressed by a proposition traces to the Stoic logicians, who identified the lekton as what is said by a proposition or sentence, what we might today call its “content” as distinct from its denotation, reference, or linguistic use. The problems of describing this dimension were developed by the Stoics (who already recognized it as a site of far-ranging paradoxes), the medieval school of Ockham, and in the nineteenth century by Meinong. More recently, Husserl’s discovery of the “noema” or the “noematic sense” of a perception or proposition again discerns, at a crucial point for phenomenology, the ideal dimension of meaning underlying both language and the intentionality of ordinary experience. In general, we may see sense, as Deleuze discusses it, as a kind of level or dimension of reality that underlies the very possibility for symbolic language to be meaningful at all. Such a dimension was, of course, also essential for the early foundations of the analytic tradition. Frege, for instance, identified sense as the dimension of ideal meaning or content, defined by the laws of logic and existing in a “third realm” of pure, objective, thoughts, wholly distinct from spatiotemporal reality or subjective ideas. In the early Wittgenstein, sense as the condition for the possibility of meaningful symbolic language is identified with the “logical form” that permeates both language and world and first makes it possible for the structure of a proposition to correspond with that of a state of affairs. As was already clear to Wittgenstein, the definition and description of this dimension underlying the possibility of any and all symbolic language involves the philosopher in fundamental paradoxes. The deepest and most telling of these is the paradox of its enunciation itself: that sentences appearing to describe or make statements about logical form must undermine themselves in the saying, being revealed as nothing more than pure nonsense.

According to Deleuze, we can best understand sense by considering its distinction from the more obvious functions of language, or of a proposition in its accomplishment of signification, assertion and communication. Deleuze distinguishes three aspects or relations of a linguistic proposition, to which he will add “sense” as a fourth, supplementing, precondition, underlying and defines all three. The first of these relations is denotation. This is the proposition’s function of referring to, standing for, or indicating some object or state of affairs; it functions, according to Deleuze, by means of the association of words with particular “images” which are supposed represent or stand for the things themselves, thus gaining a

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16 *LofS*, p. 20.
(true or false) relationship to things.\textsuperscript{17} The second relation, as familiar as the first although often thought of as opposed to it, is the “manifestation,” or deixis, whereby a speaker presents himself in the concrete instance of discourse. This relation is marked, most of all, in the use of the personal pronoun “I”, thought it is also exhibited in other indexicals and deictic indicators, as well as in the speaker’s concrete appropriation of the function of speech, what Benveniste called the “enunciative function.”\textsuperscript{18} Finally, the third relation or dimension of overt language is the dimension of “Signification,” which concerns the relation of words to general concepts, and hence defines the conceptual and inferential relations among general terms.\textsuperscript{19} It is also on the level of Signification that propositions first gain general truth conditions, comprehensible in terms of the inferential relations that preserve truth in the case of successful inference or deduction.\textsuperscript{20} As Deleuze notes, the distinction between manifestation and Signification already suffices to demonstrate a certain tension, or relationship of mutual presupposition, between the phenomena that Saussure already distinguished as “la parole” and “la langue.” If manifestation, and hence the assignation and enunciation of a concrete identity, may be considered to be primary in the diachronic order of concrete speech, this does not preclude the existence of the largely autonomous dimension of Signification in the synchronic order of the totality of language or “langue,” a dimension which itself may also be understood as lying at the ultimate basis of the assignation of identities and traits.\textsuperscript{21}

As distinct from all three of these relations of the proposition, however, we may be led, according to Deleuze, to recognize a fourth, underlying the three others as a kind of “ideational material” on which they draw and within which they circulate.\textsuperscript{22} The question of whether indeed to posit such a dimension is, according to Deleuze, a “strategic” one; for there is no proof of its existence “from the outside.”\textsuperscript{23} However, if we do posit it, sense will be an additional, “supplementary” dimension, answering to the question of the conditioning of each of the other three relations of the proposition, but incapable of being

\textsuperscript{17} It may be problematic that he thus thinks of denotation in terms of a category of representation – namely the image – which invokes psychological rather than logical aspects of meaning, in the first instance.

\textsuperscript{18} L\textit{ofS}, p. 13; for Benveniste, see chapter 3, above.

\textsuperscript{19} Deleuze occasionally uses “signification” in the more general sense of any phenomenon of the use of a signifying sign to stand for something; to distinguish the two usages, I shall capitalize “Signification” when it is used in the present, more specialized sense.


\textsuperscript{21} L\textit{ofS}, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{22} L\textit{ofS}, p. 19

\textsuperscript{23} L\textit{ofS}, p. 17.
assimilated to any of them. To begin with, sense is not simply denotation. For (as Frege decisively recognized), denotation or reference is a relation that either may or may not obtain between a name and its object; but even if the relation of denotation does not obtain, the name may still retain its sense. Similarly, sense cannot be assimilated to manifestation. For as we have already seen, the concrete existence of speech co-exists with a largely autonomous realm of signification in which identities and properties are determined and assigned. Here, sense is certainly present, but the concrete assumption of the enunciative function need not occur, and there is no question of reducing the inferential and conceptual relationships of signification to the mental or psychological states or intentions of an individual.

The third option is to assimilate sense to Signification. If this assimilation is successful, then sense will amount to the determination of the character of concepts and their inferential relations, the total structure of the possibility of inferential and logical reasoning. However, it is here that we encounter the first decisive paradox, which was already given by Carroll in his dialogue “What the Tortoise Said to Achilles.” In the dialogue, Achilles expresses an ordinary piece of reasoning in accordance with the most general rule of logical inference, *modus ponens*: If A, then B; A; therefore B. But the Tortoise now voices an objection, quite out of the course of ordinary practice, but capable nevertheless of evincing the prevalent mystery of its foundation. In order to make the inference, it is necessary to apply the rule *modus ponens* to the particular case, but do we not, then, need another rule capable of ensuring the legitimacy of this application? In other words, if we are to move from the general premise (“If A, then B”) the particular condition (“A”), and the statement of Modus Ponens, to the conclusion (“B”), do we not need another rule capable of ensuring that this movement is legitimate? Worse yet, it would seem that the requisite rule must itself again take the same form: it must show us, in particular, that if we have the general premise, the particular condition and Modus Ponens, it must therefore be possible to derive the particular conclusion. But then we apparently need another rule, stating that we may derive the conclusion from (what is now) the conjunction of the three premises, and so on to infinity. It follows that the application of the logical rule involved in the most ordinary chains of reasoning cannot be justified, on

24 Ultimately, however, it’s not a question of conditions of possibility; for the question of the conditions of possibility always invokes, Deleuze suggests, a progression to the next condition (and thus to the condition for the condition, etc.). Rather, sense is to be invoked – if we do invoke it -- as the unconditioned stratum responsible for the whole apparatus of language. (pp. 18-19).

25 Carroll (1895).

26 We may see this by assigning names to the premises and conclusion as follows. Let the general premise (“if A, then B”)=G. Then let “A”=P, and “B”=C. The tortoise’s objection then can be understood as the point that, if we are to move to the conclusion, we need, additionally, another rule of the form: If G, and P, then C. Call this rule H; then we seemingly need a new rule, saying that we may derive C from the combination of G, P, and H; and so on.
pain of bottomless infinite regress; the order of signification, the total regime of the possibility of logical inference and deduction, cannot ultimately be wholly founded on any rule internal to it itself. This first paradox of signification shows that the ascent from the proposition, as conditioned by its logical relations, to its underlying conditions will never have a finite end; it is therefore necessary either simply to affirm the irreducibility of this paradox or to affirm sense as a constitutive dimension of the “unconditioned” which halts the regress and provides an ultimate foundation for the possibility of significative meaning.

Thus, this first paradox of sense demonstrates, as a fundamental and constitutive feature of at least one dimension of linguistic meaning, the essential gap between rules and their application that must apparently result from any attempt to found language in the unity of a complete system of logical laws. As such, it has important resonances and parallels in neighboring areas of twentieth century philosophy, where this attempt is perhaps most fully developed. Remarkably, in fact, it is precisely the paradox of Caroll’s Achilles and the Tortoise to which W. V. O. Quine appealed, in 1935, in criticizing Carnap’s understanding of language as wholly defined and bounded by such a system of logical rules.27 (See chapter 3, above). Nor, indeed, is Quine’s interpretation of the upshot of the paradox dissimilar to Deleuze’s; for both philosophers, it demonstrates the ultimate untenability of any attempt to capture the entirety of the ordinary practice of logical reasoning and inference in a fixed corpus of determinate logical rules, capable of grounding this usage and justified in themselves. However, whereas Quine emphasizes the strictly negative and aporetic implications of this for Carnap’s project of describing language as defined by regular conventions of usage, Deleuze suggests again that we may be led to posit “sense” as the unconditioned “stratum” or layer that, in preconditioning the totality of signification along with the other constitutive dimensions of language, finally halts the infinite regress.28 29 As Deleuze clearly points out, though, the price of doing so is that sense itself will be constitutively paradoxical, and in a certain way will simply be another name for paradox itself. In particular, if we do thus make the strategic

27 Quine (1935).

28 We should note, however, the caution with which Deleuze makes this suggestion: “In truth, the attempt to make this fourth dimension [of sense] evident is a little like Carroll’s Snark hunt. Perhaps the dimension is the hunt itself, and sense is the Snark.” (LofS, p. 20)

29 Interestingly, we might see the first thinkers of the analytic tradition as identifying the distinction of sense from the first two dimensions (denotation and manifestation) while still often assimilating sense to what Deleuze calls Signification. Thus, for instance, in “The Thought” and “On Sense and Reference,” Frege distinguishes sense very clearly, and in exemplary fashion, from both denotation (or reference) and ordinary linguistic usage and subjective ideas (or manifestation). However, he nevertheless identifies the constitution of sense with the logical laws that define the patterns of inference and reasoning in a language. We might, then, see the adumbration of paradoxes about the force of the rules of inference by Wittgenstein, Quine (see below) and others, as (at least potentially), breaking this final link, and thus bearing witness to the analytic tradition’s discernment of a structure of sense that is very similar to Deleuze’s.
decision to affirm sense as the final, unconditioned stratum that founds language as a kind of “ideational material” from which all the other dimensions of language are made, it will not be able to appear as another sign or object; nowhere in the world of meaning that it conditions, neither in the signs nor the objects, will it appear as such and be manifest. The question (and it does remain a question), is rather whether there is:

…something, aliquid, which merges neither with the proposition or with the terms of the proposition, nor with the object or with the state of affairs which the proposition denotes, neither with the “lived,” or representation or the mental activity of the person who expresses herself in the proposition, nor with concepts or even signified essences…

Such a “something,” between sign and meaning, incapable of being manifest in either order but conditioning both, founding the application of general concepts to particular terms but neither general nor particular in itself, would also be (if we do posit it) indifferent to the distinction between language and the world, “partaking in” or mediating between the two but incapable of being assimilated to either. As such, it alone would be capable of founding the operations of language, as well as all becoming in the world. Such a sense would be, therefore, an “incorporeal, complex, and irreducible entity, at the surface of things, a pure event which inheres or subsists in the proposition.” Founding the directionality of language’s doxa as well as the heterodox, its directionality toward the constitution of meaning, the stability of reference, and the possibility of communication, as well as that toward the dissolution of meaning, ambiguity, and the instability of nonsense, its very essence would be paradox. This is the ambiguous flight along a line that goes in two directions at once, the contradictory simultaneity that twists the “inside” and the “outside” of language constitutively and essentially together, like the surface of a Möbius strip.

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30 *LofS*, p. 19.

Deleuze’s invocation of sense is thus an affirmation of the underlying paradox of meaningful language in all of its forms: the paradox that the existence and functioning of language in relation to the world must be pre-conditioned by something that apparently cannot appear within it. The first paradox, of Carroll’s Achilles and the Tortoise, demonstrates this with respect to signification, or inference: any application of the logical laws of inference to justify a particular rational inference seemingly requires another law to establish its own legitimacy, and so on forever, unless the regress is blocked by the invocation of a paradoxical, “unconditioned” element at the foundation of the possibility of inference, what we may (provisionally) call “sense.” This particular paradox is, however, also closely linked to a series of other paradoxes of signification and manifestation of language, ranging through all the other constitutive dimensions of language, which Deleuze proceeds to investigate in detail.

For one thing, the paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise already suggests the necessity of an infinite regress in the conditions for meaningful language. Each statement of such conditions itself invokes the need for a further statement of its conditions, and so forth. Thus, a more general version of paradox underlying any meaningful use of language (whether in the register of denotation, manifestation, or signification) is what Deleuze calls the “paradox of regress, or indefinite proliferation:”

When I designate something, I always suppose that the sense is understood, that it is already there … Sense is always presupposed as soon as I begin to speak; I would not be able to begin without this presupposition. In other words, I 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 … If we agree to think of a proposition as a name, it would then appear that every name which denotes an object may itself become the object of a new name which denotes its sense: \( n_1 \) refers to \( n_2 \), which denotes the sense of \( n_1 \); \( n_2 \) refers to \( n_3 \); etc. \(^{32}\)

The resulting regress can in fact be generated in either of two ways; either as a regress of conditions, starting from an initial proposition and attempting, at each stage, to describe the sense of the proposition at the previous stage; or as a progression of names, whereby the assumption of the possibility of giving a name invokes the question of the name of that name, and so forth. In the first version, the paradox of regress is already suggested, as Deleuze notes, by Frege with his distinction between concepts and

\(^{32}\) *LoS*, p. 28
Since this is a formal distinction, already demanding distinct logical and grammatical structures for the use of concepts and the designation of objects, it follows, as Frege pointed out, that neither a concept nor the sense of a proposition can, strictly speaking, be named. According to Frege, it follows as well that to attribute any property to a concept – to say, for instance, even that “the concept “horse” is a concept,” is to utter nonsense. Thus, only in this way – by the invocation of a distinction between sense and nonsense that determines the possibility of linguistic or grammatical forms -- is the regress blocked that otherwise would demand for each sense another, and on to infinity.

The second, nominal version of the paradox is given, again, by Carroll in an amusing passage of Through the Looking Glass, wherein Alice discusses songs, names, and the names of names with the White Knight. Here, in response to each of Alice’s successive questions about the name of an entity, the Knight is able to provide another, completely distinct name; the paradox is that if everything real has a name, and if no name can name itself, then the provision of any real name for anything will demand a name for that name, and so forth. The assumption of the nameability of any real entity thus leads to an infinite proliferation of names, or to the necessity of the assumption of an infinite possible extensibility of the power of linguistic naming.

In this form, the paradox might be thought relatively unproblematic: we might readily agree, for instance, that language bears within itself an infinitely extensible power of possible naming, or that there could possibly be an infinite number of names, without supposing that all of these names must be provided on any actual occasion of linguistic use or description. However, if we add the assumption that each name, in order to possess its denotational function, must be endowed with an intelligible sense, we can combine the two versions of the paradox of regress into a more fundamental and devastating one. For on this assumption, each name is endowed with something – a sense -- which is responsible for its being able to be used to name what it does (or is what we understand when we know what it names). Thus, it ought to be possible in case of any use of a name to designate its sense, and then it must be possible to ask after the sense of this designation, and so forth. Here, the problem is not just that of an infinite possible extension of designations, but a bottomless regress of conditions for intelligible use, each of which must apparently be satisfied by another. If we cannot block the regress, then the meaningful use of any term presupposes not only the possible existence, but also knowledge and reality of, an infinite chain of conditions. The regress thus testifies not only to the “infinite power of language” but, seemingly, to the irreducible infinity of the knowledge or competence involved in, and presupposed by, the most ordinary use of any name.

33 See, e.g., Frege (1892).

34 See Frege (1892).
As Deleuze argues, classical theories of sense exhibit, at least in some cases, a dim understanding of this paradox, and have attempted to respond to it with their conception of “sense” as that which is ultimately expressed by a proposition. However, how can the paradox be blocked? The problem is, as noted, not just that each level of the description of sense seems to invoke the possibility of another description on a higher level, but much more radically that it seems that the effectiveness of sense in conditioning the functioning of language in general depends, at each level, on this higher-level description being given or known. If this were right, then the actual effectiveness of any concrete function of language, any act of denotation, manifestation, or signification, would depend on an effect of sense which would itself presuppose another effect at its root, and so on infinitely.

If sense is, then, is indeed to be invoked as a condition for meaningful (or meaningless) language use at all, the only way to block the paradox, then is to take it to be able to be fixed as such a condition in such a way that it is indeed always possible to refer to it, but also in such a way that it contributes *nothing* substantial to the effectiveness of any of the other dimensions of linguistic use (denotation, manifestation, and Signification). This is what Deleuze calls the *sterility* of sense, a property asserted of it by theorists from the Stoics to Husserl. The hypothesis of sterility is the hypothesis of a layer of sense that is *real* as a precondition for the proposition, but nevertheless completely *ineffective*, adding nothing on the level of effects to the work of any of the other three dimensions of language.

If we may indeed assume sense to be sterile in this way, the infinite regress of conditions of effectiveness is blocked (though there is still an infinite proliferation of ineffective senses). However, the assumption is in itself somewhat paradoxical – it demands the reality of a discernible level of language that both operates as a precondition of the other dimensions (thus retaining its “power of genesis in relation to the dimensions of the proposition,”)\(^{35}\) and is nevertheless without any effect on them. Moreover, it leads directly to yet another paradox, what Deleuze calls the “paradox of neutrality.” According to this paradox, which was anticipated as early as the work of Nicolas d’Autrecourt, the sense of a proposition is indifferent to its status as affirmed or denied, as well as to its “quality, quantity, relation, or modality.” For instance, the affirmative proposition “God is” and the negative one “God is not” must nevertheless share a common element of sense, in order to be, respectively, the affirmation and the denial of the same claim. This common element, being without effect on the possibilities of assertion or denial, is itself neutral between them. Similarly, with respect to modality, a proposition affirming a possible event in the future will have substantially the same sense as a proposition affirming the same event as an actuality in

\(^{35}\) *LofS*, p. 32
the past. More generally, Deleuze says, the hypothesis of a neutrality of sense will lead to a paradoxical conception of sense as:

…indifferent to the universal and to the singular, to the general and to the particular, to the personal and to the collective; it is also indifferent to affirmation and negation, etc. In short, it is indifferent to all opposites. This is so because all of these opposites are but modes of the proposition considered in its relations of denotation and signification, and not the traits of the sense which it expresses.36 (p. 35)

As Deleuze notes, moreover, it is precisely this indifference that qualifies sense, as so described, to figure as the basis for the possibility of becoming and events. For although “it is neither at the same time, nor in relation to the same thing, that I am younger and older,” it is nevertheless “at the same time and by the same relation that I become so”.37 If the problem of understanding becoming is to comprehend the simultaneity of opposites in a single entity or stratum that unifies these contradictory relations, then sense alone, conceived (in accordance with the paradoxes voiced so far) as regressive, sterile, and above all neutral, seems capable of doing so.

III

As Deleuze points out, all of the paradoxes of sense considered so far may be considered to be very closely linked to, or even derived from, the most general one, which is the “White Knight” paradox of regress. We may, again, take this paradox either of two ways: either as demonstrating a simple regress of names, or, more problematically, as invoking an ongoing alternation between senses and denotations, so that the naming of a sense at each stage invokes the question of the sense of this name, and so forth. Even more generally, the White Knight paradox results, along with all of the others, simply from the assumption that sense can be presented as such in language in some way; all that is needed to start the regress is the assumption that the necessary precondition of meaningful language can itself appear in signs.

It is thus appropriate that Deleuze next considers the far-ranging implications of the paradoxes of sense for the structuralist picture of language deriving from the work of Saussure.38 Familiarly, according to

36 LofS, p. 35.
37 LofS, p. 33.
38 Saussure (1913).
In an exemplary article from 1967, two years before the publication of *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze enumerates a series of criteria or common features definitive of structuralism and the structuralist movement, as developed by thinkers in such diverse domains as linguistics, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and literary criticism. The first of these criteria, according to Deleuze, is the recognition of a specific domain of or order of “signification,” completely distinct from both the orders of the real and the imaginary. This recognition, Deleuze notes, provides for a dramatic and even revolutionary advance beyond the methods and assumptions of both classical philosophy and the nineteenth and early twentieth century movements of Romanticism, Symbolism, and Surrealism, whose attempt is always to comprehend the Real as such, even if it also seen as in decisive relation to imagination and the imaginary. Structuralism, by contrast, discerns in language and signification a “third regime,” wholly distinct from the real as such but also distinct from the imaginary and its “games of mirroring, of duplication, of reversed identification and projection, always in the mode of the double”; it is at the point of the sign and its action that we can now discern something like the “transcendent point where the real and the imaginary interpenetrate and unite.”

Most decisively, Saussure’s conception of language as a system of pure differences allows for a conception of meaning as grounded, neither wholly in the reality of things nor in the resemblances of the imagination, but rather in a structure that “has no relationship with a sensible form, nor with a figure of the imagination, nor with an intelligible essence.” (p. 173). That is, the discovery of the order of signification, and its articulation of language as a system of pure differences, allows us to see the foundations of meaning in an order that has *nothing to do* with resemblance, mimesis, or the representation of a pre-existing order of things or concepts. The sign is, rather, split between signifier and signified, between the order of things on one side and the order of concepts on the other, and

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39 Deleuze (1967).


the recognition of its differential structure provides a radical new insight into the paradoxical point that
defines and conditions both orders. It is in this way that the specific discovery of the structure of
language by Saussure provides a vast new project for thought, and a radically transformed arena for
theoretical work.42

As Deleuze goes on to explain in Logic of Sense, the most significant implication of the paradoxes of
sense for the structuralist picture of language is in fact that of an essential mismatch, or failure of
parallelism, between these two levels or series, that of the linguistic signifiers and that of the worldly
signifieds. We may see this by considering once more the implication of the basic paradox of regress for
the structuralist picture. Conceived in terms of structuralism, the paradox of regress shows the necessity
of an ongoing alternation between signifiers and signifieds, whereby the signification of a signified results
in the production of a new signifier, which may then itself be treated as an designated (signified) entity, to
be named by again by a new signifier, and so on. As Deleuze argues, given the structuralist picture, this
alternation has a basic and fundamental significance for our underlying conception of the basis of
language (thought as composed of the two systems of signifiers and signifieds) itself. For absent any
other principle of coordination, and given the avowed “arbitrariness” of the link between the signifier and
the signified in any individual sign, to assert the infinite alternation demonstrated in the course of the
paradox is in fact the only way in which it is possible to assert a systematic relation between the level of
the signifiers and the level of the signified at all. In other words, once again, the only way to understand
the general possibility of language (which must, after all, amount to drawing some connection between
signifiers and signifieds) is to affirm the paradox of regress involved in the actuality of signification itself,
whereby each signifier becomes a possible object of signification for another.

If we are thus, once again, led to affirm sense, in connection with the paradox of regress, as the inherently
paradoxical condition for the possibility of any signification whatsoever (here, the precondition for any

42 In a broader sense, indeed, this discovery of a regime of constitution that underlies the meaning of propositions
and words but owes nothing to imagination or resemblance might indeed be seen as one of the most transformative
and significant outcomes of the philosophical turn to language in the twentieth century, in both its structuralist and
its analytic versions. For instance, we may discern precisely the same discovery in Frege’s identification of a realm
of pure thoughts, or senses, that is defined by the logical rules that underlie language as an objective structure that is
completely distinct from the realm of subjective ideas or images. Even more broadly, it is this discovery of
language-as-structure that visibly underlies the critique of psychologism that defined the methods of the early
analytic tradition for Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, and Carnap. As this radical and unprecedented critique
discerned, given the discovery of language as a total structure, it is impossible any longer to see meaning as derived
from the intentions of an individual mind, or from the certainty of a self-conscious cogito. Instead, philosophy must
transform itself into an unprecedented reflection on, and analysis of, the nature and force of the rules that define
language, in our understanding, consideration, and everyday practice of it.
systematic relationship between the system or structure of signifiers and that of the signifieds), then what consequences follow for how we should think of the overall structure of language in itself? The most important such consequence is that there is in language a fundamental and constitutive excess of signification over the signified, a surplus of signifiers that always goes beyond the actuality of what is signified. To see this, consider again the paradox of regress and the alternation of signifiers and signifieds to which it gives rise. This alternation is not simply a static exchange, but is always directional and oriented: for at each level, it is the existence of a signified that implies the existence of a signifier (which then, if supplied, becomes a new signified, and so on). In other words, what is demanded at each stage by the principle that everything real must have (or be capable of having) a name is, at each stage, a new signifier: in this way, the directionality of the whole series is oriented toward the excess (always one more) of signifiers over signifieds. Given the completion of the series to any particular stage, it will always be possible to ask for the signifier of what exists at that stage, and so to move to the next one by means of its provision. Short of dropping or suspending the principle that everything must have a name, there is nothing we can do to block this regress, which we may accordingly take to define the (infinite) totality of significations. We may accordingly take this oriented, directional excess to be essential to language, and as definitive of sense itself.

At the time of Deleuze’s writing, as he notes, several authors within the tradition of structuralism had already discussed something very much like this excess of signification over the signified, and even given it a central place in their own “structuralist” systems. For instance, as Deleuze notes, what is called the letter in several of Lacan’s texts effectively develops the consequences of the “blurred excess of signifier.” For instance, in his reading of Poe’s “The Purloined Letter,” Lacan shows how the narrative is structured by the non-correspondence of two series of relations, effectively a signifying series and a signified one, connected only by the single element of the letter which circulates between both. More generally, of course (as we have seen; see chapter 3, above), Lacan understands the dimension of signification (or the symbolic), and the constitutive excess of the signifier over the signified, as essential to the structure of the subject itself. It is thus that, according to Lacan’s notorious and radical thesis, a signifier is “that which represents a subject for another signifier;” the subject does not pre-exist the chain of signification but is, rather, produced as its differential effect. Similarly, as we have seen above, for

43 As (Bosteels 2008a) has pointed out in a discussion of Deleuze’s article, this means that these systems already possess many of the features more usually associated with “post-structuralism”: “…among its defining features structuralism always seeks to place an empty square or an empty place (un case vide) at the center of the structure. Of course, this means, as you can clearly see, that all true structuralism is already a post-structuralism, if we take the latter to refer to the fact that the structure’s center is empty or absent…” (Bosteels 2008a, p. 3).

Claude Lévi-Strauss, the structure of language presupposes a kind of permanent and original dimension of latency that precedes even the origin of man himself; thus “the universe signified long before we began to know what it was signifying” and language always deploys “a completeness of signifier” which essentially exceeds the totality of the signified. When this excess of signification is problematically signified within language itself, it gives rise to the famous “floating signifier,” which is, according to Lévi-Strauss, “the promise of all art, all poetry, all mythic and aesthetic invention.” To this set of promises, Deleuze adds, as well, a political significance, holding that the floating signifier can also be understood as the “promise of all revolutions.” The characteristic feature of the floating signifier is that, while being accorded a great value within the daily functioning and use of a language, it wholly lacks any determinate sense of its own, allowing it to be able to take on any sense whatsoever, or more broadly, as we shall see, to figure the entire movement of sense itself. Thus, to the excess of the series of signifiers corresponds, on the side of the signified, a lack: what is lacking is “a supernumary and non-situated given – an unknown, an occupant without a place, or something always displaced.”

In this way, the floating signifier and the “floated,” indeterminate signified together figure the paradoxical movement essential to the coordination of the two chains overall. Indeed, since the relationship of the floating signifier and the floated signified results from and stands in for what makes possible the paradoxical linkage of the two chains at all, we may understand this relationship to manifest the very (paradoxical) possibility of what makes any coordination between signifier and signified possible, sense itself. If, in other words, we now conceive of this linkage between the floating signifier and the floated signified, in itself, as a kind of “paradoxical element” which is not a member of either series, but rather their “differentiator,” we can conceive of this paradoxical element as underlying both the articulation and the differentiation of both series. This element will itself have “the function of articulating the two series to one another, of reflecting them in one another, of making them communicate, coexist, and be ramified.” It will, indeed, be the paradoxical element responsible for the functioning of anything like a coordination or differentiation of the two series, responsible for there being anything like a structure at all.

This paradoxical element at the basis of the movement of language and the possibility of sense combines a number of contradictory features: “It is at once excess and lack, empty square and supernumary object,

45 LofS, p. 49.
46 LofS, p. 49.
47 LofS, p. 50.
48 LofS, pp. 50-51.
49 LofS, p. 51.
a place without an occupant and an occupant without a place, ‘floating signifier’ and floated signified, esoteric word and exoteric thing, white word and black object.”\(^{50}\) The paradoxical, two-sided element is thus neither word nor thing, but this does not preclude it from having its own proper sense; indeed, given its capability to present the form of all sense, Deleuze argues, its own proper sense will be unique and exceptional. In fact, the defining characteristic of this element is precisely that it “denotes exactly what it expresses and expresses what it denotes.”\(^{51}\) In other words, “It says something, but at the same time it says the sense of what it says: it says its own sense.”\(^{52}\)

But it is this unique self-relation of the “paradoxical element” that says its own sense (and so manifests, in this self-showing, what paradoxically conditions the entirety of sense itself) that points to what is perhaps the most remarkable parallel suggested by Deleuze’s whole analysis. This is the parallel to what is indeed, as we have already seen, the founding paradox of set theory’s consideration of meaning and reference: Russell’s paradox of the set of all sets that are not members of themselves. We can see this connection readily if we consider the status of the “paradoxical element” with respect to sense itself. In that it says, or designates, its own sense, it is “completely abnormal” with respect to all the other elements of language. For it violates, according to Deleuze, two laws of the normal functioning of language which must apparently be respected by any ordinary signifier in connection with its signified. The first is one we have already considered: the law of regression, or hierarchy, according to which the sense of any name can only be designated by means of another name. It is this law, as we saw, that generates the paradox of infinite regress at the root of all of the paradoxes of sense; the paradoxical element that presents self itself violates it by standing for its own sense. The second law of normal language that is violated by the paradoxical element is what Deleuze calls the law of disjunctive synthesis: “The second normal law governing names endowed with sense is that their sense cannot determine an alternative into which they themselves enter.”\(^{53}\) In other words, according to this law, it is impossible for a term endowed with sense to determine a disjunction of properties, on one side of which it itself falls.\(^{54}\) It is easy to see,

\(^{50}\) *LofS*, p. 66.

\(^{51}\) *LofS*, p. 67.

\(^{52}\) *LofS*, p. 67. There are some interesting parallels to be drawn here to Derrida’s treatment of words such as *chora*, *hymen*, and even his own coinages such as *différance* (see chapter 4, above).

\(^{53}\) *LofS*, p. 67.

\(^{54}\) Compare the issues of self-reference involved in Russell’s paradox and the related semantic paradoxes (chapters 1 and 2, above).
for instance, that the term “nonsense” must violate this principle. For insofar as it is its sense to
determine the distinction between sense and nonsense, it is precisely determined as a term with sense.

There is nothing in itself paradoxical or contradictory about this situation by itself, whereby, in violating
the second law, a term designates a disjunction that it itself falls on one side of. However, if we combine
this violation with a violation of the first law (of regression), we derive the most general and far-ranging
of the paradoxes of sense. In particular, an element which violates both laws will both: i) stand for itself
and ii) in so doing, articulate a distinction of which it, itself, paradoxically is capable of falling afoul.
But the “paradoxical element” we have discovered in the relationship of the floating signifier to the
floating signified is just such an element. In standing for its own sense, it violates the first law; in thus
articulating the distinction between sense and nonsense, it violates the second. We may, Deleuze says,
indeed subsume it under the general term “nonsense,” owing to its complete abnormality with respect to
these two normal laws of sense. However – and this is the most important consequence for the theory of
sense itself – this will imply that nonsense is not simply exterior to sense, but rather exists in a complex
and paradoxical internal relationship to it. For, due to the existence and necessity of the paradoxical
element, it is impossible simply to disjoin sense and nonsense, except by means of the introduction of a
signifying element that destabilizes precisely this disjunction. More specifically:

…When the regressive law states that the sense of a name must be denoted by another name,
these names of different degrees refer, from the point of view of signification, to classes or
properties of different “types.” Every property must belong to a type higher than the properties or
individuals over which it presides, and every class must belong to a type higher than the objects
which it contains. It follows that a class cannot be a member of itself, nor may it contain
members of different types. Likewise, according to the disjunctive law, a determination of
signification states that the property or the term in relation to which a classification is made
cannot belong to any of the groups of the same type which are classified in relation to it. An
element cannot be part of the sub-sets which it determines, nor a part of the set whose existence it
presupposes. Thus, two forms of the absurd correspond to the two figures of nonsense, and these
forms are defined as ‘stripped of signification’ and as constituting paradoxes: a set which is
included in itself as a member; the member dividing the set which it presupposes – the set of all
sets, and the “barber of the regiment.” The absurd then is sometimes a confusion of formal levels
in the regressive synthesis, sometimes a vicious circle in the disjunctive synthesis.55

55 LofS, p. 69.
Thus, the most general and underlying paradox of sense, manifest in the “paradoxical element” that, in linking the floating signifier to the floating signified, presents the original and pervasive excess of signification, is identical in form to Russell’s paradox of the set of all sets that are not members of themselves (or to its “intuitive” version, the paradox of the barber who must shave all those in the regiment who do not shave themselves). As is familiar, the paradoxical Russell set has two determinants, which correspond precisely to the two sides of absurdity, as presented by Deleuze. First, there is the possibility for a set to be contained within itself, which Russell himself sought to prohibit through the imposition of a hierarchy of types (and which is similarly prohibited by what Deleuze calls the “regressive law.”) Second, there is the capacity of any well-defined set (given by the fundamental axioms of set theory (extensionality)) to determine a distinction between what is within it and what is outside it. If we allow a set (or element) to possess both capacities, and thus to violate both of Deleuze’s laws, the paradox of the set of all sets that are not self-membered results immediately. But the “paradoxical element” which is nonsense in that, denoting its own sense, it violates both of these normal laws, must be considered to be just such a one.

According to Deleuze, there is, thus, a surprising and radical analogy between Russell’s paradox (along with the various associated paradoxes of self-inclusion and self-reference) and the paradox generated, on the basic structuralist picture of language, by the signification of sense itself. If this is indeed correct, how should we then respond to each of these closely analogous paradoxes? As we saw above (chapter 2), Russell’s response to his own paradox of set membership is a gesture that is both theoretical and prohibitive: he introduces as an absolute law of language and membership the hierarchy of types, which makes it impossible for the set of all sets (or the Russell set of all sets not members of themselves) even to be defined (let alone to “exist”). This gesture, indeed, defines as legal only those sets that comport with (the set-theoretic versions of) Deleuze’s two laws of normal signification: that no set can be a member of itself (no sign can denote its own sense), and that no set can define a disjunction that its definition itself presupposes.

Deleuze’s response, while recognizing the existence and far-ranging implications of the same set of paradoxes, is fundamentally different, and even the direct opposite of Russell’s. For rather than prohibiting the “extra-legal” paradox of the self-presentation of sense, Deleuze recognizes this paradox, precisely, as foundational for the order of sense in its entirety. From the perspective of the desire for the consistency of foundations, this response may seem perverse; however, as we have seen, it is indeed the only way to conceive of the basis of language in sense, given the necessary existence of the paradoxes already discussed.
We can, of course, foreclose the paradox on the legislative level by laying down axiomatic laws (as Russell and Zermelo-Fraenkel do) as governing all real possibilities of signification, but the price of this, as we have seen, is a prohibition on the possibility of sense being linguistically described at all. Moreover, if we do follow Deleuze’s response, we gain a revealing perspective on these laws, and indeed on all of the constitutive laws governing signs and language, from which we are otherwise debarred. In particular, as Deleuze shows, we may then take the laws prohibiting self-membership and self-applying disjunctions as indeed conditioning “determinations of signification” proper, so that anything violating them indeed exists prior to the subsumption of sense under the maxims they propound, without, nevertheless, completely denying sense to such paradoxical elements as do indeed violate the laws of “proper” signification. The decision to do so, in fact, reflects the recognition that the prohibitions that guarantee the absence of paradox, in legislating the conditions necessary for the regular operation of the domain of proper or “good” sense, also first give rise to the ordinary logical laws and axioms constitutive of this domain, including the law of non-contradiction and the principles underlying ordinary set membership and inclusion. But both the prohibition and its effectiveness in constituting the domain of proper signification have their pre-condition, as we have seen, in the pre-existing stratum of paradoxical, bi-directional sense. Accordingly:

The interest of the determinations of signification lies in the fact that they engender the principles of non-contradiction and the excluded middle, instead of these principles being given ready-made. The paradoxes themselves enact the genesis of contradiction and inclusion in the proposition stripped of signification.56

In other words, by invoking the existence of a paradoxical stratum of sense at the underlying basis of every possibility of signification, and even of the possibility of any meaningful use of signs as such, we can account for the several dimensions of the functioning of signs. In each case, this functioning is possible only by means of the constitutive prohibition of the paradoxical condition that also gives it rise. More specifically: in connection with the first paradox, that of Achilles and the Tortoise, we have seen that the force of the rational laws governing inference in language is possible only on the condition of a more fundamental stratum of sense that paradoxically, in expressing itself, mandates its own force; this self-legislation is, however, prohibited from the domain of normal, rational inference, given that within this domain, each valid inference must be made on the basis of a law that it does not itself state as premise or conclusion. In connection with the second paradox, that of the White Knight, we have seen that the assumption of the nameability of all entities is possible only on the basis of an infinite regress of names or

56 LofS, p. 69.
an infinitely regressive alternation of names and senses; this infinite regress is blocked from the domain of ordinary denotation, however, by the assumption of a sterile layer of sense capable of effectively underlying denotation while being without effect itself. In connection with structuralism, finally, we have seen that the assumption of a link between the series of signifiers and signifieds, the link that makes possible the order of signification as such, is possible only on the basis of an infinite alternation between signifiers and signifieds which ensures the serial movement along each chain and also ensures that they are connected at all; this infinite alternation is again foreclosed, however, from the domain of ordinary denotation by the laws prohibiting sets containing themselves and signs denoting their own sense. Nevertheless, although it is in this way fundamentally blocked from appearing within the domain of ordinary signification, paradoxical sense leaves its mark (or trace?) on this realm; as we have seen, it is marked precisely in the “paradoxical element” which, devoid of a signified and so excepted from the realm of normal signification, nevertheless figures or stands for the constitutive excess of signification itself. Thought as the double of floating signifier and floated (absent) signified, this element is neither word nor thing, neither concept nor object. However, what it presents is thus the paradoxical basis for all possibilities of enunciation and for the force of all laws.

Even more suggestively, the close analogy (or identity) that Deleuze points out between the paradoxical element that, in illegally presenting its own sense, bears the status of nonsense, and the Russell set of all sets that are not members of themselves, yields the suggestion of a remarkable and radical insight into the basis for the general meaning of concepts itself. For if we may consider the denotation of various individuals by a general term or concept to be analogous to (or identical to?) the grouping of these individuals within a particular, well-defined set, then we may indeed, conversely, consider the relationship of set membership, figured by the symbol ‘∈’ (usually read “is an element of,”) to stand for the relationship that an individual bears to a concept that it falls under. Indeed, that such a definition is always possible is precisely the intuition underlying Frege’s original formulation of the unrestricted comprehension axiom. And extending the analogy (or identity) between set membership and general denotation, we may take whatever determines the unity of a set – here, precisely what is symbolized by the sign ‘∈’ – to be (analogous to) sense. (In other words, we are assuming that “sense is whatever determines reference.”) However, as we have seen, Frege’s intuition is ruined by, precisely, the apparent definability of a set that, in its definition, refers to this general relation of set membership (and exclusion) itself, the Russell set. The consequence is that, in ordinary set theory, such sets are debarred, and it is impermissible to define any set by terms that refer to the general relationship of set membership (as the Russell set does); indeed, the relationship of inclusion symbolized by ‘∈’ is simply taken as a given and never defined. However – and this is the essential contribution of a theory of the paradoxical stratum of
sense as prior to, and underlying, the domain of ordinary signification – if we may nevertheless accord sense prior to this paradoxical set or element, its sense will be, precisely, the sense of ‘∈’ itself. That is, the criterion that the Russell set uses to determine its members is stateable in terms of – and only in terms of – membership itself. If it is indeed impossible to speak of set membership, of the relationship that links concepts to individuals or universals to particulars, then this paradoxical element does not exist and cannot ever appear in any presentation or presence. If, however, it is indeed possible to conceive it as manifest – although illegal in the normal order of signification – as the exceptional remainder, the excess of signification, the empty square or the floating signifier (correlative to a deficiency in the order of the signified), then its own proper sense is precisely this general relationship of universals to particulars itself. Thus, by means of the fundamental paradox of signification that nevertheless took logic and the theory of signs two millennia to discern, something like a (problematic) solution is found for the problem that Plato already grasped as his most fundamental one: the problem of participation, or the link between the Idea and the particular that institutes the very order of language itself.

IV

As we have already seen, sense, for Deleuze, is paradoxical in that it “goes in both directions at once.” Before the orthodoxy of common sense or good sense, original, paradoxical sense bears the bi-directionality of contradiction in its very structure. This is what qualifies it, in particular, to underlie becoming and change in a way that no static essence could; for as we have also seen, the paradox of becoming (for instance Alice’s becoming-taller) is that of a simultaneous reconciliation of contradictory predicates. The detailed analysis of sense as the precondition for language has thus elicited its inherent suitability for serving as a basis for an analysis of becoming, by demonstrating the series of paradoxes that constitute its very form. Moreover, in connection with structuralism, we have seen that this underlying, paradoxical structure of sense is what is ultimately responsible for the movement of signification itself, the serial dimension of language that allows an oriented progression along each of the separate chains of the signifiers and the signifieds, and also the communication between them. Indeed, according to Deleuze, we may use this understanding of the role of paradoxical sense in underlying the dynamic structure of language to comprehend the general conditions of structure as such. The first of these conditions, as we have seen, is the existence of two heterogeneous series, one determined as signifying and the other as signified. But it is the relationship, or tension, between the two series is necessary to determining the dynamism of structure as such. That is why the second condition is that:
Each of these series is constituted by terms which exist only through the relations they maintain with one another. To these relations, or rather to the values of these relations, there correspond very particular events, that is, *singularities* which are assignable within the structure. The situation is very similar to that of differential calculus, where the distributions of singular points correspond to the values of differential relations.\(^57\)

Thus, in addition to the static co-existence of the (partially) parallel series of signifiers and signifieds, it is necessary, in order that the chains be linked to each other and put into motion, that the relations and differences *within* the chains also be constituted by paradoxical items that cannot be assimilated to any static order (essence or accident) but must indeed be thought as singular events. In fact, we have already encountered such an element: it is the “paradoxical element” that, manifesting the excess of signification, ensures the linkage and circulation of both series. The paradoxical element that is manifested, in the order of signification, as the “empty square” then:

…has the function of joining the singularities which correspond to the two series in a “tangled tale,” of assuring the passage from one distribution of singularities to the next. In short, it has the function of bringing about the distribution of singular points; of determining as signifying the series in which it appears in excess, and, as signified, the series in which it appears correlative as lacking and, above all, of assuring the bestowal of sense in both signifying and signified series. For sense is not to be confused with signifier and the signified as such. We can conclude from this that there is no structure without series, without relations between the terms of each series, or without singular points corresponding to these relations. But above all, we can conclude that there is no structure without the empty square, which makes everything function.\(^58\)

Both the existence and the dynamism of the two series, linked in problematic correspondence, is an outcome of the circulation of the paradoxical element that manifests sense itself, the empty square or the floating signifier corresponding to the floated signified. But this circulation is not simply a homogenous development, or unitary progression; it is, rather, articulated by specific points of inflection, reversal, and qualitative differentiation. These are the sense-events at the basis of all change and becoming. They are singular points in that they are: “turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and

\(^57\) *LofS*, p. 50.

\(^58\) *LofS*, p. 51.
anxiety, ‘sensitive points.” 59 Because they articulate sense, which (as we have seen) is prior to and different from the three ordinary linguistic orders of manifestation, denotation, and Signification, they are not to be understood as equivalent to individual agents, states of affairs, or universal concepts. In this respect, singularities are definitively neutral. Indeed, Deleuze says, they escape and precede the oppositions between the individual and the collective, the personal and the impersonal, and the particular and the general. Their articulation and distribution conditions not only the two normal chains of signifiers and signifieds in their mutual relations and correspondences, but can also displace these relations into entirely new directions and connections. The basis for all of these phenomena of change, flux, and becoming is the neutrality of the singular as undecidable between personal and impersonal, individual and collective, or particular and general.

This recognition of the way that what he calls singularities, or events, articulates any possible dynamism of structures by means of its paradoxical neutrality leads Deleuze to theorize structure and event as deeply and constitutively linked. Thus, “it is imprecise to oppose structure and event;” for “the structure includes a register of ideal events.” 60 Within the structure that is defined simply by its differential relations, the singularities (or sense-events) are those points that correspond to what seem to be solid elements, for instance the specific values in the differential structure of linguistic phonemes that correspond to the actual values of sounds and letters. 61 These events, or singularities, are thus ideal in that they correspond to the structure of language as a whole and define its action, but at the same time real in that they account for the actual processes of change and becoming that occur within the course of this action.

The way that the underlying paradoxes of sense constitute this domain and define its topology also provides the key to another central notion of Deleuze’s thinking deployed throughout his career, the concept of the virtual. We can see this, in particular, by considering the relationship of the “transcendental field” to the phenomena and objects it underlies and constitutes. Sense, as we have seen, is to be understood as something like a pre-condition for phenomena, both words and objects; but what kind of relationship of pre-conditioning is this? As Deleuze clearly points out at several points, the relationship between paradoxical sense and the two series that it conditions, the signifiers as well as the signifieds, will not be one of resemblance, similarity, or representation. For sense, opening the divergence between both chains and circulating undecidably between them, will not resemble either words or objects; being at the origin of both, it is heterogeneous to both series. So the relationship of pre-

59 LoF, p. 52.
60 LoF, p. 50.
61 LoF, p. 50.
conditioning, here, is not one of “conditions of possibility” that resemble or replicate the structure of the conditioned. On the other hand, the relationship between the transcendental field and the ordinary phenomena of language and world will not be the relationship of the undetermined to the determinate; for the field of sense, though paradoxical in itself, is nevertheless completely determinate. Moreover, as we have in fact already seen, the field of sense is not to be opposed to objects and phenomena as possibility is opposed to actuality. For if sense is to donate itself to the phenomena of the world, it cannot remain mere possibility or the shadowy schema of modes of action or effect. Rather, it itself must in fact be real: it must produce (in the order of quasi-causes at least) the whole of their structure and the articulation of their differences.

Indeed, as Deleuze argues in *Difference and Repetition*, the relationship of pre-conditioning here (what is expressed by calling the field of sense “transcendental”) is no longer to be understood as a matter of conditions of possibility at all, but rather as a dimension of the virtual that is not opposed to the real, but in fact, a part of it:

> The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual. Exactly what Proust said of states of resonance must be said of the virtual: ‘Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract’; and symbolic without being fictional. Indeed, the virtual must be defined as strictly a part of the real object – as though the object had one part of itself in the virtual into which it plunged as though into an objective dimension … The reality of the virtual consists of the differential elements and relations along with the singular points which correspond to them. The reality of the virtual is a structure.\(^6^2\)

It is only as real, and indeed as a “part” or dimension of the objects themselves, that the dimension of sense can articulate their meaning and determine their properties. It does not do so, however, by resembling them or replicating their form, but rather through the original effects of structure, which (as we have seen) opens and ensures the circulation of the two series of words and objects. Rather than being opposed to the elements of these series in terms of the duality of possible and real, therefore, the paradoxical structure of sense conditions these elements in their total structure, and mutual definitive relationships, by means of a virtuality that is opposed to the “actuality” of these elements, without being in any respect less than completely determinate and productive.

\(^6^2\) *D&R*, pp. 208-09
It is this paradoxical structure of sense in underlying the phenomena of language and the world that allows Deleuze to propose a radical re-thinking of the relationship of Ideas to things, alternative to the conception Plato often suggests, which understands this relationship as one of resemblance or representation. For Deleuze, in fact, the virtual is the “characteristic state of Ideas”; it is the basis for the production of any existence whatsoever. However, the relationship between the virtual Idea and this production, or actualization, is not at all one of possibility to actualization. Correspondingly, to think the Idea is not at all to move from the hypothetical to the apodictic, the movement which, according to Deleuze, has defined the movement of thought for philosophers from “Plato to the post-Kantians” (as, for instance, when Descartes moves from the hypothesis of doubt to the apodicticity of the cogito; or when Kant moves from the hypothetical forms of possible experience to their underlying necessary principles). To think the Idea is, rather, to think the virtual pre-condition for phenomena and meanings in the paradoxical stratum of sense, the transcendental field of sense-events. In thus moving from the actual phenomena to its virtual condition, we discern the network of differential relations that articulate the specificity and determinacy of sense, the particular “system of differences” that gives the phenomenon the distinctive meaning and significance that it has. However, for Deleuze, this network of differences is no longer determined as purely oppositional and negative; rather, the reality and positivity of the virtual allows us to understand the Idea as “made up of reciprocal relations between differential elements, completely determined by those relations which never include any negative term or relation of negativity.” In other words, in place of the classical structuralist’s conception of language as a “system of differences, without positive terms,” the virtuality of the Idea, defined in terms of the paradoxical structure of original sense, allows us to understand the basis of the sense of objects and language as residing in a network of differences thought entirely as positive, having not the privative and secondary status of possibility but the full positivity of reality. Paradoxical sense thus defines an original domain of constitution, positive and relational in itself, prior to and independent of the negativity of the opposition between the possible and the real, or the hypothetical and the necessary. This domain is ordered not by the similarity between the image and the original or the resemblance between model and copy, but by the even more original and positive relationship between sense and what it conditions, one which has nothing to do with either resemblance or representation.

It is this original domain which will be, finally, the basis of one of Deleuze’s most radical suggestions: that of a theory of Ideas that is both deeply opposed to Platonism and, at the same time (as I shall try to

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63 D&R, p. 211
64 D&R, p. 203.
show) profoundly Platonic. This theory articulates in an essential way what is involved in Deleuze’s call to “overturn” or “reverse” Platonism and shows that this call has, in general, been very poorly understood.

One of the primary uses of the inquiry into sense, according to Deleuze, is to evince a theory of the conditioning of phenomena that does not exclude their change and becoming, or in other words does not relegate this conditioning to the order of static being. It is through its definition as originally paradoxical, as “going in both directions at once,” that original sense, prior to the ordering assumptions of good sense and common sense, can indeed provide such an accounting. This is the basis of its utility in answering to the paradox of becoming already identified by Plato: In becoming taller, Alice is, in the act and at the moment of becoming, both tall (in relation to her earlier state) and small (in relation to her later one). This paradox, of the “simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present”\textsuperscript{65} is not simply the problem of the relationship of what Plato called “participation,” which presents itself (on the surface, at least) as the problem of the relationship of two static beings (the idea and the participant) with one another. Nevertheless, it is closely linked to this latter problem and, in a certain way, underlies it. Thus, as Deleuze says, there are in fact two dimensions or aspects of determination implied by Plato’s theory. The first is the dimension of “limited and measured things, of fixed qualities, permanent or temporary”; this is the dimension that corresponds to the theory of Ideas as it is classically interpreted, punctually and statically, for instance as explaining “a particular subject having a particular largeness or a particular smallness at a particular moment.”\textsuperscript{66} However, caught within this theory and implicit (and at some places explicit) in the Platonic text as its own suggestion is a second dimension, that of the determination of a “pure becoming without measure,” whereby, for instance, “…the younger becoming older than the older, the older [becomes] younger than the younger – but they can never finally become so; if they did they would no longer be becoming, but would be so.”\textsuperscript{67} This second dimension, the dimension of becoming, is omitted from the theory of Ideas as classically interpreted, but as Deleuze points out, it is hardly ignored by Plato himself. Rather, it is the basis of a second and more profound dualism that we can discern in Plato’s own text, in addition to and at the basis of the more familiar dualism of intelligible Idea and sensible object. By contrast with the more familiar one, this is a:

…more profound and secret dualism hidden in sensible and material bodies themselves. It is a subterranean dualism between that which receives the action of the Idea and that which eludes this action. It is not the distinction between the Model and the copy, but rather between copies

\textsuperscript{65} LofS, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{66} LofS, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{67} LofS, p. 1.
and simulacra. Pure becoming, the unlimited, is the matter of the simulacrum insofar as it eludes the action of the Idea and insofar as it contests both model and copy at once.\textsuperscript{68}

This second dualism does not, then, concern the relationship between the (definite) object and the (defining) idea, but rather splits the object between that part that receives the action of the Idea and that which remains the substrate of this action, the bare matter or unformed substance of the object itself. Again, the question here is not, therefore, the question of the relationship of the static Idea to its static participant, but of what allows the participant to participate, and thus to “receive” the various forms as it proceeds from one state to another. This second dualism, as Deleuze points out, thus suggests a more basic problem of becoming, at the root of any description of participation, and thus at the basis of any theory of Ideas.

It is a problem that, as Plato was well aware, affects and haunts the description of the Idea at every point. It crops up, repeatedly in the Platonic corpus, precisely at the points where the theory of Ideas is exposed to the question of change. Here, in relation to becoming rather than being, becoming in one direction implies and is implied by the other; becoming is thus split and paradoxical, manifesting an original indeterminacy behind the determination of the thing by the Idea. As we have already seen, Plato thus repeatedly mentions, or allows to appear, the paradox of a “becoming unlimited” that is involved in, and presupposed by, the action of the Idea in each case.\textsuperscript{69}

In \textit{Difference and Repetition}, Deleuze treats this problem of “pure becoming” as essential to any possible contemporary reading of Plato, arguing that it provides the basis for a conception that is at once profoundly in the spirit of Plato’s own suggestions, and yet provides the basis for the entire contemporary project of “overturning” or “reversing” Platonism. In particular: whereas the more familiar dualism of static Idea and its static object (or of the intelligible and the sensible) orders all metaphysical relations in terms of \textit{representation}, or the relationship between an original and a copy, the second, “subterranean” dualism of becoming provides the basis for a re-thinking of this relationship that completely re-orders.

\textsuperscript{68} LofS, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{69} Deleuze mentions, for instance, \textit{Philebus} 24d: “The hotter and equally the colder are always in flux and never remain, while definite quantity means standstill and the end of all progression. The upshot of this argument is that the hotter, together with its opposite, turn out to be unlimited”; and the –th hypothesis of the \textit{Parmenides}, according to which: “what is younger comes to be older in relation to what has come to be earlier and is older, but it never is older. On the contrary, it always comes to be older than that thing. For the older advances toward the younger, while the younger advances toward the older. And, in the same way, the older, in its turn, comes to be younger than the younger. For both, by going toward their opposites...” (154e-155a). Another relevant passage, not mentioned by Deleuze, is \textit{Phaedo} 102d-103a, where the opposition of forms determines them as “approaching” and “fleeing,” even being “destroyed” by the approaching of their opposites. (It is, of course, no accident that the “unlimited” or infinite repeatedly appears at just this point; see below.)
these relations, and allows us to think of the action of Ideas completely outside the regime of representation. This alternative – between an ordered regime of representation based on the copying of originals (with the Idea always thought as the original, and its objects as more or less good copies) and a deeper, non-representational order of replication – is the alternative that, for Deleuze, defines the imperative to overcome Platonism, which is the imperative to "glorify… the reign of simulacra…," affirming their rights over those of the copy.\footnote{D&R, p. 66; cf: “So ‘to reverse Platonism’ means to make the simulacra rise and to affirm their rights among icons and copies.” (p. 262)}

What, however, is a simulacrum? A simulacrum is an “image without resemblance” built not upon similarity or identity, but upon disparity and difference.\footnote{D&R, p. 257.} Although it produces an “effect” of resemblance, it is not at all founded upon resemblance; rather, this effect is “an effect of the whole, completely external and produced by totally different means than those at work within the model.”\footnote{D&R, p. 258.} It is constituted not by the similarity or essence or its static repetition, but by an inherently differential network of relations; in this network “repetition already plays upon repetitions, and difference already plays upon differences.”\footnote{D&R, p. xix.} Thus, whereas Platonism founds the “entire domain that philosophy will later recognize as its own,” as the order of representation “defined …by an essential relation to the model or foundation,” affirming the rights of simulacra allows us to discern behind this order another, more chaotic one: an order of pure differences as constituting and producing everything that we recognize as similitude, an order of images that precedes and itself constitutes all identity and representation as such.\footnote{D&R, p. 259.}

With the analysis we have already considered of the paradoxes of language and their ultimate ground in the paradoxical structure of sense, in fact, we already have in place all the resources needed to understand this strange order of simulacra, and the kind of alternative it defines for Plato and his contemporary reception. As we have already seen, in particular, the analysis of sense and its paradoxes yields an understanding of the conditioning of the ordinary dimensions of symbolic language that owes nothing to representation or resemblance; the relationship between sense-events on the plane of immanence and the order of symbolic language that they constitute is not one of resemblance but one of production. The circulation of the paradoxical element between signifiers and signifieds manifests a “donation of sense” that has nothing to do with the relationship of copy to original, but is rather, itself, a “pure effect” of the
action of structure, the network of differences. Given these relations, “that which is … has no prior constituted identity: things are reduced to the difference which fragments them…” The basis for the possibility of this reduction is, again, the purely differential order of symbolic language, which elicits sense as both its effect and its paradoxical quasi-cause. This original order of pure differences is the order of simulacra, and defines the possibility of their infinite circulation in language. In underlying this circulation, simulacrum and symbol are in a certain sense “one”; in particular, “the simulacrum is the sign in so far as the sign interiorises the conditions of its own repetition.” That is, it is in the constitutive relationships that define the meaning of the sign and the possibility of its meaningful iteration that we can locate the procession and circulation of simulacra, a circulation that both precedes and produces the order of representation and similitude. These relations are to be understood – and can only be understood – in terms of the pure differential order exhibited by the paradoxical structure of sense.

We have also seen, above, that the key to understanding this structure is to consider the circulation of the “paradoxical element,” which, manifesting the constitutive excess of signification, both disjoins and first articulates the two series of signifiers and signifieds. In connection with the sense-events that articulate the structure of paradoxical sense as “going in both directions at once,” this circulation is the basis for the “pure becoming” that is “the matter of the simulacrum … insofar as it contests both model and copy,” or in other words the whole domain of representation. Whatever the extent of his adherence to the “official,” representationalist theory of Ideas, Plato, it seems, suspected as much. Indeed, “Sometimes Plato wonders whether … pure becoming might not have a very peculiar relation to language.”

Throughout the Platonic corpus, in fact, in passing instances and dialectical suggestions, strange anticipations and even aporetic conclusions, the specter of an originary difference and an order of the simulacrum, before and beyond the action of the Idea and the distinction between model and copy, flashes up and comes to expression, only to be modified, repressed, or subjected once again to the stable order of representation.

Thus, if Plato’s aim is, as Deleuze says, always to sort the “good copies” from the bad ones, to distinguish the order of representation from that of simulacra and to propound principles which allow the good copies of participation to be distinguished from the bad simulacra whose purveyor is the sophist, whose “terrifying models of the psuedos”…”unfold the power of the false”, some of the most notable moments

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75 D&R, p. 67.
76 D&R, p. 67.
77 LofS, p. 2.
78 LofS, p. 2.
in Plato’s text are those where the original simulacra do indeed “appear, if only momentarily, like a flash of lightning in the night…” and the distinction between good and bad copies, between the Ideal model and the bad simulacrum, is thrown momentarily into confusion and undecidability.\(^{79}\) Such is the case, according to Deleuze, with the ultimate conclusion of the *Sophist*, which attempts to identify the sophist by separating, at a crucial point (236c) the good image-making of imitation to the bad image-making of the fabrication of appearances, which are apparently (if the distinction can be made) responsible for the possibility of error and falsehood (cf. 264c, and also *Republic X*, 601ff). However, at the final end (268a), “we glimpse the possibility of the triumph of simulacra” in that the Sophist does not ultimately “distinguish himself from Socrates, placing the legitimacy of such a distinction in question.”\(^{80}\) Other examples of the sudden, lightening-like appearance of the simulacra and their indistinction from the Ideas occur in connection with Plato’s consideration of a “model of the Other” that witnesses the original possibility of a kind of model of difference or dissimilitude itself: see, for instance, *Theaetetus* 176e and *Timaeus* 28bff.

As Deleuze notes, at decisive moments in the Platonic corpus, as well, the paradox of becoming-unlimited according to which “more and less are always going a point further” is decisively connected to the phenomena of language and writing.\(^{81}\) This is the case, for instance, in the *Philebus*, where “it is through discourse that the same thing flits around, becoming one and many in all sorts of ways, in whatever it may be that is said at any time, both long ago and now.” (15d). Here, the possibility of a limitless flux or circulation of things is guaranteed not only by this “gift of the gods to men” (16c) but, even further, by its articulation into “letters” (17a), the systematicity of the alphabet (18b-c), and the articulation of sounds by mutes or silences. As is shown by Derrida’s classic analysis in “Plato’s Pharmacy” this is even more the case in the *Phaedrus*, where writing is opposed to spoken language as both supplement and inherent threat, the pharmakon which is both cure and poison.\(^{82}\) Thus, as Deleuze points out, according to Derrida’s analysis, writing is here the simulacrum of logos; it is, in other words: “a false suitor, insofar as it claims to take hold of the logos by violence and by ruse, or even to supplant it without passing through the father.”\(^{83}\) The deconstructive aim that Deleuze and Derrida have in common, then, is simply to re-

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\(^{79}\) *D&R*, p. 128.

\(^{80}\) *D&R*, p. 128.

\(^{81}\) *LofS*, p. 258.

\(^{82}\) Derrida (1972).

\(^{83}\) *LofS*, p. 361.
affirm the originary status and original rights of this simulacrum or false suitor, along with the irreducible and positive difference (compare Derrida’s *différance*) that it demonstrates.

One of the most striking instances of the connection between simulacra and language, however, is the opinion voiced in passing by Socrates near the middle of the dialogue most profoundly dedicated to language and names, the *Cratylus*:

Most of our wise men nowadays get so dizzy going around and around in their search for the nature of the things that are, that the things themselves appear to them to be turning around and moving every which way. Well, I think that the people who gave things their names in very ancient times are exactly like these wise men. They don’t blame this on their own internal condition, however, but on the nature of the things themselves, which they think are never stable or steadfast, but flowing and moving, full of every sort of motion and constant coming into being. (411b-c)

The basis of this suggestion (which Socrates considers but nevertheless does not endorse, seemingly quoting the opinion of “wise men” and the nomothetes or name-givers of ancient times) is the Heraclitean image of constant becoming and uncontrollable flux. This image is preserved on the more “official” level of the dialogue’s position by Socrates’ quotation of it, as well as by the presence of Cratylus, who was himself a student of Heraclitus. The view that Cratylus actually voices – according to which “one can never speak nor say anything falsely” (429e) is swiftly refuted by the assumption of a representational order of likeness that ensures the imitative “correctness of names” as a precondition for any possibility of linguistic articulation or meaningful usage. On the “official” level, therefore, the view endorsed by

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84 402a.

85 The basis of this view is apparently an implicit rejection of the possibility of distinguishing between the “true copy” and the “false copy” with respect to names (cf. *Sophist* 264c). However, Cratylus is easily refuted:

Socrates: Let’s see, Cratylus, if we can somehow come to terms with one another. You agree, don’t you, that it’s one thing to be a name and another to be the thing it names?

Cratylus: Yes, I do.

Socrates: And you also agree that a name is an imitation of a thing?

Cratylus: Absolutely.

Socrates: And that a painting is a different sort of imitation of a thing?

Cratylus: Yes.

Socrates: Well, perhaps what you’re saying is correct and I’m misunderstanding you, but can both of these imitations – both paintings and names – be assigned and applied to the things of which they are imitations, or not?
Socrates refutes the Heraclitean one, ultimately insisting upon a position whose defense is nevertheless, as
Socrates indeed recognizes, “like hauling a ship up a sticky ramp” (435c), according to which “names
should be as much like things as possible.” This is the position of the order of representation; at the
fundamental level of the assignation of names, it propounds an order of likeness and similarity that is
supposed to ground and provide the possibility of all linguistic truth or falsity. However, repeatedly
throughout the dialogue, this assumption at the level of the nomothesis, the posing of the law and the
assignation of names, is contested by the suggestion of another, quite different foundation: one of pure
becoming, flux, and flows whose basis, and evidence, is paradox.

We have seen, above (chapter 1), that the problem of the nomothesis is both at the center of the Cratylus
and the basis of its ultimate invocation of forms, or ideas, as the source of the correctness of names and
the force of their law. At first, the correctness of names seems to depend on the authority and divine
power of the nomothetes, the ancient and mysterious giver of names; by knowing the forms themselves,
the nomothetes or technician of names is able to mandate the law that links them to their objects in the
correctness of an assumed correspondence. In a characteristic move that is replicated elsewhere
throughout the Platonic corpus, this divine technology of production is itself, however, subordinated to
the truer and deeper knowledge of the user, the knowledge of the form or idea that is manifest in the
everyday practice (or ethos) of language and in the “agreement” that underlies it. This is the basis for
Socrates’ grudging admission that, much as he would like to defend a view that accords the ultimate basis
of names to a mimetic relation of resemblance between words and things, we may indeed “have to make

Cratylus: They can.

Socrates: Then consider this. Can we assign a likeness of a man to a man and that of a woman to a woman, and so
on?

Cratylus: Certainly.

Socrates: What about the opposite? Can we assign the likeness of a man to a woman and that of a woman to a man?

Cratylus: Yes, we can.

Socrates: And are both these assignments correct, or only the first?

Cratylus: Only the first.

Socrates: That is to say, the one that assigns to each thing the painting or name that is appropriate to It or like it?

Cratylus: That’s my view, at least.

Socrates: Since you and I are both friends, we don’t want to mince words, so here’s what I think. I call the first kind
of assignment correct, whether it’s an assignment of a painting or a name, but if it’s an assignment of a name, I call
it both correct and true. And I call the other kind of assignment, the one that assigns and applies unlike imitations,
incorrect, and in the case of names, false as well. (430a-d).
use of this worthless thing, convention, in the correctness of names.” (435c). Nevertheless, even in making this admission, it is clear that Socrates still sees convention and usage as governed by an order of representational connections and similarities between words and things, an order of similarity or “appropriate” usage 435c that defines the “best,” if not the only, way to speak.

The question (which Plato does not hesitate to raise and pursue to its aporetic end) is precisely whether this assumption is justified: whether everyday usage exhibits the knowledge of true names as the knowledge of identity and resemblance, whether it simply applies infinitely the consequences of the deterministic repetition of a self-same Idea, austere and timeless, or whether, as Cratylus seems to suggest, it is the “chance of usage and convention that makes both like and unlike letters express things.” (435a).

What is at stake in this question of the relative priority of use and original designation, according to Deleuze, is nothing other than the nature of forms in their entry into the world, their force in determining the possibility of reference and the being of knowledge. Plato, of course, officially decides for the first alternative; but the traces of the second are everywhere in the text of the Cratylus, and even determine it in a fundamental way. Thus:

Take … the great Platonic trinity of the user, the producer, and the imitator. If the user is placed at the top of the hierarchical ladder, it is because he evaluates ends and has at his disposal true knowledge (savoir), which is knowledge of the model or Idea. The copy can be called an imitation, to the degree that it reproduces the model; since this imitation is noetic, spiritual, and internal, however, it is a veritable production ruled by the relations and proportions constitutive of the essence. There is always a productive operation in the good copy and, corresponding to this operation, a right opinion, if not knowledge. 86 We see, then, that imitation is destined to take on a pejorative sense to the extent that it is now only a simulation, that it applies to the simulacrum and designates only the external and nonproductive effect of resemblance, that is, an effect obtained by ruse or subversion. There is no longer even right opinion, but rather a sort of ironic encounter which takes the place of a mode of knowledge, an art of encounter that is outside knowledge and opinion. Plato specifies how this nonproductive effect is obtained: the simulacrum implies huge dimensions, depths, and distances that the observer cannot master. It is precisely because he cannot master them that he experiences an impression of resemblance. The simulacrum includes the differential point of view; and the observer becomes a part of the simulacrum itself, which is transformed and deformed by his point of view. In short, there is in

86 Cf. Meno 97b-98c.
the simulacrum a becoming-mad, or a becoming unlimited, as in the Philebus where “more and less are always going a point further,” a becoming always other, a becoming subversive of the depths, able to evade the equal, the limit, the Same, or the Similar: always more and less at once, but never equal.  

The question here is what links the correctness of names to the everyday usage in which Plato would like to lodge it, what assures the effectiveness of the representational Ideas within this usage and their accessibility to its practice. For Plato, even the original technical power of the ancient nomothetes in establishing rules and names is subordinate to the implications of everyday usage and the everyday user; but this is only because the everyday user is assumed, as Deleuze says, to be capable of “evaluating ends” and having at his disposal the transcendent, representational Idea. For Deleuze, though, this subordination, and this assumption, are possible only on the basis of the suppression of a more original level of production. On this level, both Idea and the praxis that is assumed to unfold it are produced from the more basic differential relations of the simulacra. These are the relations that define a system of pure, positive differences, wherein resemblance and participation are only secondary effects. To grasp this original system of differences is to see behind the ordinary power of names and laws and the use and practice that manifests it, behind the domain of assured representation, the procession of simulacra without resemblance or ordering principle. It is to perceive the paradox of becoming behind the stability of being and its order.

As Deleuze points out, in fact, despite his official theory of representation, the inquiry in the Cratylus into the correctness of names repeatedly leads Socrates to suspect a more original relation of language to the procession of simulacra, unconstrained by representation and at the root of the “pure becoming” that first articulates the difference, and the paradox, of being and becoming. This is the case, for instance, when Socrates suspects that the correctness of names is not supported by a stable order of resemblance, but rather perhaps by a “‘flow’ of speech, or a wild discourse which would incessantly slide over its referent, without ever stopping …,” an incessant flowing and differentiating at infinite speed that is alone appropriate to the flux of all things in change, motion, and becoming. On this suspicion, “…names

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87 LofS, p. 258.

88 LofS, p. 2. Compare Plato: “The things that are are moving, but some are moving quickly, others slowly. So what moves quickly is not all there is, but the admirable part of it. Hence this name ‘tagathon’ (‘the good’) is applied to what is admirable (agaston) about the fast (thoon).

It’s easy to figure out that ‘justice’ (‘dikaiosune’) is the name given to the comprehension of the just (dikaiou sunesis), but the just itself is hard to understand. It seems that many people agree with one another about it up to a point, but beyond that they disagree. Those who think that the universe is in motion believe that most of it is of such a kind as to do nothing but give way, but that something penetrates all of it and generates everything that comes into
signify the being or essence of things to us on the assumption that all things are moving and flowing and being swept along.” (436e). Or alternatively, Socrates suspects without confirming the existence of “two languages and two sorts of ‘names,’ one designating the pauses and the rests which receive the action of the Idea, the other expressing the movements or rebel becomings…” 89 On this hypothesis, the original fixation of names by the divine nomothetes or name-giver is decisively and violently split between those names that “point to rest” and those that “point to motion,” between the hypothesis of a stable order of representation relating names to beings and a “rebel” order of simulacra relating them to becoming and change, producing a kind of “civil war among names” (438d) that ruins our ability to “judge between them” and demands, according to Socrates, another, quite different starting point.

If we are to avoid this constitutive split and this ruination of knowledge caused by the two orders of names, therefore, we must have recourse, Socrates says, to something “other than names, something that will make plain to us without using names which of these two kinds of names are the true ones – that is to say, the ones that express the truth about the things that are.” (438d). This “something other than names” is, in fact, nothing other than the Idea, determined as that which avoids all change, flux, and becoming:

Socrates: Still, let’s investigate one further issue so as to avoid being deceived by the fact that so many of these names seem to lean in the same direction – as we will be if, as seems to me to be the case, the name-givers really did give them in the belief that everything is always moving and flowing, and as it happens things aren’t really that way at all, but the name-givers have fallen into a kind of vortex and are whirled around in it, dragging us with them. Consider, Cratylus, a question that I for my part often dream about: Are we or aren’t we to say that there is a beautiful itself, and a good itself, and the same for each one of the things that are?

Cratylus: I think we are, Socrates.

Socrates: Let’s not investigate whether a particular face or something of that sort is beautiful then, or whether all such things seem to be flowing, but let’s ask this instead: Are we to say that the beautiful itself is always such as it is?

being. This, they say, is the fastest and smallest thing of all, for if it were not the smallest, so that nothing could keep it out, or not the fastest, so that it could treat all other things as though they were standing still, it wouldn’t be able to travel through everything. However, since it is governor and penetrator (diaion) of everything else, it is rightly called ‘just’ (’dikaion’) – the ‘k’ sound is added for the sake of euphony. As I was saying before, many people agree about the just up to this point. As for myself, Hermogenes, because I persisted about it, I learned all about the matter in secret …” (Cratylus 412c-413a); cf. also 413d-414a.

89 LofS, p. 2.
Cratylus: Absolutely. (439b-439d).

The necessity to avoid the rebel element, and the imperative to think the order of language as possible only on the basis of a pre-existing order of resemblance and similarity, thus completely determines Plato’s recourse here to the being of the Idea, thought of as “before names” in its mystical force, even prior to and underlying as a condition of possibility the power of the nomothetes, which has fallen into error in considering becoming and motion to be primary. Here, in finally deciding the ultimate power of the nomothetes, Plato thus seemingly affirms once more the right of the Idea over the simulacrum, even to the point of denying the ultimate relevance to the question of the origin of names of the results of the very inquiry into names and their meaning which has so clearly articulated the investigation of this power up to this point. However, there remains a fundamental paradox, as Plato is well aware; he does not deny it, but in fact uses it to conclude the dialogue at a point of aporia. It is, once again, the paradox of becoming:

Socrates: But if it [the beautiful] is always passing away, can we correctly say of it first that it is this, and then that it is such and such? Or, at the very instant we are speaking, isn’t it inevitably and immediately becoming a different thing and altering and no longer being as it was?

Cratylus: It is.

Socrates: Then if it never stays the same, how can it be something? After all, if it ever stays the same, it clearly isn’t changing – at least, not during that time; and if it always stays the same and is always ever the same thing, so that it never departs from its own form, how can it ever change or move?

Cratylus: There’s no way. (439d-e).

The inadequacy Plato recognizes here, and in fact never denies, is the inadequacy of being and the static order of presence to all motion, change and becoming. The paradox, Socrates concludes by saying, threatens to ruin knowledge itself, for if language does indeed demonstrate a flux, change and becoming of at the root of things, if things therefore are fundamentally “unsound, like leaky sinks,” “like people with runny noses…afflicted with colds and drip[ping] over everything,” (440c-d), it will be impossible as well for knowledge ever to be knowledge of what is, for each state of knowledge will pass over into something that is not knowledge, and there will be no knowledge as such. Nevertheless – and his assertion of it is an index of Plato’s supreme integrity and honesty, far beyond that of those who see here simply an apologia for the rights of the Idea – it remains “certainly possible that things are that way;” there is no way, Socrates concludes the dialogue by saying, simply to exclude this rebel hypothesis of becoming, flux, and change. It will stand just below the surface of the Platonic text, for the two thousand
years of philosophy’s development of the Platonism of static Ideas, as a suppressed remainder of the
original dualism of simulacra and copy that precedes and underlies the dualism of the idea and its object,
a subcutaneous trace of the original paradox of sense in articulating the being and becoming of words and
things.
We have followed the implications of Deleuze’s radical inquiry into sense throughout the constitution of his key concepts of the sense-event and the virtual, discerning in it the trace of a radical anti-Platonism at the heart of the Platonic text itself, a procession and production of original difference that can be seen to precede the entire order of representation and similitude. The key to all of these implications is the paradoxical underlying nature of sense, understood as the precondition of all meaningful language. This paradoxical nature of the precondition of meaningful language is revealed both by the twentieth-century structuralist inquiry into language, conceived as a system of pure differences, and the parallel analytic investigation into set theory and the bounds of sense. In their parallel demonstrations, both inquiries (and in this development we might indeed see the most important legacy of the “linguistic turn” itself) evince a basis for meaning and language-use that is radically disjoined from, and at odds with, any order of resemblance, mimesis, or representation. Moreover, both inquiries do so, as we have seen, by demonstrating the necessary existence of a “paradoxical element” between words and things, immune to the oppositions between concepts and object, or between the universal and the particular, that in escaping these oppositions also manifests the site of their original constitution or production. This is the paradoxical combination of floating signifier and floating signified (in the case of structuralism), or the Russell set (on the analytic side). Both, as we have seen, manifest the inherent excess of signification over the signified that stands within language for the permanent dimension of latency or potentiality that constitutes it in its infinite iterability and possibility of signification.

To “reverse Platonism” and to affirm the rights of becoming over being, of the simulacrum over the model, it is then sufficient, as Deleuze argues, to recognize this paradoxical element and the necessity of its appearance, as soon as the ultimate basis of linguistic meaning and communication itself is given (paradoxical) expression in language. As we have seen, it is the paradoxical element consisting of floating signifier and floated signified that demonstrates this basis, for a wide range of structuralists; as such, it manifests the originary system of pure, positive differences at the root of the original production of meaning through the procession of dissimilar simulacra, what Plato’s conception of the Idea in terms of resemblance systematically represses and denies.

We can confirm the parallel on the analytic side, as well, by noting the close analogy between the paradox we have seen in Plato’s conception of becoming and Russell’s paradox itself. In particular: as discussed above, we may consider the membership of individuals within a set to be exactly analogous to (or, indeed, a formalization of) what Plato understood as participation; the membership of a number of individuals within a particular set corresponds to their common participation in what Plato understood as an Idea, as
well as to their being able to be “rightly called” by one and the same name. The analogy tracks the stable relations of being between what we may understand as a “universal” and the particulars that stand under it, or between a general concept and particular names. However, as soon as we attempt to understand becoming, the duality is disrupted and paradox ensues. For in order to understand becoming, or changes in the status of participation or membership, we must understand the action and force of universals: their capacity or power to bind diverse singulars into the unity of a One. And this power or force, although presupposed everywhere in set theory by the use of the central, undefined symbol ‘∈’ (as it is, similarly, presupposed throughout traditional grammar and logic by the very distinction between universal and singular terms), is nowhere explained or defined within it. If, indeed, we wish to signify something like belonging as such, and manifest in a particular set both the inclusive and exclusive actions characteristic of the capacity of grouping that the universal carries out, what will result is precisely the Russell set, which includes itself by not doing so, and vice versa. To this corresponds, exactly, the manifestation of participation as such, and hence the attempt to understand the possibility of its coming to be or passing out of existence, what is present in all becoming. Thus, at the heart of the theory of the Idea as constituting the particular, as limiting it through its determination of particular properties and traits, is the paradox of a “becoming-unlimited” or infinite flux that occasionally verifies, in the Platonic text, the truth of the ancient statement, “passed down” from “people of old,” anticipated by Parmenides and Heraclitus, that “…whatever is said to be consists of one and many, having in its nature limit and unlimitedness.”

The “anti-Platonic” affirmation of the rights of the simulacra is thus identical to the affirmation of paradox as constitutive of the concept as such and of the traits of all particulars. It is the inquiry into language that most directly makes this affirmation possible, by demonstrating the paradoxes at the ultimate basis of sense. This is why the fleeting appearances of the underlying paradox of becoming occur most often, in Plato’s texts, in the course of his various considerations of language, and why he is ultimately driven to have recourse, in the Cratylus, to an element “other than names,” an alternative to language capable of grounding it, which he finds in the stable order of representational Ideas. By apparent contrast, the 20th century inquiry into language whose imperative Deleuze follows refuses steadfastly to conceive of a foundation of language that cannot be reflected in language itself, and as we have seen, it is by following out this imperative to its end that it evinces the paradoxes of sense. Thus we are led to discern the foundation of logos, as such, as identical with the radical paradox at its center.

Plato, clearly, stops short of this identification. However, there is nothing anti-Platonic about a determination of the Idea that sees it as essentially correlative to logos, and determined in its application

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90 Philebus 16d.
by the same forms and relationships that determine the meaning of concepts and the use of words. Indeed, as we have seen, above and in chapter 1, Plato comes very close to the original paradox of sense in his inquiry into the correctness of names and the source of their legitimacy in the *Cratylus*. Here, the question of the original foundation of names, the basis of the power of the *nomothetes*, is again the question of the possibility of the operation of naming, or of grouping like particulars under a common name or predicate. The gesture that institutes the correct name also institutes, as Plato grasps, the laws that constitute language as such, the structure that defines any possible difference between knowledge and illusion, or between truth and falsehood. The postulated or assumed gesture of the *nomothetes* in setting up the name and ensuring its application is, then, the same as the original grouping of particulars under a name, what is obscurely symbolized within set theory by the undefined symbol ‘∈’. In attempting to think the possibility of this original designation, and authority, Plato runs right up against the original paradox of *nomothesis*, or of the institution or foundation of language as such, which here presents itself as the undecidability of this moment of originary naming between nature and culture (*phusis* and *nomos*).

Plato’s Socrates even recognizes that the depth of this paradox demonstrates that it cannot be solved simply by invoking the transcendent authority of the *nomothetes*, the supposed original technician of names; this is why even Plato’s Socrates grudgingly admits that the correctness of names is governed ultimately by the commonality of everyday use. However, just at the point at which it would otherwise thus be possible to discern in this everyday use the productivity of an original constitution of meaning, out of the paradoxical structure of positive, differential relations without negative terms, Plato’s Socrates again subordinates this everyday praxis, as secondary, to the order of Ideas which is “other than words,” which ordinary use may now only subordinately replicate.

If we may thus discern in the margins and occasions of Plato’s text the image of a “Deleuzian” Plato, a Plato that affirms the presence of paradox, the procession of simulacra without origin or model, and the ultimate foundations of linguistic correctness in the paradoxes of an inherent ethos of language that owes nothing to the uniformity of convention or the univocity of norms, we may also, correlatively, confirm the deeply Platonic elements within Deleuze’s thought of becoming, leading to something like a “Platonized Deleuze.” Central to this Deleuze is the constitutive reference to what constitutes language and its structure, in its mutual articulation with the world; central as well is the paradox which rends this articulation at its very point of differentiation. This Deleuze is quite at odds with the received one; it suffices to indicate the differences by means of a few decisive points:

91See, e.g., *Phaedo* 78e-79b and 89d; 103b-104b; *Sophist* 260e; *Parmenides* 135e; *Meno* 75a.
1) The affirmation of difference is the affirmation of an *ideal* order between words and things. As we have seen, Deleuze’s conception of originary difference as the basis for the structure of language is strictly correlative with, and can only be discerned by means of, the fundamental paradoxes of sense. Here, as Deleuze’s descriptions of what is involved in the totality of structure, sense as the “quasi-effect” of structure refers to a properly ideal register of effectiveness. If this effect is indeed thought in a way that is profoundly opposite to “Platonism” in its affirmation of the rights of difference and the simulacrum over identity and resemblance, the plane and sites of its operation and effectiveness are nevertheless exactly the same as those of Plato’s Ideas. If we can discern the ideal dimension of the constitution of language, and to the very problematics that first open and define the difference between words and things (while also rendering this difference paradoxical), exactly through investigating the paradoxes that result from Plato’s own attempts to think this effectiveness, it is precisely because the foundations of sense are to be discerned only as involving such an Ideal dimension, which thus exists, for Deleuze, at the frontier of words and things, or of concepts and objects. To affirm difference, and to “overturn Platonism,” is thus nothing other than to affirm this ideal effectiveness.

It follows, as well, that Deleuze’s affirmation of difference is in no way an affirmation of the “rights of the sensible” over those of the intelligible. The paradoxes of sense, which are the basis for everything else, are grasped only at the level of a dimension that precedes and underlies the separation between the sensible order of signifiers and the intelligible order of the signified. We can thus follow Deleuze’s identification of the paradoxes of sense, and the affirmation of originary difference, only by identifying this ideal dimension between the sensible and the intelligible, what first opens and articulates the difference between words and things through the attempt to materialize the basis of language itself. This is the properly ideal dimension of the virtual, which defines, as we have seen, the real condition for the effectiveness of difference itself. In the same way, Deleuze’s philosophy is not a “materialism,” unless matter and the material is conceived as including this ideal dimension; nor is it an “empiricism,” if this is thought of as opposed to a recognition of the specific action of the ideal.92

2) The affirmation of difference is not the affirmation of a transcendent Other, of Otherness as such, or of the rights of any particular “other.”

As we have seen, the paradoxes of sense articulate the limits the coherence of structure as such; but they also lie at the very center of structure, first opening and problematizing the differences that themselves

92 It’s true that Deleuze often claimed to be an empiricist. However, his “empiricism” is of quite an unusual kind. In particular, as the context makes clear, it is based on recognizing the singularities and the virtual dimensions of the surface, what is presupposed to and gives sense to any “scientific” or “naturalistic” empiricism.
constitute structure as such. The sense-events that paradoxically manifest difference and give rise to its unlimited circulation are as essential to the constitution of structure as they are instrumental in demonstrating its inherent aporias. Thus, as Deleuze says, it is imprecise to oppose events and structures; the paradoxical event is essential to structure as such, and this is all that is affirmed in affirming originary difference. Thus, this affirmation is in no way an affirmation of a simple “outside” to the structure of language, or the community, as such; and its political implication is in no way the extension of rights to an “other” that is simply outside these totalities. It is, rather, a careful and rigorous tracing of the originary difference within each community or totality that both defines and cleaves it. As we have seen, this difference is to be sought at the level of the paradoxical effectiveness of its ideal signifiers, of the self-conceptions that the community offers to itself and at the point of their definition and fracture.

As was the case already in Plato, in fact, the paradoxes of originary sense are not demonstrated by means of (nor do they have any necessary recourse to) contemplating the relationship of a closed and limited structure to some postulated or perceived “outside.” Rather, they are the paradoxes of a “becoming-unlimited” that appears precisely when the definitive limits of language as such are reflected within language, as they always already are whenever the rift of difference between concepts and objects, or between words and things, is defined and named. What these paradoxes bear witness to, moreover, is not the limit of a specific language or type of language, but rather to the rift between form and matter that defines the applicability of language as such. This rift runs through all language and all things; at the boundaries of the world, it first articulates the possibility of language as such. As the “becoming-unlimited” of Plato already suggests, it is the proper entry of the infinite into the world.

3) The affirmation of difference is not opposed to the affirmation of the One, but is rather a consequence of it.

Deleuze’s philosophy is (very often) misunderstood as a simple affirmation of plurality and multiplicity, a simple reversal, as it is supposed, of the “rights of the One” or of the hypothesis of a “One-All” or single unification into totality, in favor of the irreducibly heterogeneous and diverse. As we are now prepared to see, this could hardly be farther from the truth. The paradoxes of sense, and with them the affirmation of difference as such, result directly and only from a rigorous thinking of the foundation of language as such, of the systematic totality of the structure that it is. It is only on the level of this systematic totality that the constitution of language as a “system of differences” can be grasped, and thus only on the level of this whole that the paradoxes that define originary difference first appear. Indeed, the paradoxes of sense arise in the case of any and every Idea, including the exemplary Idea of language, as soon as the relationship of the One of the Idea to the many of its participants is itself thought. Such a thinking can
never be simply the effect of an “affirmation” of the many over the One, but rather document the inevitable arising of paradox as soon as the ideal action of the One is thought in its relation to the many it properly subsumes.

From this perspective, it is thus possible to assert that paradox is, in fact, nothing other than the difference of the One with itself; and originary difference is nothing other than the paradox that the One encounters as soon as it relates to itself. (Such is one of the many lessons that one might have learned long ago from Plato’s *Parmenides*: its derivation there is yet another one of the many indices of the kinship between Plato and Deleuze.) As soon as the One—whether the One of language as such or the One of any of its Ideas—is reflected into itself, the originary paradoxes of sense show up. As we have seen, these articulate, for Deleuze, what is meant by difference, and as such are essential to the affirmation of difference, with which they stand and fall. Far from resulting from a simple affirmation of the “many” over the one, they result inevitably as soon as the rights of the One themselves are affirmed, and carried out to their own (paradoxical) limits.93

Given this, it is now possible to draw the “political” conclusion:

4) Change is not to be sought at a point simply exterior to structure, but at the paradoxical point of its self-reflection.

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93 We can thus agree wholeheartedly with the upshot of Slavoj Žižek’s recent analysis of Deleuze in (Žižek 2004a), according to which the usual reception of Deleuze as the philosopher of “the spontaneous, nonhierarchical, living multitude opposing the oppressive, reified System” (“Žižek 2004a” p. 32), which is drawn mostly from his works co-authored with Guattari, in fact obscures a very different politics in Deleuze, one that we can discern only by tracing through the implications of the deeply held and definitive structuralism of *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* (p. 82, p. 92). Indeed, according to Žižek, identifying Deleuze’s description of sense as crucial to his understanding of political change (as I have attempted to do here) allows us to see it as exhibiting close and crucial kinships to philosophers such as Lacan and even Hegel. On this reading, as Žižek notes, the affirmation of originary difference is not simply an affirmation of heterogeneity or multiplicity as such but always—as crucially for Deleuze as it is for Hegel—of the essential “split” or gap that occurs when the *totality* is reflected into itself. This gap is revealed, and its consequences developed, not by the causality of the “virtual” field of pure becoming, but rather by the quasi- or pseudo-causality of sense in its paradoxical sterility. Thus, although “at the level of Being, we have” only “the irreducible multitude of interacting particularities,” nevertheless “it is the event that acts as the elementary form of totalization/unification…”; (p.27) and it is indeed only through such totalization that change is really possible. Thus, “the truly subversive action asserts the univocity of Being,” (p. 55) in order to allow the gap between the One and itself to appear. “In this way,” as Žižek points out, “the tension between the Same and the Other is secondary with regard to the noncoincidence of the Same with itself” (p. 65) and this noncoincidence is first manifest in the “minimal difference” that first permits the iteration of a linguistic sign, “the ‘pure’ difference that differentiates an element not from other particular elements but from itself, from its own place of inscription…” (p. 64) (It should be clear, despite Žižek’s polemics here and elsewhere against Derrida and what he supposes deconstruction to be, that this identification of the difference at the basis of the minimal possibility of symbolic iteration is at the very root of Derrida’s classical (post-)structuralist analyses in “Différence,” *Of Grammatology*, and “Signature, Event, Context.”)
Clearly, one of the most important “political” questions today is the question of how to think of the relationship of structures to the possibility of novelty, change, and radical transformation. This is particularly the case in that the imperative of such change is more or less defined by the problem of finding a position from which to effect resistance and change with respect to the global order of capitalism, and at the same time the classical theory and practice of revolutionary action seems to founder. The avatars of difference, heterogeneity, and “multiplicity” have often, in recent years, adopted a superficial rhetoric and motivation from (what they take to be) Deleuze’s affirmation of difference over identity, or of plurality over unity; we are now in a position to agree with Badiou’s estimation that Deleuze himself would have laughed at these self-appointed representatives of the non-representable.94

For as it is the paradoxes of sense that are at the very root of the contradictions of the system, it is at the point of these paradoxes, and nowhere else, that these contradictions can be demonstrated and that change can occur. This is the point at which the ideological signifiers and legitimations of the culture are reflected into themselves, and found lacking; where the prevailing forms and organizing principles of the communal and economic order are materialized and found to be inadequate to themselves. The imperative to change is not, then, a battle waged on behalf of the excluded; it is not a plea for the inclusion of the heterogeneous or the tolerance of inessential differences. It is, much more radically, the break of the logic of systematicity with itself at the point of its greatest self-clarity, and it is toward the production of this clarity of the system to itself that the theory of radical or revolutionary change must, today, work.

In furthering this clarity, we cannot therefore rest with pluralism and diversity, but must rather relentlessly affirm the rights of the One and its hegemony up to and beyond the point of its original fracture. This means opposing many of the recent forms by which a certain originally critical thought, once dedicated to criticizing and removing the hegemony of the One through an affirmation of materiality, historicity and difference, that has sought to operate as an extension of the enlightenment “critique of ideology,” has indeed become little other than the prevailing ideology of late capitalism itself. Thus, we cannot rest with the hypothesis of a heterogeneity of multiple origins and plural beginnings (as,

94 Thus, a: “…latent religiosity is only too observable among those disciples of Deleuze who are busy blessing, in unbridled Capital, its supposed constitutive reverse, the ‘creativity’ of the multitudes. These disciples believe that they saw – that’s what you call seeing --- in the alter-globalization demonstrations of Seattle or Genoa, when an otherwise idle youth partook in its own way in the sinister summits of finance, the planetary Parousia of a communism of ‘forms of life’. I think that Deleuze, often skeptical vis-à-vis his own constructions once they touched on politics, would have laughed up his sleeve about all this pathos.” Badiou (2006), p. 387. However, although Badiou himself attempts to trace the roots of this “religiosity” to Deleuze’s own affirmation of sense as the One underlying the event, we shall see (below, chapter 9) that there is no reason to detect a latent religious element here, as long as we understand Deleuze’s analysis of sense in the broader context of the methods of paradoxico-criticism.
for instance, in the “genealogical” project of Foucault) which dissolves logic and necessity into a heterogeneous set of contingent beginnings and historical accidents; we must instead affirm the unity and necessity (as well as the paradox), of the one origin of language and the one birth of sense. Nor, certainly, can we rest with the hypothesis often attributed (though falsely) to the late Wittgenstein, that of an irreducible plurality of “language-games” or contingent, limited practices. This hypothesis again amounts to little more than the legitimating postmodern orthodoxy of a global political culture devoted to the narcissism of what it supposes to be its own internal and wholly tolerable heterogeneity. Rather, we must think (as Wittgenstein himself was profoundly dedicated to doing) the contradictions internal to language as such, present from its first word to the last, and increasingly manifest wherever language as such is materialized, made universal, and made to circulate, which is to say (by means of a totalization that is always underway in what is called “globalization,” despite the completeness at any moment of its own capacity to represent itself) everywhere, around the globe, more and more each day.

We are thus led by thinking through the consequences of Deleuze’s analysis, in an exemplary way, to a kind of repetition of the classical structuralist project and thereby to a radical renewal of the problematic of the structure of language as such in its relation to the defining categories of social and political thought and action. This renewal does not any longer seek (in the mode of contemporary “critical theory”) the historicization of what has formerly been naturalized, or (in the mode of contemporary naturalism) the identification of natural-scientific structures underlying human thought and action. Its inquiry is, rather, into the origin and circulation of sense, understood neither in terms of the natural nor cultural, but as defined by the paradoxical structure of signification that opens our access to both orders. It is probably from this perspective, alone, that it is possible fundamentally to investigate the far-ranging political consequences of the manifold processes that today materialize and circulate symbolic language as media and information, up to the definition and procession of (what is today called) “capital” itself.

5) The contemporary development of an internal critique dedicated to discerning and expounding the paradoxical is not opposed, but rather allied to, production and creativity.

It has often seemed as if Deleuze’s thought, in invoking a fundamental productiveness of thought whereby it calls into existence new phenomena and undreamed of realities akin to those of art (up to the definition of philosophy as the “creation of concepts”) must be deeply and intrinsically opposed to the operations of critical thought, for instance in its Kantian mode, in seeking the limitation of thought and the restriction of the freedom of its aims. By discerning the way that Deleuze’s appeal to productivity results from his discernment of the paradoxes of originary sense, we are now in a position to see that this is not at all so. Rather, the discernment of these paradoxes, and hence of what is, for Deleuze, the
original, generative power of structure to produce sense, is nothing but the outcome of a rigorous thinking of the limit of language – or rather (as we have seen above) of the very frontier between language and the world. Thus, the genesis and production of sense is nothing other than the drawing of this boundary, although it certainly passes through a necessary moment of paradox that Kant himself did not fully grasp. Rather, Deleuze’s identification of an originary level of difference that is demonstrated by the radical paradoxes of sense shows that the aims of critique, in tracing and defining the boundaries of the totality of language and reflecting them into themselves, are, today, profoundly allied with the imperative to produce sense, and with the real operations and displacements (whether material or ideal, whether aesthetic or political) that accomplish it.